

# **N O M A D I C   S U B J E C T S**

## Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory

Rosi Braidotti



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To Women's Studies in the

Humanities at Utrecht University,

with great affection



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## **NOMADIC SUBJECTS**



# Introduction: By Way of Nomadism

It's great to have roots, as long as you can take them with you.  
—Gertrude Stein

There are no/mad women in *this* attic.  
—Bertheke Waaldijk

This book traces more than an intellectual itinerary; it also reflects the existential situation as a multicultural individual, a migrant who turned nomad. The material presented here was conceptualized and, in some cases, expressed in several different European languages over a period of about ten years. These essays both accompany, precede, and prolong the ideas expressed in my book *Patterns of Dissonance*, which is itself representative of my nomadic existence. First drafted in French, it had to be translated into English, but in the final version I rewrote it extensively directly in English, so that by the time it went to press, the book had become a translation without originals. My own work as a thinker has no mother tongue, only a succession of translations, of displacements, of adaptations to changing conditions. In other words, the nomadism I defend as a theoretical option is also an existential condition that for me translates into a style of thinking. One of the aims of this volume is both to develop and evoke a vision of female feminist subjectivity in a nomadic mode. This mode refers to a figurative style of thinking, occasionally autobiographical, which may at times strike the readers as an epistemological stream-of-consciousness.

I will explore different facets of the notion of “nomadic subjects,” as a suitable theoretical figuration for contemporary subjectivity. The term *figuration* refers to a style of thought that evokes or expresses ways out of the phallogentric vision of the subject. A figuration is a politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity. I feel a real urgency to elaborate alternative accounts, to learn to think differently about the subject, to invent new frameworks, new images, new modes of thought. This

entails a move beyond the dualistic conceptual constraints and the perversely monological mental habits of phallocentrism. I take it as the task of the feminist—as of other critical intellectuals—to have the courage to face up to the complexity of this challenge. The black feminist writer and poet bell hooks, in her work on postmodern blackness, describes this kind of consciousness in terms of “yearning.” She argues that “yearning” is a common affective and political sensibility, which cuts across the boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexual practice and that “could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy—ties that would promote recognition of common commitments and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition.”<sup>1</sup> In this respect, nomadic consciousness is an epistemological and political imperative for critical thought at the end of this millennium.

Contrary to fashionable usages of the term, in this book I will take postmodernism to indicate a specific moment in history. It is a moment in which in-depth transformations of the system of economic production are also altering traditional social and symbolic structures. In the West, the shift away from manufacturing toward a service and information-based structure entails a global redistribution of labor, with the rest of the world and especially the developing countries providing most of the underpaid, offshore production. This shift entails the decline of traditional sociosymbolic systems based on the state, the family, and masculine authority. As Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan point out,<sup>2</sup> postmodernity corresponds to a reorganization of capital accumulation in a transnational mobile manner. Given this new historical trend toward “trans”-national mobility, it is imperative for critical theorists and cultural critics to rethink their situation and their practices within this scheme. In this book, my task is to attempt to redefine a transmobile materialist theory of feminist subjectivity that is committed to working within the parameters of the postmodern predicament, without romanticizing it but also without nostalgia for an allegedly more wholesome past. As I state in *Patterns on Dissonance*, the historical contradiction a feminist postmodernist is caught in is that the very conditions that are perceived by dominant subjects as factors of a “crisis” of values, are for me the opening up of new possibilities. *Mors tua vita mea*: it is the same historical condition that can be alternatively perceived as positive or negative depending on one’s position. I shall return to the notion of positionality in chapter 7.

The question that immediately arises here is: where can this new theoretical and political creativity be founded? Where does "the new" come from? What paradigms can assist us in the elaboration of new schemes? Is the model of scientific rationality totally discredited, or can it still provide some inspiration? Is the model of artistic creativity any better? Following some of the insights of the poststructuralist generation, I would like to answer by stressing the limitations of a logocentric approach and shifting the emphasis to other ways and modes of representation. I feel the need for a qualitative leap of the feminist political imagination. I believe in the empowering force of the political fictions that are proposed by feminists as different from each other as Luce Irigaray and Donna Haraway.<sup>3</sup> The former emphasizes images drawn from female morphology and sexuality, such as the two lips that suggest closeness while avoiding closure. The latter proposes instead the figuration of the cyborg,<sup>4</sup> that is to say a high-tech imaginary, where electronic circuits evoke new patterns of interconnectedness and affinity. Both, however, are committed to the radical task of subverting conventional views and representations of human and especially of female subjectivity. The both rely on alternative figurations as a way out of the old schemes of thought.

Feminist figurations such as these are evidence of the many, heterogeneous ways in which feminists today are exploring different forms of the subjectivity of women and of their struggle with language in order to produce affirmative representations. The array of terms available to describe this new female feminist subjectivity is telling: Monique Wittig<sup>5</sup> chooses to represent it through the "lesbian," echoed by Judith Butler with her "parodic politics of the masquerade";<sup>6</sup> others, quoting Nancy Miller,<sup>7</sup> prefer to describe the process as "becoming women," in the sense of the female feminist subjects of another story. De Lauretis calls it the "eccentric" subject,<sup>8</sup> alternative feminist subjectivities have also been described as "fellow-commuters" in an in-transit state,<sup>9</sup> or as "inappropriated others,"<sup>10</sup> or as "postcolonial"<sup>11</sup> subjects. The latter analyze gender in relation to other geopolitical concerns in terms of transnational feminist links.

The starting point for most feminist redefinitions of subjectivity is a new form of materialism, one that develops the notion of corporeal materiality by emphasizing the embodied and therefore sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject. Consequently, rethinking the bodily roots of subjectivity is the starting point for the epistemological

project of nomadism (see "The Subject in Feminism"). The body, or the embodiment, of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological (see "Body Images and the Pornography of Representation"). In other words, feminist emphasis on embodiment goes hand in hand with a radical rejection of essentialism. In feminist theory one *speaks as a woman*, although the subject "woman" is not a monolithic essence defined once and for all but rather the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experiences, defined by overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, sexual preference, and others (see "Sexual Difference as a Political Project"). One speaks as a woman in order to empower women, to activate sociosymbolic changes in their condition: this is a radically anti-essentialist position.

Figurations are therefore politically informed images that portray the complex interaction of levels of subjectivity. In this respect, I think that the more alternative figurations are disclosed in this phase of feminist practice, the better.

The nomad is my own figuration of a situated, postmodern, culturally differentiated understanding of the subject in general and of the feminist subject in particular. This subject can also be described as postmodern/industrial/colonial, depending on one's locations. In so far as axes of differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, the notion of nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once. Speaking as a female feminist entails that priority is granted to issues of gender or, rather, of sexual difference (see "Sexual Difference as a Political Project") in the recognition of differences among women.

The nomadic subject is a myth, that is to say a political fiction, that allows me to think through and move across established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning bridges. Implicit in my choice is the belief in the potency and relevance of the imagination, of myth-making, as a way to step out of the political and intellectual stasis of these postmodern times. Political fictions may be more effective, here and now, than theoretical systems. The choice of an iconoclastic, mythic figure such as the nomadic subject is consequently a move against the settled and conventional nature of theoretical and especially philosophical thinking. This figuration translates



therefore my desire to explore and legitimate political agency, while taking as historical evidence the decline of metaphysically fixed, steady identities. One of the issues at stake here is how to reconcile partiality and discontinuity with the construction of new forms of interrelatedness and collective political projects. I shall return to this.

Though the image of “nomadic subjects” is inspired by the experience of peoples or cultures that are literally nomadic, the nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior. Not all nomads are world travelers; some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one’s habitat. It is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of traveling.

As Caren Kaplan points out in her work on Deleuze’s image of deterritorialization and nomadic traveling, poststructuralists are in danger of romanticizing these notions.<sup>12</sup> I find however, that Deleuze’s scheme of thought is sober and empirical and that it resists romantic temptations. It entails a total dissolution of the notion of a center and consequently of originary sites or authentic identities of *any* kind. Moreover, I find that Deleuze and Guattari warn us against the risk that postmodern systems, with their fragmentation and loss of unity, may reproduce power-relations globally on a small scale. They refer to this danger as “micro-fascism”: smaller, more localized but equally exploitative power formations, which can also be described as the reproduction of “scattered hegemonies,” as Grewal and Kaplan put it, on a world scale. The radical nomadic epistemology Deleuze and Guattari propose is a form of resistance to microfascisms in that it focuses on the need for a qualitative shift away from hegemony, whatever its size and however “local” it may be.

In some cases the figurative mode functions according to what I have called “the philosophy of ‘as if’ ” (see “The Politics of Ontological Difference”). It is *as if* some experiences were reminiscent or evocative of others; this ability to flow from one set of experiences to another is a quality of interconnectedness that I value highly. Drawing a flow of connections need not be an act of appropriation. On the contrary; it marks transitions between communicating states or experiences. Deleuze’s work on lines of escape and becoming is of great inspiration here;<sup>13</sup> nomadic becoming is neither reproduction nor just imitation, but rather emphatic proximity, intensive interconnectedness. Some

states or experiences can merge simply because they share certain attributes.

Nomadic shifts designate therefore a creative sort of becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge.

The practice of "as if," with its ritualized repetitions, runs the risk of falling into solipsistic language games and self-referential obsessions with their own terms of reference. In order to avoid this, I have grounded the depiction of the nomadic state in my own life experiences, embodying it and situating it in the most concrete possible manner. The auto-biographical tone that will emerge in the course of this, as of other essays, is my way of making myself accountable for the nomadic performances that I enact in the text. If this is a metaphor, it is one that displaces and condenses whole areas of my existence; it is a retrospective map of places I have been.

Avoiding romanticizing or appropriating the exotic, the "other," I want to practice a set of narrations of my own embodied genealogy, that is to say I want to revisit certain locations and account for them. As Caren Kaplan puts it this kind of positionality is "a fictional terrain, a reterritorialization that has passed through several versions of deterritorialization to posit a powerful theory of location based on contingency, history and change."<sup>14</sup> The practice of "as if" is a technique of strategic re-location in order to rescue what we need of the past in order to trace paths of transformation of our lives here and now.

The practice of "as if" can also be approached as the mode of impersonation, that is to say of fetishistic representation. This consists in simultaneously recognizing and denying certain attributes or experiences. In male-stream postmodern thought,<sup>15</sup> fetishistic disavowal seems to mark most discussions of sexual difference (see "Discontinuous Becomings: Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman of Philosophy"). In a feminist perspective, I prefer to approach "the philosophy of 'as if,' " however, not as disavowal, but rather as the affirmation of fluid boundaries, a practice of the intervals, of the interfaces, and of the interstices. In other words, the element of repetition, parody per se, or impersonation that accompanies the practice of "as if" cannot constitute an end in itself. The practice of successive poses or masquerades per se has no automatic subversive effect; as Judith Butler lucidly warns us, the force of the parodic mode consists precisely in striving to avoid flat repetitions, which bring about political stagnation.

What I find empowering in the practice of “as if” is precisely its potential for opening up, through successive repetitions and mimetic strategies, spaces where alternative forms of agency can be engendered (see “Sexual Difference as a Political Project”); in other words, parody can be politically empowering on the condition of being sustained by a critical consciousness that aims at engendering transformations and changes. The moment I posit radical consciousness as a precondition, however, I am committing myself to addressing issues of repetition, difference, and the subversion of dominant codes, which calls for more complex schemes of explanation. Thus, Ligaray’s strategy of “mimesis” is a politically empowering sort of repetition, because it addresses simultaneously issues of identity, identifications, and political subjecthood.

Laurie Anderson’s performance art is another great example of effective parodic nomadic style, in the “as-if” mode:<sup>16</sup> situations and people are always reversible in Anderson’s conceptual universe. This constant flow of experience allows Laurie Anderson to depict a high-tech kind of *continuum* between different levels of experience. In turn this makes for her extraordinary talent for evoking paradoxes, not the least of which is a complexity that rests on a minimalist approach. In her witty practice of “as if,” Laurie Anderson has perfected the art of reversibility: events, but also statements can collapse into each other and be turned inside out. Thus Anderson often states, “It is not the bullet that kills you, but the hole,” thus signifying that the boundaries between inside and outside, as well as the temporal chain set up by being hit by a bullet and therefore dying, are not a one-track sequence. Their meaning, consequently, cannot be restricted to a one-way mode.

By analogy I would say that what is politically effective in the politics of parody, or the political practice of “as if,” is not the mimetic impersonation or capacity for repetition of dominant poses, but rather the extent to which these practices open up in-between spaces where new forms of political subjectivity can be explored. In other words, it is not the parody that will kill the phallogocentric posture, but rather the power vacuum that parodic politics may be able to engender.

The nomadic subject as a performative image allows me to weave together different levels of my experience; it reflects some autobiographical aspects, while also expressing my own conceptual preference for a postmetaphysical vision of subjectivity. Last, but not least, it allows

me to conjugate my feminist politics with a variety of other powerful political and theoretical concerns and locations.

This figurative approach to nomadism will allow me to play on the associative quality of the nomadic state and therefore tap its metaphorical richness. I will proceed by exploring some of the cognitive and affective resonances of the image of the nomad, riding on its back, so to speak, toward a horizon that I cannot always predict. Along the way, during the many variations I shall play on the nomadic theme, I will emphasize the extent to which the nomadic state has the potential for positive renaming, for opening up new possibilities for life and thought, especially for women and, even more specifically, for female feminists.

This is in keeping with what Patricia Yaeger calls “visionary epistemology”:<sup>17</sup> she points out that a new image has “this capacity to offer us ordinary access to extraordinary thinking.”<sup>18</sup> Yaeger consequently urges feminists to reflect upon the potency of our own figures of speech, so as to fully assess their potential for empowerment.

Nomadic subjects are capable of freeing the activity of thinking from the hold of phallogocentric dogmatism, returning thought to its freedom, its liveliness, its beauty. There is a strong aesthetic dimension in the quest for alternative nomadic figurations, and feminist theory—such as I practice it—is informed by this joyful nomadic force. As Donna Haraway put it, we need feminist figures of humanity that “resist literal figuration and still erupt in powerful new tropes, new figures of speech, new terms of historical possibility. For this process, at the inflection point of crisis, where all the tropes turn again, we need ecstatic speakers.”<sup>19</sup>

## The Nomad as Polyglot

The polyglot is a linguistic nomad. The polyglot is a specialist of the treacherous nature of language, of any language. Words have a way of not standing still, of following their own paths. They come and go, pursuing preset semantic trails, leaving behind acoustic, graphic, or unconscious traces. In *Alice in Wonderland*,<sup>20</sup> Humpty Dumpty sagaciously reminds us that all that counts in defining the meaning of words is *who* is the boss. This remark has always struck me as peculiarly apt for a person who is constantly in between different languages.

I was born in Italy, more specifically on that stretch of North-Eastern land that the Venetians colonized way back in the thirteenth century. Venice was created under the sign of nomadism, when the local people

took to the water, in a flight from Attila the Hun and his mighty Eastern warriors. It was to provide a steady flow of globe-trotters, not the least known of whom, Marco Polo, still shines on as one of the world's greatest decoder of foreign signs.

I was subsequently raised in Australia's polycultural metropolises, at the end of the "White Australia" policy, just before the trend of "multiculturalism" became fashionable. Contacts between migrants and aborigines were not encouraged; in fact, contact with Aboriginal culture was nonexistent even in the inner-city ghettos. Yet the cover-up of aboriginal presence and the silence of mainstream Australian culture about racism, class stratification, colonial nostalgia, and the plight of the aborigines rang in my ears as a constant, unspoken sign of inner turmoil within the Australian psyche and way of life.<sup>21</sup> It made me feel torn apart.

Cultural identity being external and retrospective, the most immediate effect of the Australian experience was to make me discover the depth of my Europeanness, which was far from a simple notion or a single experience. Not only was I a white immigrant, when compared to the aborigines but also I was off-white (a "wog," or a "dago") when compared to the Anglo-Australian minority who ran the country. How to do the right thing, then? It was by opposition to the antipodean psyche and cultural identity that I found out, often at my own expense, that I am, indeed, a European. I often wonder whether this awareness would have been so acute had I not experienced the loss of European roots through migration. Can cultural identity emerge from an internal dynamic, or is it always external, that is to say oppositional? What is sure now is that the term *European* strikes me as a notion fraught with contradictions that never cease to seduce me and to madden me. *European* is intimately linked for me to issues such as cultural mixed-upness and intercultural conflicts; it stands for physical mobility through endless waves of migration and a special brand of historical memory that, however aware it may be of colonialism, cannot easily share the claims of a postcolonial condition.

The retrospective and external sense of my "Europeanness" had many contradictory implications: it stood first of all for "Continental" as opposed to the British colonial attitude that was hegemonic. In this regard, calling myself a European was a way of revindicating an identity they wanted me to despise. On the other hand, I had enough knowledge of European history to realize that this European identity was not

and had never been *One*: its alleged unity was at best a poor fiction. In its diasporic version, through the innumerable “Little Italy’s,” “Little Greece’s,” and the “Spanish Quarters,” Europe revealed its true face as a concoction of diverse cultural, linguistic, and ethnic groups with a high level of conflicts. Not all diasporas are equal, though they get homogenized by the gaze of the colonial observer. Thus, discovering my “Europeanness” was not the triumphant assumption of a sovereign identity but rather the disenchanting experience of dis-identifying myself with sovereignty altogether. Moreover, when I realized the extent to which the “British” and the “Continental” brands of Europeanness could forego their hostility to join forces in the rejection of native Australians and of other Black and Asian immigrants, I lost all illusions. In this hegemonic mode, European identity has managed historically to perfect the trick that consists in passing itself off as the norm, the desirable center, confining all “others” to the position of periphery. It is indeed quite a trick to combine universalistic aspirations with capital-intensive efforts to establish cultural homologation of all peripheral “others.” Being a European means for me to inhabit such historical contradictions and to experience them as an imperative political need to turn them into spaces of critical resistance to hegemonic identities of all kind. Thus, I can say that I had the condition of migrant cast upon me, but I chose to become a nomad, that is to say a subject in transit and yet sufficiently anchored to a historical position to accept responsibility and therefore make myself accountable for it.

Thanks to the inspiring guidance of my Bachelor of Arts degree supervisor, Genevieve Lloyd,<sup>22</sup> I decided to settle into the disciplinary field of philosophy. To execute this plan, however, I changed continents.

I wrote my first substantial academic piece, my doctoral dissertation, in French at the Sorbonne, in a post-1968 climate where the philosophy classes, especially Gilles Deleuze’s, attracted more foreigners—Britons, Iranians, Cambodians, Americans, Palestinians, Algerians, Australians, Cameroonians, and so forth—than local students. I subsequently moved in and out of Italian, French, and the English language—in its British, Australian, American, and other variations—not in straight lines, but rather by an infinitely shifting scale of degrees of hybridization. Even when I decided to settle for English as my main vehicle of expression, it only resulted in a web of hyphenated English dialects: “Italo-Australian,” “Franglais,” New Yorkese Parisian patois, “Dutch-lish,” and

many others. With my move to the Netherlands in 1988, this shifting landscape settled into a lifestyle based on the permanence of temporary arrangements and the comfort of contingent foundations.

Over the years, I have developed a relationship of great fascination toward monolingual people: those who were born to the symbolic system in the one language that was to remain theirs for the rest of their life. Come to think of it, I do not know many people like that, but I can easily imagine them: people comfortably established in the illusion of familiarity their “mother tongue” gives them. In a mixture of envy and condescension, I think with gratitude about Lacan’s vision of the subject, which confirms my innermost feelings on the matter. Lacanian psychoanalysis shows us that there is no such a thing as a mother tongue, that all tongues carry the name of the father and are stamped by its register. Psychoanalysis also teaches us the irreparable loss of a sense of steady origin that accompanies the acquisition of language, of any language. The Bulgarian expatriate, French theorist Julia Kristeva, makes this point forcefully in *Etrangers à nous-même*;<sup>23</sup> she consequently argues that the state of translation is the common condition of all thinking beings.

Most academics tend to view Americans as monolingual, yet one only has to step into any American metropolitan space to find oneself surrounded by an overwhelming variety of languages and ethnic identities. Paradoxically, the average American—if we except the WASPs—is an immigrant who speaks *at least* one other language on top of their own brand of ado/aped English. Monolingualism seems to me a far more widespread condition in the corridors and halls of American academia than on any pavement of your average American city. The question for me becomes therefore: Whose vested interests are best served by keeping up the image of the American people as a “monolingual” monolith?

Echoing this concern, the French-American director of the Columbia university programs in Paris—Danielle Haase-Dubosc—pointed out a significant change in the profile of the American students who undertake a year of undergraduate study abroad. The increasing numbers of Asian, Indian, African-American and African students coming to France from American universities, no longer feel that they belong to one clearly marked ethnic identity. As a matter of fact, for most of these undergraduates travelling out of the United States for the first time in their life, French is often a third language and France a third culture:

When they come to this third place which is France they gain some reflexive space and time. Questions of multiple identity seem to be lived out in positive ways. And for many, the real question is a moral one. It has to do with radicalizing the concept of the universal rather than doing away with it.<sup>24</sup>

Driven by the need and the desire to radicalize the universal, I also found both solace and intellectual support in Foucault's work on subjectivity. He argues that the constitution of the fragile, split subject of the postmetaphysical era is in fact a process of culturally coding certain functions and acts as signifying, acceptable, normal, desirable. In other words, one becomes a subject through a set of interdictions and permissions, which inscribe one's subjectivity in a bedrock of power. The subject thus is a heap of fragmented parts held together by the symbolic glue that is the attachment to, or identification with, the phallogocentric symbolic. A heap of rabble, calling itself the center of creation; a knot of desiring and trembling flesh, projecting itself to the height of an imperial consciousness. I am struck by the violence of the gesture that binds a fractured self to the performative illusion of unity, mastery, self-transparency. I am amazed by the terrifying stupidity of that illusion of unity, and by its incomprehensible force.

Maybe I just see myself as structurally displaced in between different languages and find in poststructuralist thought an adequate conceptual representation of a state I experience intimately as my own way of being.

Political resistance to the illusion of unity and metaphysical presence remains an important priority. All around us, in this end-of-millennial culture, the belief in the importance, the God-given seriousness and foundational value of mother tongues is ever so strong. In this new Europe that witnesses all of its old problems, in a wave of murderous return of the repressed (see "United States of Europe or United Colors of Benetton?"), in this ethnocentric fortress, the concept of the mother tongue is stronger than ever. It feeds into the renewed and exacerbated sense of nationalism, regionalism, localism that marks this particular moment of our history.

The polyglot surveys this situation with the greatest critical distance; a person who is in transit between the languages, neither here nor there, is capable of some healthy skepticism about steady identities and mother tongues. In this respect, the polyglot is a variation on the theme of critical nomadic consciousness; being in between languages constitutes a vantage point in deconstructing identity. As the Vietnamese-born, French-educated, Californian film maker and feminist academic Trinh T. Minh-ha shows, multiculturalism does not get us very far if it is understood



only as a difference *between* cultures. It should rather be taken as a difference *within* the same culture, that is to say within every self.

This is not to say, however, that all empirically multilingual people are automatically endowed with nomadic consciousness. Far from it, the emphasis on the sacredness of the mother tongue, a sort of nostalgia for the site of cultural origin—often more fantastic than real—tends to be all the stronger in people who speak many languages or live in multicultural surroundings. Is it because of their mother tongues that women in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia are being systematically raped and held in procreative concentration camps? Is coercive motherhood by gang rape the price to be paid for speaking the “wrong” mother tongue? Is not every appeal to the “right” mother tongue the matrix of terror, of fascism, of despair? Is it because the polyglot practices a sort of gentle promiscuity with different linguistic bedrocks, that s/he has long since relinquished any notion of linguistic or ethnic purity?

There are no mother tongues, just linguistic sites one takes her/his starting point from. The polyglot has no vernacular, but many lines of transit, of transgression; some common habits are lost on her/him—for instance to be able to recall in what language s/he chants nursery rhymes, in what language s/he dreams, loves, or fantasizes. The complex muscular and mental apparati that join forces in the production of language combine in the polyglot to produce strange sounds, phonetic connections, vocal combinations, and rhythmical junctions. A sort of polymorphous perversity accompanies a polyglot’s capacity to slip in between the languages, stealing acoustic traces here, diphthong sounds there, in a constant and childlike game of persiflage. The shifts are untranslatable, but not less telling. The best gift to give anyone, but especially a polyglot, is: a new word, a word s/he does not know yet.

The polyglot knows that language is not only and not even the instrument of communication but a site of symbolic exchange that links us together in a tenuous and yet workable web of mediated misunderstandings, which we call civilization. Since Freud and Nietzsche, Western philosophy has argued that meaning does not coincide with consciousness, that there is a nonconscious foundation to most of our actions; *cogito ergo sum* is the obsession of the west, its downfall, its folly. No one is master in their house; *desidero ergo sum* is a more accurate depiction of the process of making meaning.

In other words, a fundamental imbalance exists between libidinal or affective grounds and the symbolic forms available to express them. As a graffiti read on the Paris walls put it: “*C’est du même endroit que l’on sait et l’on ignore* [It is from the same location that you can both see and

fail to see). All knowledge is situated, that is to say partial; we are all stuttering for words, even when we speak "fluently."

Many contemporary critical thinkers<sup>25</sup> bank on the affective as a force capable of freeing us from hegemonic habits of thinking (see "On the Female Feminist Subject; Or, from 'She-Self to She-Other' "). Affectivity in this scheme stands for the preconscious and for prediscursive; desire is not only unconscious but it remains non thought at the very heart of our thought, because it is that which sustains the very activity of thinking. Our desires are that which evades us in the very act of propelling us forth, leaving as the only indicator of *who* we are, the traces of *where* we have already been—that is to say, of what we have already ceased to be. Identity is a retrospective notion.

The polyglot as a nomad in between languages banks on the affective level as his/her resting point; s/he knows how to trust traces and to resist settling into one, sovereign vision of identity. The nomad's identity is a map of where s/he has already been; s/he can always reconstruct it a posteriori, as a set of steps in an itinerary. But there is no triumphant *cogito* supervising the contingency of the self; the nomad stands for movable diversity, the nomad's identity is an inventory of traces. Were I to write an autobiography, it would be the self-portrait of a collectivity, not unlike Luisa Passerini's exemplary *Autoritratto di gruppo*.<sup>26</sup>

The key notion to understanding multiple identity is desire, that is to say unconscious processes. Psychoanalysis—as a philosophy of desire—is also a theory of cultural power. The truth of the subject is always in between self and society. The truth of the matter is that, from the moment you were born, you have lost your "origin." Given that language is the medium and the site of constitution of the subject, it follows that it is also the cumulated symbolic capital of our culture. If it was there before "I" came to be and will be there after "I" disappears, then the question of the constitution of the subject is not a matter of "internalization" of given codes but rather a process of negotiation between layers, sedimentations, registers of speech, frameworks of enunciation. Desire is productive because it flows on, it keeps on moving, but its productivity also entails power relations, transitions between contradictory registers, shifts of emphasis. I shall come back to this.

The polyglot also knows intimately what de Saussure teaches explicitly: that the connection between linguistic signs is arbitrary. The arbitrariness of language, experienced over several languages, is enough to drive one to relativist despair. Thus the polyglot becomes the prototype of the postmodern speaking subject; struck by the maddening, fulminating insight about the arbitrariness of linguistic meanings and yet resisting the free fall into cynicism. As the Norwegian-Australian femi-

nist Sneja Gunew put it in her introduction to an anthology of Australian migrant writers from non-English-speaking backgrounds: "Paradoxically, it is languages that speak us. Ask any migrant."<sup>27</sup>

My experience as a polyglot taught me the courage to face this arbitrariness and still not jump to the conclusion that anything goes, that arbitrary does not equate absurd and polyvalence does not mean anarchy. In some respects, my polylinguism forced upon me the need for an ethics that would survive the many shifts of language and cultural locations and make me "true to myself," although the self in question is but a complex collection of fragments. I trained myself to see that the interchangeability of signs is not a medieval death dance but a pattern of orchestrated repetitions. That one must respect the complexity, not drown in it. Thus the polyglot can end up being an ethical entity, confronting multiplicity and yet avoiding relativism.

## Nomadic Aesthetics

The nomadic polyglot practices an aesthetic style based on compassion for the incongruities, the repetitions, the arbitrariness of the languages s/he deals with. Writing is, for the polyglot, a process of undoing the illusory stability of fixed identities, bursting open the bubble of ontological security that comes from familiarity with one linguistic site. The polyglot exposes this false security: s/he is Christa Wolf's Cassandra: "So far, everything that has befallen me has struck an answering chord. This is the secret that encircles me and holds me together: there is something of everyone in me, so I have belonged completely to no one, and I have even understood their hatred of me."<sup>28</sup> Writing in this mode is about disengaging the sedentary nature of words, destabilizing commonsensical meanings, deconstructing established forms of consciousness.

In this respect, writers can be polyglots within the same language; you can speak English and write many different Englishes. What else did the great modernists such as Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, or—my least favorite—James Joyce do, but invent a new English dialect? What else are Alice Walker and Toni Morrison doing but redesigning the boundaries of the citadel that was English? Becoming a polyglot in your own mother tongue: that's writing. Françoise Collin, the Belgian-French feminist theorist and writer now based in Paris, has coined the expression "*l'immigrée blanche*"—the white immigrant—to describe the condition of people who are in transit within their most familiar tongue; in her case, between the French language of Belgium and that of Conti-

mental France. The sense of singularity if not of aloneness, of the white immigrants can be immense.

This fascination with the solitude of the empty spaces may appear affected and it may even smack of radical chic. I do maintain, however, that this kind of nomadic aesthetics is the counterpart of the politics of peripheral resistance to new hegemonic formations. In other words, I do not believe you can separate the question of style from political choices. Part and parcel of accepting the postmodern transnational economy we live in is the elaboration of styles and forms of representation that are suitable to our historical situation.

Nomadism: vertiginous progression toward deconstructing identity; molecularisation of the self. As Trinh T. Minh-ha put it: "To write is to become. Not to become a writer (or a poet), but to become, intransitively. Not when writing adopts established keynotes or policy, but when it traces for itself lines of evasion."<sup>29</sup> The nomadic, polyglot writer despises mainstream communication; the traffic jam of meanings waiting for admission at the city gates creates that form of pollution that goes by the name of "common sense." Nomadic writing longs instead for the desert: areas of silence, in between the official cacophonies, in a flirt with radical nonbelonging and outsideness. Colette, in *La Vagabonde*, caught it once and for all: "Personne ne m'attend, moi, sur une route qui ne mène ni à la gloire, ni à la richesse, ni à l'amour."<sup>30</sup>

Writing is not only a process of constant translation but also of successive adaptations to different cultural realities. Nicole Ward Jouve, the French-born British literary theorist who has also written extensively on Colette, raises this point forcefully before addressing her own multiculturalism.<sup>31</sup> This is a difficult task that translates into the need to take your bearings, to contextualize your utterances, to draw maps, in a mobile manner. As an intellectual style, nomadism consists not so much in being homeless, as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere.<sup>32</sup> The nomad carries her/his essential belongings with her/him wherever s/he goes and can recreate a home base anywhere.

I think that many of the things I write are cartographies, that is to say a sort of intellectual landscape gardening that gives me a horizon, a frame of reference within which I can take my bearing, move about, and set up my own theoretical tent. It is not by chance therefore, that the image of the map, or of map-making is so often present in my texts. The frequency of the spatial metaphor expresses the simultaneity of the nomadic status and of the need to draw maps; each text is like a camp-

ing site: it traces places where I have been, in the shifting landscape of my singularity.

Homelessness as a chosen condition also expresses the choice of a situated form of heterogeneity, which I tend to display in my writing style (see “Re-figuring the Subject”). Is it any wonder, then, that each text seems to grow out of the other, by a slow process of accretion? My thinking grows by gradually adding small pieces or flashes of colorful insight onto an existing canvass. Because I think in successive steps, sometimes the process gets ahead of me and the ideas grow like some astonishing amoeba, much to my own surprise and delight.<sup>33</sup>

The nomad and the cartographer proceed hand in hand because they share a situational need—except that the nomad knows how to read invisible maps, or maps written in the wind, on the sand and stones, in the flora. The globe-trotting writer Bruce Chatwin, in his book *The Songlines*,<sup>34</sup> shows admirably the extent to which, in Gypsies, Australian aborigines, and other tribes, the nomad’s identity consists in memorizing oral poetry, which is an elaborate and accurate description of the territories that need to be crossed in the nomad’s never-ending journey. A totemic geography marks this sort of identity. The desert is a gigantic map of signs for those who know how to read them, for those who can sing their way through the wilderness.

In *Invisible cities*,<sup>35</sup> Italo Calvino, the Italian writer who spent most of his life in Paris, has his hero, Marco Polo, display the nomadic skill memorizing imperceptible maps. Marco Polo reads the chessboard on which he is playing with the Kublai Khan. From a small scratch in the board’s wood, he is capable of reconstructing its genealogy, retracing the sort of the trees it was made from, their origin and structure, down to the kind of craftsmanship that was used to make it. The map is invisible or, rather, it is available only to those who have been trained to read invisible ink signs.

Luce Irigaray, a Belgian-born philosopher who lives in France as an immigrant within the same language and is most followed and understood in Italy (where the former Communist Party appointed her as adviser) carefully notes in her latest books the place and the date where she wrote each article. I appreciate her cartographic precision and see it as a sort of situated ethics: the politics of location applied to writing.

Were I to do the same for the articles gathered in this volume, I would have to note down places such as: Jyväskylä in central Finland, Melbourne in South-Western Australia, Verona in Northern Italy, Utrecht in

central Netherlands, and so on. This mode of writing also involves conversations and exchanges with other transmobile entities, foreigners without whom the intellectual life in the many metropolises of the world will come to an end: Americans in Paris; Dutch, Italians, Canadians, and Australians everywhere; African-Americans, Belgian-Africans, and Americans in all sorts of hyphenated variations: Jewish Americans and Jewish Parisians; postcolonial British, Palestinians, and Israelis.

Prominent among these nomadic intellectuals are the feminists—who form the core of that “transatlantic” contingent about which Alice Jardine has written so eloquently.<sup>36</sup> I am quite struck by the high number of women I know from mixed cultural backgrounds who are very actively involved in the feminist movement; in my experience, the movement has provided stability amid changing conditions and shifting contexts. At times I think that this mix of radical intellectuals is the mark of an era and that this sort of mobility has decreased since. For instance, Nancy Huston, an English-Canadian who has settled happily into the French language to become a prolific essayist and novelist, and the French-Algerian novelist Leila Sebbar have written tenderly about the multicultural mix that characterized most of their intellectual colleagues and friends<sup>37</sup> in Paris during the seventies. Could the same be said of the nineties?

I would also have to note the essays gathered here have also experienced several displacements in their actual publication: most of them saw the light of day in minority journals, women’s studies journals, or in that peculiar space in mainstream publishing known as “the special feminist issue.” All of them were published in countries other than the one I happened to be living in at the time. I sometimes think that even my choice of location within the field of women’s studies is a reflection of my desire for nomadism, that is to say, my desire to suspend all attachment to established discourses. I tend to see women’s studies as a new frontier and to feel uneasy within mainstream discourses (see “Women’s Studies and the Politics of Difference”). Maybe all nomads have a minority vocation? I will return to this.

What has become clear over the years is that without such geographical dislocations, I could not write at all—and what I write is *not* travel literature. But I do have special affection for the places of transit that go with traveling: stations and airport lounges, trams, shuttle buses, and check-in areas. In between zones where all ties are suspended and

time stretched to a sort of continuous present. Oases of nonbelonging, spaces of detachment. No-(wo)man's lands.

Maybe this is why these open, public spaces of transition are privileged sites of creation for contemporary artists.<sup>38</sup> At the "Decade Show," which was held at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 1990, the artist Martha Rosler exhibited an installation piece called "In the Place of the Public (1983–1990)," which consisted of large photographs of places of transition, of passage, especially airport lounges and luggage carousels, accompanied by extensive comments inspired by the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre. In Rosler's vision, public spaces are sites that mark rites of passage and are subjected to culture-specific imperatives such as schedules, rhythms of production, allowed or forbidden directions, loading and unloading, areas of transition, and spaces of transactions. Space is an abstraction ruled by the logic of the market economy and, as such, it is "permeated with social relations." The great merit of Rosler's art is to have captured both aspects of these areas of transit: their instrumental value as well as their peculiarly seductive anonymity. Airport lounges are places where one passes "without registering passage"; as such they are a microcosmos of contemporary society, which may well be postindustrial but nevertheless displays a more pure, that is to say a more ruthless form of capitalist aggression than ever before.

Installations in public spaces, in areas of passing through are also central to the work of other important contemporary women artists. For instance, Barbara Krueger's large billboards are strategically set up in huge intersections at the center of the metropolises of the Western world. They announce "We don't need another hero" and "Surveillance is their busywork" with breath-taking force.<sup>39</sup> In these days of postindustrial decay of urban space, artists such as Krueger manage to return to the artwork the monumental value that used to be its prerogative in the past, while also preserving its politically committed nature. Krueger's punchy messages are also invigorating for their powerfully feminist touch, their humor, and their sheer beauty.

Similarly, Jenny Holzer's electronic panels flash right across the advertisement-infested skyline of our cities and relay very politicized and consciousness-raising messages: "Money creates taste," "Property created crime," "Torture is barbaric," etc., etc.<sup>40</sup> Holzer also uses the airport spaces, especially the information panels of luggage carousels, to transmit such staggering messages as, for example, "Lack of charisma

can be fatal," and such ironic messages as "If you had behaved nicely, the communists wouldn't exist," or "What country should you adopt if you hate poor people?"

Rozler, Krueger, and Holzer are perfect examples of postmodern, insightful, and non-nostalgic appropriators of public spaces for creative and political purposes. In their hands, areas of transit and passage become contemporary equivalents of the desert, not only because of the enormous, alienating solitude that characterizes them but also because they are heavily marked by signs and boards indicating a multitude of possible directions, to which the artist adds her own, unexpected and disruptive one.

The urban space is thus one huge map that requires special decoding and interpreting skills; in the hands of these artists the city also becomes text, a signifying artifact. Brunhilde Biebuyck (a Zaire-born Belgian who never lived in Belgium, grew up all over the United States, including four years in New York City, became an ethnologist, and finally settled in France) and Mihaela Bacou (Rumanian-born from Latin-Macedonian parents, lived in Greece, and then settled in Paris as a research scholar) have gathered an impressive collection of stencilled mural art from Parisian walls. In an article they co-authored about this collection, they emphasize the expressivity of the city, its aural resonance—the multilayered density of the messages it relays.<sup>41</sup>

Public spaces as sites of creativity therefore highlight a paradox: they are both loaded with signification and profoundly anonymous; they are spaces of detached transition but also venues of inspiration, of visionary insight, of great release of creativity. Brian Eno's musical experiment with *Music for Airports* makes the same point very strongly: it is a creative appropriation of the dead heart of the slightly hallucinating zones that are the public places.<sup>42</sup> Artists are not the only ones, however, to be concerned with areas of transit.

Once, landing at Paris International Airport, I saw all of these in between areas occupied by immigrants from various parts of the former French empire; they had arrived, but were not allowed entry, so they camped in these luxurious transit zones, waiting. The dead, panoptical heart of the new European Community will scrutinize them and not allow them in easily: it is crowded at the margins and nonbelonging can be hell.<sup>43</sup>



## Neither Migrant nor Exile: The Feminist as Nomad

The polyglot nomadic intellectual in Europe today must provide food for thought about the exclusionary, ethnocentric usage that is currently being made of the notion of a common European Community (see "United States of Europe or United Colors of Benetton?"), and the images of an alleged intranational European identity that accompany them. Among the images of intercultural otherness that are current today, I shall single out the exile and the migrant—before returning to the nomad.

As far back as 1938 Virginia Woolf was raising the issue: "As a woman I have no country, as a woman I want no country, as a woman my country is the whole world."<sup>44</sup> The identification of female identity with a sort of planetary exile has since become a *topos* of feminist studies, with writers such as the Algerian-born, Jewish Parisian H el ene Cixous<sup>45</sup> and the Belgian-French Luce Irigaray<sup>46</sup> stressing this point.

I am not entirely happy, however, with this metaphor of exile: being "a citizen of the world" may seem attractive at first, but it can also be an evasive tactic. As if all women had in common were a sense of their homelessness, countrylessness, of not having a common anchoring point. I do not find this satisfactory either as a diagnosis of the status of women in 1993 or as a vision of their possible role in the future. Relying on Adrienne Rich's notion of "the politics of location," I think that generalizations about women should be replaced by attention to and accountability for differences among women. As Alice Walker pointed out<sup>47</sup> in her response to Virginia Woolf: is this nonchalant detachment not the privilege of caste and whiteness? What could it mean to people who have never had a home, or a remembered home country, like Phillis Wheatley in the slave plantations of the United States? Is not the lofty metaphor of planetary exile very ethnocentric? In this end of century, when Europe and other parts of the world are confronted by the problem of refugees from the East and the South and movements of populations away from war-torn homelands, issues such as exile and the right to belong, the right to enter, the right to asylum, are too serious merely to be metaphorized into a new ideal.

In this respect, it is important to restore the notion of "the politics of location" to the radical political function for which it was intended. It refers to a practice of dialogue among many different female embodied genealogies. A location, in Rich's sense of the term, is both a geopoliti-

cal notion and also a notion that can only be mediated in language and consequently be the object of imaginary relations. Thus, while I share the concerns expressed by Caren Kaplan in her transnational analysis of the notion<sup>48</sup> and also share her urge to use the politics of location as a critique of dominant models of hegemony, I also want to argue that there is no social relation that is unmediated by language and is consequently free of imaginary constructions. In this regard, a radical feminist postmodernist practice requires attention to be paid both to identity as a set of identifications and to political subjectivity as the quest for sites of resistance.

Next to the exile, another figuration I want to evoke is that of the migrant. The migrant is no exile: s/he has a clear destination: s/he goes from one point in space to another for a very clear purpose. Europe today is a multicultural entity; the phenomenon of economic migration has created in every European city a set of foreign "sub-cultures," in which women usually play the role of the loyal keepers of the original home culture. I do not think that effective links exist between the "white" intellectual women and the many "domestic foreigners" that inhabit Europe today. This problem is all the more urgent at a time of increasing racism and xenophobia and revival of nationalistic ideologies.

The migrant bears a close tie to class structure; in most countries, the migrants are the most economically disadvantaged groups. Economic migration is at the heart of the new class stratification in the European Community today. By contrast, the exile is often motivated by political reasons and does not often coincide with the lower classes; as for the nomad, s/he is usually beyond classification, a sort of classless unit.

As opposed to the images of both the migrant and the exile, I want to emphasize that of the nomad. The nomad does not stand for homelessness, or compulsive displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity. The nomadic subject, however, is not altogether devoid of unity; his/her mode is one of definite, seasonal patterns of movement through rather fixed routes. It is a cohesion engendered by repetitions, cyclical moves, rhythmical displacement. In this respect, I shall take the nomad as the prototype of the "man or woman of ideas";<sup>49</sup> as Deleuze put it, the point of being an intellectual nomad is about crossing bound-

aries, about the act of going, regardless of the destination. "The life of the nomad is the intermezzo . . . He is a vector of deterritorialization."<sup>50</sup>

The nomad enacts transitions without a teleological purpose; Deleuze also gives as an example of this nomadic mode the figuration the "rhizome." The rhizome is a root that grows underground, sideways; Deleuze plays it against the linear roots of trees. By extension, it is "as if" the rhizomatic mode expressed a nonphallogocentric way of thinking: secret, lateral, spreading, as opposed to the visible, vertical ramifications of Western trees of knowledge. By extension, the rhizome stands for a nomadic political ontology that, not unlike Donna Haraway's "cyborg" (see "Re-figuring the Subject"), provides movable foundations for a post-humanist view of subjectivity. Nomadic consciousness is a form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity.

Nomadic consciousness is also an epistemological position. In her work on contemporary science, Isabelle Stengers remarks on the role played by "nomadic concepts" in postmodern epistemology.<sup>51</sup> According to Stengers, concepts are nomadic because they have acquired the capacity to transfer from one scientific discourse to another, in a blurring of disciplinary boundaries that is the distinct historical privilege of contemporary science. This transdisciplinary propagation of concepts has positive effects in that it allows for multiple interconnections and transmigrations of notions, mostly from the "hard" to the "soft" sciences. One just needs to think of the fortunes of a notion such as "complexity" to appreciate the metaphorical resonance gained by some scientific concepts in contemporary culture at large. On the negative side, this form of conceptual nomadism causes, according to Stengers, problems of metaphor-overload and therefore of confusion, to which she is firmly opposed. In a most non-nomadic manner that is so typical of post-structuralist French thought, Stengers concludes by chastising the very concept that has supported her reflection. Thus, nomadism is out and a new "normative epistemology" is called for, one that would avoid confusions and allow for clearer and more accountable points of transdisciplinary crossing. This call for a new epistemological visa system confines nomadism to the infelicitous status of a concept that is evoked only in order to be delegitimated. This disavowal, however, has the advantage of placing nomadic concepts, however briefly, at the center of contemporary scientific debate.

On a more general level, the history of ideas is always a nomadic story; ideas are as mortal as human beings and as subjected as we are to the crazy twists and turns of history. The figure of the nomad, as opposed to the exile, allows us to think of international dispersion and dissemination of ideas not only on the banal and hegemonic model of the tourist or traveler but also as forms of resistance, as ways of preserving ideas that may otherwise have been condemned to willful obliteration or to collectively produced amnesia.

The distinction I am defending between the migrant, the exile, and the nomad corresponds also to different styles and genres and to different relationships to time.

The mode and tense of exile style are based on an acute sense of foreignness, coupled with the often hostile perception of the host country. Exile literature, for instance, is marked by a sense of loss or separation from the home country, which, often for political reasons, is a lost horizon; there is a diasporic side to it. Memory, recollection, and the rumination of acoustic traces of the mother tongue is central to this literary genre, as in Nathalie Sarraute's *Enfance*.<sup>52</sup> Translated into time, this genre favors a sort of flow of reminiscence, which I would translate into a sort of future perfect: "it will have been like this . . . ."

The migrant, on the other hand, is caught in an in-between state whereby the narrative of the origin has the effect of destabilizing the present. This migrant literature is about a suspended, often impossible present; it is about missing, nostalgia, and blocked horizons. The past acts as a burden in migrant literature; it bears a fossilized definition of language that marks the lingering of the past into the present. The migrant's favorite tense is the present perfect.

The Italo-Australian writer Rosa Capiello offers a great example of this in her book *Oh, Lucky Country!*,<sup>53</sup> her devastating response to an all-time Australian classical text, the *The Lucky Country*.<sup>54</sup> In Capiello's book, all the action takes place physically in white Australia, but within the multicultural communities that compose its diversified urban landscape. All the various hyphenated subjects that compose this human tapestry are pure immigrants, living in their own frozen sense of their cultural identity, behaving as if they were still in their countries of origin, and speaking a language that is neither their mother tongue nor standard English but a concoction of their own making. As the plot unfolds, white Australians are seldom if ever depicted or even approached; they constitute a sort of distant and unreachable horizon,

thus becoming a permanent object of longing and fear. As for native aboriginal Australians, they are simply confined to invisibility and thus plunged into unredeemed otherness. The overall effect is one of utter desolation and of hybridization without joyful creative relief.

Juxtaposed to the migrant genre, postcolonial literature functions differently, because the sense of the home country or culture of origin is activated by political and other forms of resistance to the conditions offered by the host culture. As a consequence time is not frozen for the postcolonial subject, and the memory of the past is not a stumbling block that hinders access to a changed present. Quite the contrary, the ethical impulse that sustains the postcolonial mode makes the original culture into a living experience, one that functions as a standard of reference. The host culture, far from being unreachable and distant, is confronted quite directly, at times almost physically. In her enlightening analysis of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*,<sup>55</sup> the Indian-American postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak distinguishes politically and epistemologically between metropolitan migrancy and the postcolonial condition.

I am arguing that nomadic consciousness is akin to what Foucault called counter-memory; it is a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self. Feminists—or other critical intellectuals as nomadic subject—are those who have forgotten to forget injustice and symbolic poverty: their memory is activated against the stream; they enact a rebellion of subjugated knowledges. The nomadic tense is the imperfect: it is active, continuous; the nomadic trajectory is controlled speed. The nomadic style is about transitions and passages without predetermined destinations or lost homelands. The nomad's relationship to the earth is one of transitory attachment and cyclical frequentation; the antithesis of the farmer, the nomad gathers, reaps, and exchanges but does not exploit.

Consequently, there is a strong link between nomads and violence; the ruthlessness of the rootless can be shocking. From the dawn of time, nomadic tribes have been what Deleuze calls "war machines," that is to say perfectly trained armed bands. The raids, the sacking of cities, the looting, the killing of the sedentary population are the nomad's answer to agriculture. I think it is worth emphasizing this point so as to see the political density of the figure of the nomad; in dealing with this sort of consciousness, one must also therefore confront the difficult issues of political violence, armed rebellion, destruction, and the death-drive.

In a stimulating study of the links between the European artistic avant-gardes, from the Dadaist movement at the beginning of this century to the Italian Metropolitan Indians of the mid-seventies, Sadie Plant raises this point quite forcefully: "It is here, in the adventures and defeats of generations of revolutionaries, saboteurs, artists and poets that the struggle to escape and subvert the codes theorized by Deleuze and Guattari has been played out countless times."<sup>56</sup>

Plant's analysis highlights the persistence of the nomadic trait in contemporary political movements, from the "hippies" to the "new age gypsies," the peace camps, the music festivals, the feminist happenings, all the way to the spiraling violence of terrorist units such as the Italian Red Brigades, which were total war machines launched against the state.

Pier Paolo Pasolini, who was born in Bologna, raised forty kilometers south of my home town, and assassinated in Rome, has provided one of the most staggering analyses of state violence in his accounts of the murky Italian politics during the years of terrorism 1968–1977: the years of lead/bullets, up to and including the assassination of the politician Moro.<sup>57</sup> Pasolini points out the almost uncanny similarity between state violence and terrorist violence in the Italian context, yet makes distinctions between the two, so as to defend the possibility of radical, nonviolent politics.

Several critics have also commented on the tribal characteristics acquired by inner-city countercultures, including phenomena such as rioting and looting. Looking at the analyses of the postmodern predicament as the decline of the nation-state,<sup>58</sup> one is struck by the correlation between the violence of state apparati and the neonomadism of suburban unrest, especially inner-city urban culture.

The central structure for understanding nomadic violence is indeed the opposition of the city to the space of the desert; Bruce Chatwin describes the city as a garden superimposed on a sheep fold: a space of agriculture and sheep-farming—that is to say, of sedentary stocking and cumulation of riches. As such it is diametrically opposed to the open space: the *nomos*, or plot of land, is the etymological root of *nomad*, which means the clan elder who supervises the allocation of pastures to the tribe. By extension, *nomos* came to mean the law; thus we get a term such as *nemesis* that refers to appropriate or divine justice. Almost all monetary expressions also come from this pastoral origin: *nomisma* means current coins, from which we get *numismatics*. The words con-

nected to money—such as *pecuniary*—have the root in the words for sheep: *pecu/pecus*.

Deleuze confirms Chatwin: *noumos* is a principle of distribution of the land, and as such it came to represent the opposition of the power of the *polis* because it was a space without enclosures or borders. It was the pastoral, open, nomadic space in opposition to which the sedentary powers of the city was erected. Metropolitan space versus nomadic trajectories.

[ Nomadic violence is consequently opposed to state apparatus violence: the tribe is the counterarmy, that is to say the space where the warriors rule. Is this why nomads have always been persecuted as dangerous criminals by the state? The nomadic fighter becomes, in his/her turn, victim of state repression. Is this why so many Gypsies were killed in Nazi concentration camps; was it fear of their mobility that stiffened the murderous hand around their neck? Is this why the Tuaregs are being slaughtered in Africa today? Nomadic violence and state violence are mirror images of each other, divided by an antithetical hostility.

Differences in the kind of violence are also a question of different beats, that is to say of variations of intensity or speed. The intense, mobile rhythm of inner-city youth rappers is counteracted by the use of heavy metal and other forms of rock'n'roll music<sup>59</sup> as a combat weapon by the American army during their attack on Noriega in Panama.<sup>60</sup> This difference in beat, or speed, is all the more paradoxical if one keeps in mind the fact that rock'n'roll started out as a subversive, antiestablishment culture. In its infinite flexibility, late capitalism has adapted itself to the hard rock "revolution" and found clever instrumental applications for it. It may be more difficult, however, to exploit the rappers to the same degree.

A flashback illustrates my ambivalence on the issue of nomadic violence: I remember my grandfather—a respected member of the antifascist resistance in northern Italy—warning me that Gypsies "steal children." I remember looking at the first Gypsies who came through my own town—which is barely 100 kilometers from the Yugoslav border—with fascination and fear: did they really steal children? Would they steal me? If they stole me, where would I end up? The realization of the existence of people whose house was on the road opened up a new dimension for me. Retrospectively, the fear of them gave me the first atrocious suspicion that the road, the old familiar road that opened in front of my family home, was an irresistible path that could lead as

far as Melbourne, Paris, or Utrecht. That the solid foundations I was accustomed to taking for granted might be swallowed up in one spasmodic moment, leaving me on the road too. That stepping on that road could be fatal, as it turned out to be.

From Kleist's depiction of Penthesilea, in the homonymous play of deathly passions, to the tragedy of Medea, a foreigner in an ungrateful land, other forms of violence also come into focus in female nomads: a sort of rough encounter with hostile environmental forces; an emphasis on physical resistance and stamina; a reliance on rituals and dramas in the absence of the temple of established religion. The Sicilian-born, Rome-based Italian novelist Dacia Maraini depicts with desperate lucidity, in her book *Donna in Guerra*,<sup>61</sup> the violence of rebellious females. They inhabit the man-made world as a prolonged, painful form of self-estrangement and are capable of outbursts of great violence as a consequence.

There is a rigorous, relentless sort of toughness in nomadic subjects; I find a powerful evocation of it in the raucous, haunting rhythm of the voice of the beggar girl in *India Song*, a piece of film magic by Marguerite Duras, the French artist who grew up in colonial South-East Asia. I also recognize it, however, in the demonic, relentless beat of Kathy Acker's *In Memoriam to Identity*,<sup>62</sup> in her visceral passion for nomadic transformations and her Deleuzian flair for the reversibility of situations and people—her borderline capacity to impersonate, mimic, and cut across an infinity of "others."

## Postmodern Feminist Nomadism

The figuration of the nomad is a form of intervention on the debate between feminism and the postmodernist crisis of values and representations of the subject. Being situated as a European, in a context where the term *postmodernism* has only reached a consensus as an architectural notion, I shall speak now of the term *poststructuralism* to designate the theoretical discourse about the crisis of the subject.

While stating my skepticism at a notion of a "crisis" of values that takes place at the same time as the historical emergence of feminism, I have been particularly critical, in *Patterns of Dissonance*,<sup>63</sup> of the rise of new man-made images of the feminine as the prototype of that split, fluid, multicentered identity that postmodernists seem to favor. At the same time, however, I want to argue for the relevance of poststructural-



ism to my attempt to image both the process of thinking and the thinking subject differently—in the nomadic mode.

Just like real nomads—who are an endangered species today, threatened with extinction—nomadic thinking is a minority position. My defense of nomadism is thus due to my perception of the historically vulnerable position of the movement of thought known as poststructuralism, and of the political and theoretical activities that made it attractive for my generation. Thinkers of the subversive persuasion of Foucault, Irigaray, and Deleuze (see “The Ethics of Sexual Difference: The Case of Foucault and Irigaray”) have little or no chance of imposing their own philosophical agenda and theoretical priorities in these gloomy days of fin-de-siècle (see “Envy; Or, With Your Brains and My Looks”). Their particular philosophical style, the radical questions they ask, their commitment to change and transformations in everyday life as well as in their teaching of the history of philosophy have been swept aside by the winds of neoconservatism that are blowing across the European Community nowadays. Their thought is a part of the intellectual left that has been historically defeated in favor of whatever brand of neopositivism or lukewarm neoliberalism we are going through today. This also implies that those places where poststructuralist thought is going to continue are non- or extra-philosophical. I think feminism is one of the forums where the essence of the poststructuralist debate could be carried on: it is one of the escape routes for ideas that would otherwise have become extinct. Poststructuralism may survive by taking the nomadic route of feminism, but will it?

One of the points of intersection between poststructuralist philosophies and feminist theory is the desire to leave behind the linear mode of intellectual thinking, the teleologically ordained style of argumentation that most of us have been trained to respect and emulate. In my experience, this results in encouraging repetition and dutifulness to a canonical tradition that enforces the sanctimonious sacredness of certain texts: *the* texts of the great philosophical humanistic tradition. I would like to oppose to them a passionate form of post-humanism, based on feminist nomadic ethics.

More especially, I see it as essential that women break free from what Teresa de Lauretis, the Italian-American feminist theorist who has chosen the Netherlands as one of her homes, describes as “the Oedipal plot” of theoretical work. It is important for feminists to break away from the patterns of masculine identification that high theory demands, to

step out of the paralyzing structures of an exclusive academic style.<sup>64</sup> Nomadism is an invitation to dis-identify ourselves from the sedentary phallogocentric monologism of philosophical thinking and to start cultivating the art of disloyalty to civilization, which Adrienne Rich advocates, or, rather, that form of healthy disrespect for both academic and intellectual conventions that was inaugurated and propagated by the second feminist wave.

On the whole, feminist philosophers do not shine for their radical nomadism; on the contrary they tend to embody the syndrome of the dutiful daughter, or alternatively, of the devoted mistress.<sup>65</sup> This confirms a corporatist attachment to the discipline and a strong identification with its masters; many feminists work to preserve or even to rescue the very idea that philosophy actually *matters*. Thus it is not surprising that the poststructuralist notions of the death of the philosophical subject and the crisis of philosophy often find their most vehement opponents in women in philosophy.<sup>66</sup>

In the light of the position outlined above, I want to defend the poststructuralists' attack on philosophical humanism while criticizing their gender-blindness. The only theory I feel I can practice is that which both Irigaray and Deleuze defend as a form of creation of new ways of thinking. I am interested only in systems of thought or conceptual frameworks that can help me think about change, transformation, living transitions. I want a creative, nonreactive project, emancipated from the oppressive force of the traditional theoretical approach. I see feminist theory as the site of such a transformation from sedentary logocentric thinking to nomadic creative thought.

For me, feminism is a practice, as well as a creative drive, that aims at asserting sexual difference as a positive force (see "The Politics of Ontological Difference"). The new feminist nomadic subject that sustains this project is an epistemological and political entity to be defined and affirmed by women in the confrontation of their multiple differences of class, race, age, lifestyle, and sexual preference. Accordingly, I see feminism today as the activity aimed at articulating the questions of individual, embodied, gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity, connecting them both with the problem of knowledge and epistemological legitimation.

In my assessment, one of the central issues at stake in this project is how to reconcile historicity, and therefore agency, with the (unconscious) desire for change. The most difficult task is how to put the will

to change together with the desire for the new that implies the construction of new desiring subjects.

This difficulty is due to the fact that inner, psychic or unconscious structures are very hard to change by sheer volition. The case of psychoanalysis rests precisely on the demand that the pain involved in the processes of change and transformation be recognized and respected. In-depth transformations are as painful as they are slow. If female feminists want to posit effective politics, they need to keep in mind the distinction of levels between willful political choices and unconscious desires and attempt to develop strategies that are suited to each one. Collapsing the will with desire or positing the primacy of the one over the other are equally inadequate moves. As I have argued (see "Sexual Difference as a Political Project"), each level has to be respected in its complexity, yet points of transition and of overlapping must be developed between them. One cannot take short-cuts through one's unconscious; the women who attempt to cheat their way across—especially female feminists—are playing with fire. I call "ethics of sexual difference"—adapting the concept proposed by Luce Irigaray—a feminist nomadic project that allows for internal contradictions and attempts to negotiate between unconscious structures of desire and conscious political choices. In this respect feminism is a form of multiple consciousness of differences.

In other words, my work at this time focuses on the intersection of identity, subjectivity, and epistemology from a poststructuralist angle of sexual difference. The central issue is the interconnectedness between identity, subjectivity, and power. The self being a sort of network of interrelated points, the question then becomes: By what sort of interconnections, sidesteps, and lines of escape can one produce feminist knowledge without fixing in into a new normativity?

Faced with these issues, I suggest that feminists and other critical intellectuals today cultivate a nomadic consciousness. This form of consciousness combines features that are usually perceived as opposing, namely the possession of a sense of identity that rests not on fixity but on contingency. The nomadic consciousness combines coherence with mobility. It aims to rethink the unity of the subject, without reference to humanistic beliefs, without dualistic oppositions, linking instead body and mind in a new set of intensive and often intransitive transitions.

The feminist postmodernist task is to figure out how to respect cultural diversity without falling into relativism or political despair. Rela-

tivism is a pitfall in that it erodes the grounds for possible interalliances or political coalitions. The challenge for feminist nomads in particular is how to conjugate the multilayered, multicultural perspective, with responsibility for and accountability to their gender.

The notion of "situatedness" is not in itself a nomadic one; on the contrary, it can be taken in the sense of the need for steady foundations. In a powerful defense of the notion of exile, against what she perceives as a postmodernist withdrawal from the political, Seyla Benhabib clarifies several points.<sup>67</sup> She stresses the historical permanence of the image of the intellectual as occupying a space outside the city walls, living in a sort of social exile, because s/he rejects the values that are immanent to that society. Benhabib defines this space in relation to the idea of utopia, which literally means no-where, or no-place. According to Benhabib, without some utopian belief in a space of critical no-where, no political or social criticism can be legitimated. Taking a firm stand against the postmodernist celebration of loss of boundaries and of increased territorial insecurity, which she sees as politically disempowering, she argues that the best we can opt for, at this point in time, is a situated form of criticism, that is to say a temporary sort of exile. When it comes to subjectivity, we cannot do better than to offer a view of the self as autonomous, yet endowed with fluid ego boundaries and capable of agency and accountability.

While I share Benhabib's ethical impulse to empower women's political agency without falling back on a substantialist vision of the subject, I cannot go along with the emphasis on exile. According to the distinction I drew earlier, the central figuration for postmodern subjectivity is not that of a marginalized exile but rather that of an active nomadism. The critical intellectual camping at the city gates is not seeking readmission but rather taking a rest before crossing the next stretch of desert. Critical thinking is not a diaspora of the elected few but a massive abandonment of the logocentric *polis*, the alleged "center" of the empire, on the part of critical and resisting thinking beings. Whereas for Benhabib the normativity of the phallogocentric regime is negotiable and repairable, for me it is beyond repair. Nomadism is therefore also a gesture of nonconfidence in the capacity of the *polis* to undo the power foundations on which it rests.

The utopia, or nonplace, that the poststructuralists pursue, therefore, is a nomadic path that functions according to different rules and designs. I will define this sort of post-human utopia as a political hope

for a point of exit from phallogocentrism; it is the basis for nomadic consciousness. Nomadic thinking is the project that consists in expressing and naming different figurations for this kind of decentered subjectivity.

Politically, the nomadic style expresses my doubts about the capacity of high theory to reflect upon the very questions that I see as central: phallogocentrism, ethnocentrism, the positivity of difference. Philosophy—as a discipline of—thought is highly phallogocentric and antinomadic; it maintains a privileged bond to domination, power, and violence and consequently *requires* mechanisms of exclusion and domination as part of its standard practices. Philosophy creates itself through what it excludes as much as through what it asserts. High theory, especially philosophy, posits its values through the exclusion of many—nonmen, nonwhites, nonlearned, etc. The structural necessity of these pejorative figurations of otherness, makes me doubt the theoretical capacity, let alone the moral and political willingness, of theoretical discourse to act in a nonhegemonic, nonexclusionary manner.

Even more specifically, my work on nomadism has made me aware of a sort of structural aporia in conventional theoretical discourse and especially in philosophy. Discourse, in the poststructuralist sense of a process of production of ideas, knowledge, texts, and sciences, is something that theory relates to and rests upon, in order to codify and systematize its diversity into an acceptable scientific norm. The normativity of high theory, however, is also its limitation, because discourse being a complex network of interrelated truth-effects, it exceeds theory's power of codification. Thus philosophy has to "run after" all sorts of new discourses (women, postcolonial subjects, the audiovisual media, other new technologies, and so on) in order to incorporate them and codify them. As Donna Haraway reminds us, high theory is a cannibalistic machine aimed at assimilation of all new and even alien bodies. Fortunately nomads can run faster and endure longer trips than most: thus they cannot be assimilated easily.

Being a nomad, living in transition, does not mean that one cannot or is unwilling to create those necessarily stable and reassuring bases for identity that allow one to function in a community. Rather, nomadic consciousness consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent. The nomad is only passing through; s/he makes those necessarily situated connections that can help her/him to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national, fixed identity. The nomad has no passport—or has too many of them.

The best way to render the image of the nomad in a concrete manner is by translating it into institutional politics. For me, nomadic consciousness lies at the heart of the project of women's studies such as we practice it in Utrecht (see "Women's Studies and the Politics of Difference"). Experience has shown that success in implementing and sustaining institutionalized feminist projects requires a pragmatic mixture of autonomous structures and integrated practices. Not only does the epistemological nomadism that sustains the practice of feminist teaching and research *not* exclude more "sedentary" institutionalized practices, it also makes us better at playing the institutional game, because we are more critically distanced from it.

Thus the course of study that we offer is a fully recognized undergraduate program in the faculty of the humanities, but it is staffed by academics who are attached to an autonomous department of women's studies and depend solely and entirely on the authority of a professorship *in* women's studies. This facilitates all the staff management and related administrative matters. It also encourages an internal spirit of commitment to feminist theory; the sense of legitimacy favors a relaxed and interested approach to faculty members of other departments.

Throughout our graduate programs our approach is trans-disciplinary, in that it consists in being both autonomous in our thinking and integrated into mainstream faculty life. Clearly, this is a very privileged position, made possible by generous state grants.<sup>68</sup> For me, the practice of setting up and running a women's studies department constitutes living evidence of the pragmatic effectiveness of nomadic politics.

This idea of passing through, of cutting across different kinds and levels of identity, is not a way of avoiding the confrontation with the very real ideological and social constraints under which one has to operate. Quite the contrary, nomadic consciousness expresses a way of dealing with these constraints. On this point, I disagree with Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson<sup>69</sup> when they state that the postmodernist emphasis on the contingency of identity and the decline of metanarratives undermines political agency and feminism with it; rather, I see postmodernism and feminism as originating from the same source but following different courses. Both stress the historical decline of the idea that political agency and effective social criticism require steady and substantial foundations as their necessary premise. Postmodern nomadic feminism argues that you do not have to be settled in a substantive vision of the

subject in order to be political, or to make willful choices or critical decisions.

Nomadic feminism goes even one step further and argues that political agency has to do with the capacity to expose the illusion of ontological foundations. As Judith Butler put it, "the task is to interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations authorizes, and what precisely it excludes or forecloses."<sup>70</sup> In a nomadic perspective, the political is a form of intervention that acts simultaneously on the discursive and the material registers of subjectivity; thus it has to do with the ability to draw multiple connections. What is political is precisely this awareness of the fractured, intrinsically power-based constitution of the subject and the active quest for possibilities of resistance to hegemonic formations.

Not only are foundations not required for effective political agency, very often they are also of hindrance to the flights of nomadic consciousness. Just consider that very settled, anchored, sedentary people are amongst the least empathic, the least easily moved, the most self-consciously "apolitical." The French film-maker Agnès Varda shows the indifference of rooted people in her remarkable coverage of teen-age runaways, *Sans toit ni loi*, where French homes are presented as unwelcoming bourgeois fortresses, shutting the roofless girl out. How many of today's homeless people have personally experienced this utter lack of interest, let alone emphatic understanding? By contrast, the nomadic subject functions as a relay team: s/he connects, circulates, moves on; s/he does not form identifications but keeps on coming back at regular intervals. The nomad is a transgressive identity, whose transitory nature is precisely the reason why s/he can make connections at all. Nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections.

I have experienced this in my own existence: it was not until I found some stability and sense of partial belonging, supported by a permanent job and a happy relationship, that I could actually start thinking adequately about nomadism. Which is not to say that the act of thinking about it actually spelled its end as a ruling existential habit of mine, but rather that this notion became visible and consequently expressible only when I was situated enough actually to grasp it. Identity is retrospective; representing it entails that we can draw accurate maps, indeed, but only of where we have already been and consequently no longer are. Nomadic cartographies need to be redrafted constantly; as

such they are structurally opposed to fixity and therefore to rapacious appropriation. The nomad has a sharpened sense of territory but no possessiveness about it.

As Haraway rightly puts it: you must be located somewhere in order to make statements of general value. Nomadism, therefore, is not fluidity without borders but rather an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries. It is the intense desire to go on trespassing, transgressing.

As a figuration of contemporary subjectivity, therefore, the nomad is a postmetaphysical, intensive, multiple entity, functioning in a net of interconnections. S/he cannot be reduced to a linear, teleological form of subjectivity but is rather the site of multiple connections. S/he is embodied, and therefore cultural; as an artifact, s/he is a technological compound of human and post-human; s/he is complex, endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness in the impersonal mode. S/he is a cyborg, but equipped also with an unconscious. She is Irigaray's "mucous," or "divine," but endowed with a multicultural perspective. S/he is abstract and perfectly, operationally real.

One of her/his historical tasks is how to restore a sense of intersubjectivity that would allow for the recognition of differences to create a new kind of bonding, in an inclusive (i.e., nonexclusionary) manner. I think that one of the ways in which feminists could visualize this multi-differentiated and situated perspective, is through the image of multiple literacies, that is, a sort of collective becoming polyglot. Feminists need to become fluent in a variety of styles and disciplinary angles and in many different dialects, jargons, languages, thereby relinquishing the image of sisterhood in the sense of a global similarity of all women *qua* second sex in favor of the recognition of the complexity of the semiotic and material conditions in which women operate.

## Points of Exit

I have been arguing so far that legitimating feminist theory as both critical *and* creative amounts to reinventing a new kind of theoretical style, based on nomadism. In this last section I shall spell out some of the features of this style.

First, transdisciplinarity. This means the crossing of disciplinary boundaries without concern for the vertical distinctions around which they have been organized. Methodologically, this style comes close to the "bricolage" defended by the structuralists and especially Lévi-Strauss; it also constitutes a practice of "theft," or extensive borrowing



of notions and concepts that, as Cixous puts it, are deliberately used out of context and derouted from their initial purpose. Deleuze calls this technique "deterritorialization" or the becoming-nomad of ideas.

A related feature of this style is the mixture of speaking voices or modes: I deliberately try to mix the theoretical with the poetic or lyrical mode. These shifts in my voice are a way of resisting the pull toward cut-and-dried, formal, ugly, academic language. In the philosophical circles in which I was trained, a certain disregard for style is conventionally taken as a sign of "seriousness," or even of "scientificity,"<sup>71</sup> as if writing beautifully were the expression of a "soft," i.e., nonphilosophical, mind. This attitude fills me with both mirth and irritation. Inherent functionalism disappoints me, as it rests on a categorical division of labor between the "logos-intensive" discourses (philosophy) and the "pathos-intensive" (literature), a division I challenge very strongly.<sup>72</sup> That so many women in philosophy still continue to use philosophical language functionally, as a means of "communication," distresses me. I would much rather fictionalize my theories, theorize my fictions, and practice philosophy as a form of conceptual creativity.

Furthermore, this style is attached to the collective project of feminism, which implies the acknowledgment and recognition of the voices of other women. The feminist literary theorist Carolyn Heilbrun has commented on the difficulties encountered in transforming the male academic canon in such a way as to do justice to female literary talents. Heilbrun attributes this not only to male political resistance to the feminist struggle for intellectual recognition but also the fact that most university women have been trained to speak to and in the language of man: the fetishized, false universal mode of Western humanism. The creation of feminist knowledge therefore implies that renewed attention be paid to the expression of a fundamental difference in women's texts: "Women's texts have, for the most part, been woven in secret ways, hard to decipher, dangerous if discovered by the wrong people, or merely misread, misunderstood."<sup>73</sup> According to Heilbrun, it is the task of feminist scholars to voice this difference and to act upon the asymmetrical relationship it creates with the established academic mode.

Another strategy proposed in the same vein is the principle of quotations citations, as Spivak reminds us, following Derrida.<sup>74</sup> Letting others speak in my text is not only a way of inscribing my work in a collective political movement, it is also a way of practicing what I preach. The dissolution of steady identities advocated by the poststructuralist genera-

tion is no mere rhetorical formula for me; the dethroning of the "transcendental narcissism" of the philosophizing "I" is a point of nonreturn. Letting the voices of others echo through my text is therefore a way of actualizing the noncentrality of the "I" to the project of thinking, while attaching it/her to a collective project.

The many voices of women in the text are also a way of emphasizing and celebrating the subtlety and theoretical relevance of women's thought. I want to reclaim all they have offered to the life of the mind, in spite of the belligerent opposition of the established institutions. My style is therefore based on the politics of location;<sup>75</sup> it rests on the attention to differences among women. I see this style as an important step in the process of constituting feminist genealogies as commonly shared discursive and political practices, which are primarily a sort of counter-memory, or a space of resistance.<sup>76</sup>

Part of this project involves the critique of the conventional distinction between "high" theory and "popular culture" (see "On the Female Feminist Subject; Or, From 'She-Self' to She-Other' "). This distinction is particularly effective in Europe, where the stronghold of the disciplines on the process of making knowledge is considerable and cross-disciplinary and iconoclastic fields such as "cultural studies" are not much developed. The attention I pay in several of my texts to low or "popular culture" (see "Ethics Revisited: Women in/and Philosophy" and "Theories of Gender; Or, Language is a Virus") also springs from this healthy disregard for the conventions of high learning. What I long for is some mingling with and integration of popular, feminist ways of thinking into mainstream discourse, but not at the cost of the homologation of the former into the latter.

This also explains the changes in tone and style that characterize the different sections of this book. These variations are very important to this collection, where the more conventional academic pieces alternate with more provocative ones. This game of variations also aims at constructing reading positions outside or beyond the traditional intellectual ones. In this process I hope to be constructing my potential readers as nomadic entities as well.

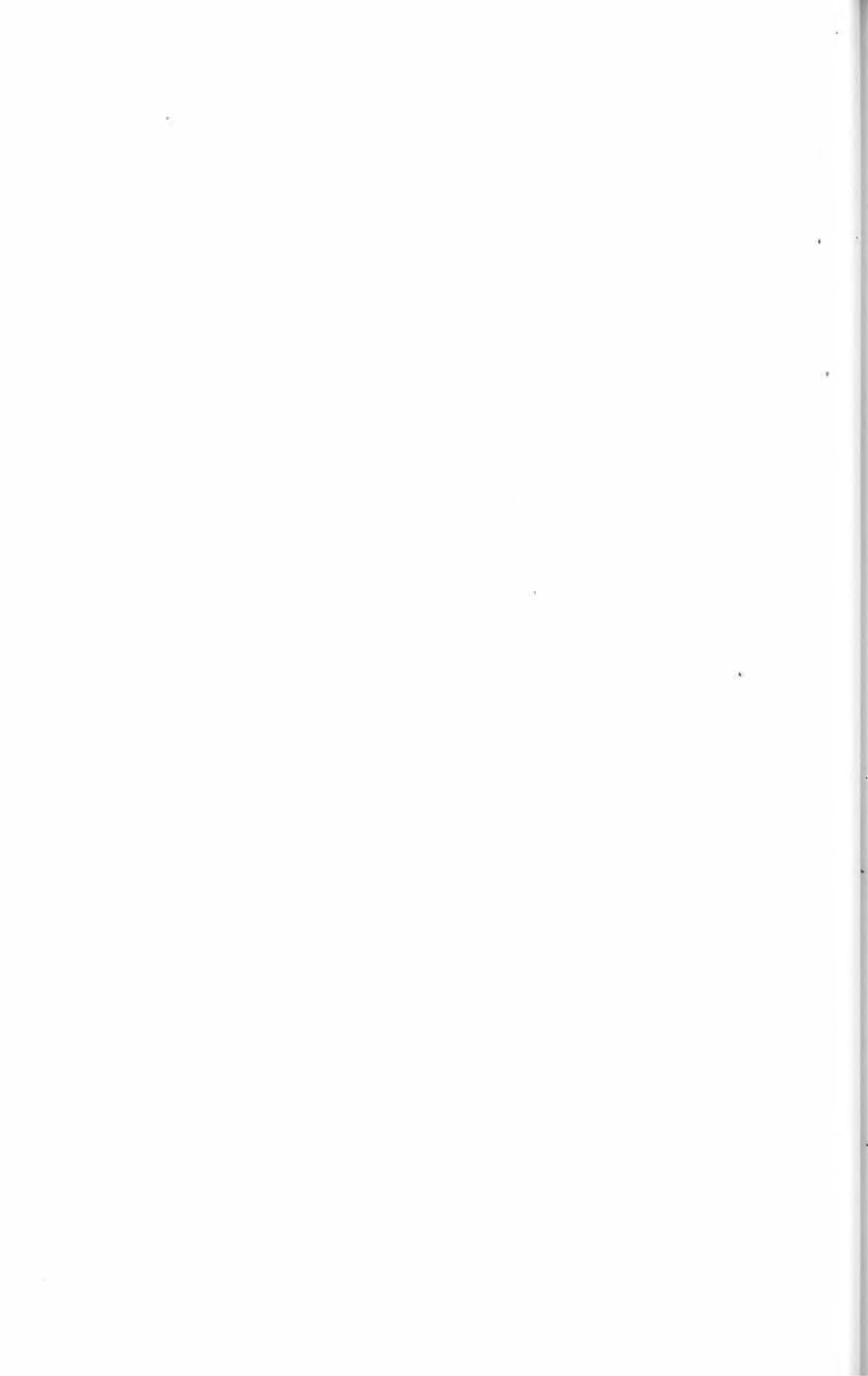
I think that the new figurations of female subjectivity that I explore here can be taken as different maps by which critical readers can identify points of exit from phallogentric schemes of thought. They attempt to work through established forms of representation, consuming them from within. I have referred to this technique as the metabolic con-

sumption of the old in order to engender the new. It is also in this sense that I have defended the practice of "as if," of mimesis as a political and intellectual strategy based on the subversive potential of repetitions.

Metabolic consumption attacks from within the stock of cumulated images and concepts of women as they have been codified by the culture we are in. Women need to re-possess the multilayered structure of their subjectivity as the site or historical sedimentation of meanings and representations that must be worked through. Female feminists need to revisit these multifaceted complexities and make of their consumption the aim—however temporary—for their political project of feminism. Not unlike Walter Benjamin's angel of history, nomadic feminist thinkers already have a foot in the next century, while keeping in sight the very past from which they are struggling to emerge.

Thus the quest for points of exit from phallocentrism continues and the feminist nomadic journey goes on, by necessity. Propelled by a yearning for change that cannot spare even the most familiar and especially the most intimate aspects of their experience, most feminists would have to agree with Kathy Acker's caustic, devastating realization that, to date:

I have my identity and I have my sex: I am not new yet.<sup>77</sup>



## Organs Without Bodies

Decoding the psychopathology of this *fin de siècle* may well be one of the most urgent tasks of the critical intellectual in general and of the feminist one in particular. In Foucault's inception of the term, I see the intellectual as a technician of practical knowledge: an analyst of the complex and ever-shifting ways in which the technologies of control of the embodied self—the corpo-r(e)ality of the subject—intersect with the macro-instances that govern the production of discourses socially recognized as "true" and scientifically "valid."

Starting from the assumption that the privilege granted to the discourse of sexuality and reproduction as the site of production of truth about the subject is the trademark of modernity, I will try to track down some of the forms taken by this discourse today. My aim is to bring forth questions that seem to me urgent for feminist theory and practice. More specifically, I would like to ask: what is the most suitable speaking stance, or place of enunciation, for a feminist critical intellectual faced with the discourse of biopower, that is to say the government of the two related dimensions of sex-and-death and sex-and-life?

How should this whole problematic field be assessed by those who are committed to taking seriously—that is, politically—the dimension of sexual difference? How can the affirmation of the positivity of difference be combined with the critical analysis of the dominant form of discourse and sexuality? How can the critical or reactive function of feminist theory be reconciled with its affirmative or active pull?<sup>1</sup> The key problem area I wish to address is that of the new reproductive technologies as they stand in relation to the AIDS epidemic and the social panic that has marked its appearance. I shall not analyze the technical aspects of these issues but rather try to situate them strategically within

the same discursive constellation. This problem area is a powerful indicator of the contemporary will-to-know; it sets out the lines of questioning and therefore the normative directives that focus on the body (the embodied subject) as their target. The discourse on the new reproductive technologies manifests not only the order of scientific discourse currently at work in our society but also the cultural imaginary that supports it. The task of decoding the scientific and cultural imaginary calls for a multidisciplinary approach to feminist theory, which results in a new style of thought.<sup>2</sup>

Let us take as our starting point Foucault's analysis of the political economy of truth about sexuality in our culture.<sup>3</sup> The distinction between technologies of reproductive power—*scientia sexualis*—and the practices of pleasure of the self—*ars erotica*—thus becomes capital. In the light of this discussion it could be argued then that modern anti-contraceptive technology has made it scientifically and culturally viable to raise this hiatus between reproduction and sexuality to the status of a contradiction, that is, of an active paradox.

With the anticontraceptive pill we could have sex without babies; with the new reproductive technologies we can have babies without sex. This situation would be disconcerting enough without an added factor, namely that exactly at the same point in time that it has arisen, the AIDS epidemics has been manipulated by socially conservative forces and marketed so as to carry a clear and simple message: "Sex kills." The major biotechnological changes we are undergoing are therefore feeding into the most reactionary ideological option possible. I could sum it up, ironically, as follows: "Isn't it lucky that now we can reproduce outside sexuality, given that non-reproductive-oriented sex kills!!"

It is quite amazing how patriarchal conservatism always manages to recreate the optimal conditions for its own survival by reasserting the priority of reproductive (non)sex over *jouissance* while submitting it to the imperatives of advanced capitalist societies—precisely at the time in history when feminist forces are at work in society to redefine sexuality differently. Let us look more closely at the network of issues at play on this intricate chess board.

### "My Organ, My Pro-thesis, My Self"

The radically new fact about the nineties is the biotechnologies, that is to say the degree of autonomy, mastery, and sophistication reached by

technological devices that take "life" and "the living organisms" as object.

The biotechnological gaze has penetrated into the very intimate structure of living matter, seeing the invisible, restructuring that which has no shape yet, freezing time out of the picture. One of the questions here is: does this quantitative change, this increase in the degree and efficiency of the techniques also involve a qualitative change? Are we faced with a "scientific revolution" in the Khunian sense of a change of paradigm?

In attempting to answer this question, let us look more closely at the context in which biotechnologies have developed. It is one in which "bios"—the notion of "life"—has burst open to cover an immense variety of living organisms. Although sexuality and reproduction are the privileged targets of "biopower," its range of implementation is further-reaching. Our age as a whole<sup>4</sup> is characterized by the calculating and rational management of *all* living matter. The boundaries between us and that which is suitable for us to know and master are shifting rapidly; the capitalization and exploration of outer space (zero-gravity manufacturing, especially important for the chemical industry) and of the ocean beds (forming the metals contained in the so-called "nodules") are well on their way. They are also the prelude to their inevitable militarization: the "star-wars" syndrome on the one hand, the imperceptible buzz of nuclear submarines on the other, while flying laboratories direct "intelligent" bombs into the ventilation shafts of civilian buildings in third-world capital cities. Multifunctional lidless eyes watching, outside-in and inside-out; our technology has produced the vision of microscopic giants and intergalactic midgets, freezing time out of the picture, contracting space to a spasm.

As Frederic Jameson rightly puts it,<sup>5</sup> one of the defining features of the postmodern condition is the dislocation of spatio-temporal continuity. The French philosopher of difference, Gilles Deleuze,<sup>6</sup> also defines the postmodern state in terms of schizophrenic time sequences.

Furthermore, need we be reminded that, when it comes to technology, life and death are inextricably connected? That the human technological subject is an eminent warmonger? That Da Vinci worked for the war industry of his time and so have all self-respecting scientists?

By extension we need to consider that the tool, the weapon, and the artifact were forged simultaneously by the human hand. In this respect *homo sapiens* was never more than a crafty *homo faber*. No one can tell

how long ago the human hand picked up the first stone and shaped it so as to multiply its strength, so as to strike better. This elementary principle of prosthesis and prosthetic projection animates the whole technological universe.

In the perspective of French poststructuralism, the human organic mass, the body, is the first manufacturer of technology in that it seeks for organic extension of itself first through tools, weapons, and artifacts,<sup>7</sup> then through language,<sup>8</sup> the ultimate prosthesis.

In this theoretical framework—which seems to me to characterize the French epistemological school from Bachelard and Canguilhem, down to Foucault—technology is not a priori opposed to and inimical of humanity. It is rather that a primitive sort of anthropomorphism pervades the technical universe; all tools are therefore products of the creative human imagination, copying and multiplying the potencies of the body. Technology fulfills the human's biological destiny in such an intimate way that the organic and the technical complement and become adapted to each other. This mutual receptivity of the organ to its technical extension, of biology to technology is, for both Canguilhem and Foucault, the reason why the dualistic and oppositional distinction of nature-culture is dropped in favor of the discourse on biopower: the political reflection on the subject as an embodied organism, a bio-cultural entity *par excellence*.

It seems to follow from these premises that what we are going through in the postmodern technological scene, is not a "scientific" revolution but rather an ideological one, a fundamental change in our modes of representation of life. There is clearly a shift in the scale of the techniques involved in contemporary biopower, but not in the scientific logic that sustains them. The real "break" occurs at the level of the economy of representation that is being deployed to give cultural, legal, moral, and emotional shape to the advent of biopower.

## Which Body?

Foucault argues that, since the eighteenth century,<sup>9</sup> the bodily material has been situated at the heart of the techniques of control and analysis aimed at conceptualizing the subject. The term *bodily material* refers to the body as a supplier of forces, energies, whose materiality lends them to being used, manipulated, and socially constructed. Foucault argues that the body needs to be disciplined so as to be made docile, productive, and reproductive. He analyzes institutions such as the hospital, the



mental asylum, the prison, and the factory as structures that aim at harnessing and exploiting the body as a raw material, destined to be socialized into purposeful productivity. Because of this structure of power and knowledge, the discursive prominence granted to the body is for Foucault co-extensive with the discourse of modernity. Particularly since the end of the last century, the emphasis on the body from a variety of concrete, scientific discourses expresses for Foucault the decline of the conventional and somewhat more reassuring dualism, mind/body, which for centuries had legitimated the view of the scientific subject as coinciding with reason. This questioning of the rationalist paradigm became also known as "the death of the subject."

The classical vision of the subject of knowledge had, in fact, fixed the subject in a series of dualistic oppositions: body/mind; passion/reason; nature/culture; feminine/masculine, and so on, which were organized hierarchically and provided the basic structure for the organization of knowledge.

The proliferation of discourses about the body consequently marks also the crisis of the rationalist vision that rested on dualistic thinking and thus confined the body to naturalism.

Disengaged from its classical subordination to dualistic, hierarchical thinking, the "embodied subject" in his/her "intelligent materiality" lays bare the metaphysical foundations on which classical notions of subjectivity rested. For Foucault, this shift corresponds to a changing of the guard in the palace of high theory. Philosophy, which had historically been the guardian of rational subjectivity, steps down in favor of a whole range of postmetaphysical discourses: the human and social sciences. A set of interrelated questions about the embodiment of the subject, and about the facticity of the body, emerges as a new epistemological field. The "body" thus turns into the object of a proliferation of discourses; they are forms of knowledge, modes of normativity and normalization that invest the political and scientific fields simultaneously. Therefore the proliferation of discourses about life, the living organism, and the embodied subject is co-extensive with the dislocation of the classical basis of representation of the human subject.

In the discursive spaces thus rearranged around knowledge and power over the body, a new alliance comes into being—on the ruins of the old metaphysical edifice—between the "soft" or "human" sciences on the one hand and the "hard" or "exact" sciences on the other. Being an effect of the crisis of metaphysics, the human and social sciences will

not be totally cleansed from some of their old mental habits—such as the transcendental narcissism of the subject and other forms of nostalgia for its lost totality. They will be able, however, to innovate by introducing new types of discourse, which are structurally and genealogically connected to the crisis of modernity in that they place the fragmented, split, complex nature of the subject at the heart of their concerns. Of special significance among them: psychoanalysis, ethnology, and the biosciences.

Modernity, according to Foucault, opens up in this double shift in the position of the subject: on the one hand a move away from the metaphysical unity, which was postulated on a careful balance of dualistic oppositions. On the other hand a shift toward a multiplicity of discourses that take the embodied subject as their target.

This analysis of the double structure in the discourse about the embodied subject in modernity has serious implications. Not only is this subject not one but also there is no consensus among the human and social sciences as to what exactly its bodily structure is. Between the discourses of the biosciences, of psychoanalysis, and of the law—to name only three—important divergences exist as to what exactly is the “body.”

The heart discursive of the bodily matter is dead, empty. That so much could have been written about human sexuality since the end of the last century, for instance, is symptomatic of the discursive structure of modernity—one for which the issue of the living body is genealogically simultaneous with the loss of one unified vision of the bodily subject. The issue of the body is consequently both unavoidable and unsolvable. In other words, that modernity should be the age of production of discourses and modes of capitalization of the organic human being is another way of saying that no consensus exists as to *what* the embodied subject actually is.

This paradoxical mixture of simultaneous, discursive, over-exposure and absence of consensus is reflected perfectly in the postmodernist discourse about the “feminine” or “the woman question.”<sup>10</sup>

As I have argued,<sup>11</sup> the crisis of the rational subject of “phallogocentric discourse” is clearly related to the emergence of the theoretical and political revindications of women—that is to say to the historical revival of the women’s movement. In a strategy of affirmation of difference meant as positive alterity, and as the rejection of hierarchical differences, of the hegemonic power of reason, feminist activists and theorists

turned a situation of crisis into the possibility of creation of new values, new critical paradigms. In so doing women were not only widening the crisis of the logocentric subject, they were doing so on the basis of gender analysis; that is, they *sexualized* the discourse of the crisis.

In a complex reversal, the "feminine," which traditionally was the dark continent of discourse, emerged as the privileged symptom and sign of and, in some cases, even as the solution to the crisis of the subject. The postmodern discursive inflation about the "feminine" as the necessary other of phallogocentrism fails to raise the question that is crucial to feminist practice, namely: "what does this have to do with real-life women?" Just like the body, the "feminine" is re-presented as a symbolic absence. It may signify a set of interrelated issues, but per se, it is not one notion, not one corpus. There is "no-body" there.

## The Body as Visual Surface

I have suggested the formulation "organs without bodies" to refer to this complex strategic field of practices connected to the discursive and normative construction of the subject in modernity. For instance, the whole discourse of the biosciences takes the organism as its object, and it therefore takes the body as a mosaic of detachable pieces. In turn, the primacy granted to the discourse of biopower in modernity turns the bioscientist into the very prototype of the instrumental intellectual. In the practice of the "techno-docs" the visibility, and intelligibility of the "living body" are the prelude to its manipulation as an available supply of living material. As Haraway points out, in the age of biopower the embodied subject is "cannibalized" by the practices of scientific techno-apparati.<sup>12</sup>

The biotechnician, as the prototype of high-tech power, represents the modern knowing subject: "man-white-Western-male-adult-reasonable-heterosexual-living-in-towns-speaking a standard language."<sup>13</sup>

Under his imperious gaze the living organisms, reduced to an infinitely small scale, lose all reference to the human shape and to the specific temporality of the human being. All reference to death disappears in the discourse about "biopower"—power over life. What seems to me at stake in the biopower situation is the progressive freezing-out of time, that is to say ultimately of death.<sup>14</sup> The living material that comes under the scrutiny of the medical gaze is beyond death and time—it's "living" in the most abstract possible way.

The process of freezing-out of time is very clearly visible in the case of artificial procreation. For instance, in the new reproduction technology the reproductive process as a whole is broken down into a set of discontinuous steps. On the one hand freezing the sperm, the ova, and the embryo suspends the reproductive time indefinitely; on the other hand *in vitro* fertilization introduces a new kind of break: hormonal pretreatment / farming the eggs / *in vitro* fertilization / cellular division *in vitro* / transferal of the embryo into the uterus.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, the new forms of procreation that are socially rather than technologically innovative, such as surrogate motherhood,<sup>16</sup> blow the procreative continuum into a series of different degrees of "mothering": the ovular, the uterine, and the social.

Time, in all these procedures, is profoundly dislocated. The discursive status of the body as organic mass, or organ-ism, makes it liable to technological manipulations that displace the boundaries of natality and mortality.

This complex set of biotechnological practices awakens a great ambivalence in me: on the one hand, there is genuine concern—and even a pinch of fear about the extent of biomedical power. The suspicion does arise that the loss of bodily unity may engender the fantasy of total, that is timeless mastery over living matter. Let me develop this anxiety-prone aspect first.

Swapping the totality for the parts that compose it, ignoring the fact that each part contains the whole, the era of "bodies without organs" is primarily the era that has pushed time out of the bodily picture: biopower has more to do with the denial of death, than with the mastery of life.

In Foucault's perspective<sup>17</sup> the freezing of time is also linked to the nuclear situation. The possibility of atomic overkill has transformed even our sense of death, replacing it with the previously unthinkable notion of extinction. The nuclear situation, therefore, has destroyed more than the Enlightenment belief in a teleologically ordained future, based on the progress of mankind through scientific reason; it has short circuited the future altogether. In this respect, the atom bomb does mark the death of time.

The freezing of time however, is also reflected socially in the field of everyday perception and of spatio-temporal logistics. In this respect, contemporary culture is marked by constant emphasis on visual representation; it can be seen as the triumph of the image or, alternatively, as the historical decline of the Gutenberg Galaxy.<sup>18</sup> Contemporary culture

lives in a constant state of overexposure: fax, photocopier, minicam, satellite dish, PC, electronic mail screen, and other telecommunication developments have created a world where not only elections are won on television and visibility is an imperative.

Visualization is a way of fixing (in) time. Let us take, as an example, the technique of echography—which allows us to externalize and see on a screen the inside of the womb and its fetal content. Offering “everything” for show, representing even the irrepresentable—the “origin”—means finding images that replace and dis-place the boundaries of space (inside/outside the mother’s body) and of time (before/after birth).

The triumph of the visual representation of the maternal site, “the work of life in the age of its mechanical reproduction,” opens a new chapter in the long and intense history of women’s relation to the biological sciences. I do not mean to suggest, of course, that this emphasis on the visual is new.

Several feminist philosophers<sup>19</sup> have emphasized the primacy of looking, that is, the scopic drive as the paradigm of knowledge. They have also pointed out that scientific discourse has always—that is to say since Plato—privileged the image of “the eye” as metaphor for “the mind,” that is, “I see” as a synonym of “I know.” Psychoanalytic critics of scientific rationality have also emphasized how the persistence of “the gaze” as the classifying principle is connected to fundamental sadistic impulses<sup>20</sup> directed toward/against the mother’s body. “Looking” where there is “nothing to see”; as if the site of origin, as if one’s “history” was written up in capital letters in the site one has elected as the fantasmatic theater of one’s own “origin”: the inside of the uterus; as if on the scene of desire there was *something* to see.

In the biotechnological universe, the scopic drive is reaching a paroxysm; as if the basic principle of visibility had shifted into a mirage of absolute transparency, as if *everything* could be seen. As if the scopic, that is, the mental act of acquisition of ideas were indeed the most adequate way of re-presenting the act of knowledge.

The visual-scopic drive implicit in all representation is thus brought out with particular intensity in the field of biopower. One of the trends in contemporary French postmodernist thought has developed this point into a full theory of signification.<sup>21</sup> Stating that the ruthless and fundamentally mercenary logic of representation has the priority over that which is represented, it marks the triumph of the image, the repre-

sented object, of the visible in so far as it becomes visual—that is, an object of scopic consumption. Hyper-realistically over-represented, this object remains profoundly absent (like “the body,” “the woman,” “the feminine,” and so on).

The bodily surface, and the complex montage of organs that composes it, is thus reduced to pure surface, exteriority without depth, a movable theater of the self. One can find confirmation of the new economy of visual surfaces by looking at the images of the body conveyed by the dominant forms of fashion today: clothes, hairstyles, presentation of self in everyday life. The emphasis placed on accessories (the “telling” details); on “design” or “look” (the sculpted hair-style, etc.); as well as the powerful push toward androgynous, unisexed bodies, reveals the shifts that have occurred in the contemporary imaginary. I would sum them up saying that not only is sexual difference systematically “blurred,” but that, with it, generational time is also arrested; “age” disappears into broader and less defined categories: the “third age,” as opposed to the “teen” age. The same blurring occurs in spatial terms; take the contemporary relationship to food, for instance. The fast-food inhabitants of the modern metropolis have collapsed time in anticipating dreams of artificial nutrition: frozen food, precooked food, mashed-up food. No time for cooking; acceleration, but also contraction of the spatio-temporal coordinates.

Pill-popping becomes a cultural imperative, as if the shrinking stomachs of the collectively anorexic city-dwellers—variations on the theme of the bachelor machines—<sup>22</sup> ignored everything to do with hunger, despite the increasing visibility of poverty all around them.<sup>23</sup> Pill-popping, better to evacuate the body, to simplify the bodily functions. The new RU486—the abortion pill—replaced the dramatic gesture of the surgical intervention by a perfectly trivial one: the body is not, or, at least, it is not one.

Not even modern warfare really takes the body seriously, that is, politically as a variable;<sup>24</sup> military geopolitical considerations are no longer a question of death but of extermination, not of individuals but of masses, not of killing<sup>25</sup> but of allowing some to stay alive. The recent, dramatic coverage of the Desert Storm operation against Iraq has highlighted a great many of the points that concern me here: the primacy of visualization techniques; the occultation of the physical body from the field of political and especially of military action; the utter disregard for individual, non-Western casualties. Life is an “added” factor, that

needs to be kept in mind . . . death is that from whence one speaks of power and/in the body.

## Ex-Sex

It is clearly in the field of sexuality and reproduction, however, that the more spectacular changes have taken place on the status of "the organs without bodies" and their relationship to life and death. In the heyday of Lacanian psychoanalysis sexual relations may have been described as improbable or unlikely; today, they are uncomfortable, to say the least: sex is not at all a safe or celebrated value in the post-yuppie days of the early nineties.

Chastity is back into fashion<sup>26</sup>—"Make love, not war" has turned around considerably as a cultural imperative. Sexuality, in its genital form, has again become dangerous as it had not been since the days before contraception became effective. The contemporary decrease of interest in sex, due to the post-60s fatigue with experimentation, the fear of the AIDS epidemic, and a general work overload, goes hand in hand with an obsession with propriety, hygiene, good health. Fear of disease escorts the fetishization of the body beautiful.

Is it small wonder that precisely at this point in time the whole question of reproduction moves into the spotless purity of the techno-docs labs? That the business of making artificial babies under the careful gaze of the biotechnicians becomes big business? Trade-marks and patents to guarantee the quality of the product?

Loose genitality may be out, but only to let willful reproduction in. Making babies is a major concern for an aging, postindustrial Western world where most women seem to have opted for Zero Population Growth. The massive midlife crisis our world is going through gets translated into the fear of perishing. The demographic crisis feeds into Western xenophobia, pushing the manufacturing of babies to unprecedented levels of industrial output,<sup>27</sup> the "human capital" being a major priority.

These imperatives are transnational; they characterize the whole range of white, developed countries. Based on the principles of off-shore production, which have proved so effective in constructing the postindustrial context,<sup>28</sup> biotechnological power cuts across national boundaries: it does not hesitate to implant clinics, plants, or assembly lines anywhere in the world. As it happens, the fresh supply of living cells and organs relies on the developing countries: frozen fetuses from

Korea or India; kidneys from Brazil; corneas from Colombia, etc. etc.. The racism and blatant ethnocentrism of these practices is overwhelming.

As black feminist theorists have pointed out, especially Spivak and Mohanty, the postmodern system of transnational economy, with its decentered and tentacular mode of economic exploitation is absolutely no guarantee that Western ethnocentrism is over. When read from the framework of female corporeal materialism that I am defending here, the postmodernist dissolution of identity and alleged decentering of hegemonic formations displays an amazing capacity to reabsorb and recycle the peripheral others into a newly undifferentiated economy. The same pattern that I have noted in relation to the feminine shows up also in marginal, subaltern ethnic or migrant groups. As David Slater puts it:

[I]n a certain way the postmodernist has taken the old negative myths of marginality and turned them on their heads, endowing them with a subversive and positive sense. Sometimes, however, this can divert analytical attention away from the different contexts in which subaltern groups are forced to survive, to become, for instance, "squatter-wise," in conditions of increasing social polarization, political instability and material deprivation.<sup>29</sup>

I think more detailed, politically motivated accounts are needed of the new forms of economic and social exploitation that the transnational economy of today has made possible and of how it affects the living conditions of minority groups, including women of different locations. The overcoming of national boundaries in the new transnational economy also spells the end of the power of the law as the expression of the will of a nation-state. The whole phenomenon of biopower escapes state control and, more often than not, falls into a legal vacuum. The biopower world is marked not by the sovereignty of the law but by prohibitions, rules, and regulations that bypass, overflow, and disregard what used to be the law. The bodily matter is directly and immediately caught in a field of power effects and mechanisms for whom legislation, when not archaic, is simply redundant.

Beyond good and evil, the commerce of living bodies eludes the control of the very world that engendered it.

"Organs without bodies" marks a planetary transaction of living matter carefully invested to keep the species alive and healthy and white. In a perverse twist, the loss of unity of the "subject" results in the human



being lending its organic components to many a prostitudinal swap: the part for the whole. "Organs without bodies" marks the transplant of and experimentation with organs in a cynical, postindustrialist simulacrum of "the gift."<sup>30</sup>

## All Organs Are Equal, But Some . . .

The perverse turn taken by the situation I describe as "organs without bodies" promotes a very dangerous idea: the inter-changeability of the organs.

According to the instrumental logic of biopower, provided that the continuity of a vital function is guaranteed and that basic compatibility is assured between the organ and the host organism, all organs are equal in helping achieving the aim. Thus, in the New Reproductive Technology, the uterus of one woman is worth that of the other, of any other. A uterus is a uterus is a uterus is . . . In that case: why not have a mother carry the babies that her daughter managed to conceive? And by extension, hole for hole, why not think that the abdomen of the one, the other, may well be worth the uterus of the other, the one? Male pregnancies. Female mother-machines.

Without falling into the oppositional logic that condemns *en bloc* the whole of technology, I think it nevertheless important to stress that something, in the present-day government of sex/life/death, of biopower, is going down a perverse road. We seem to have slipped from the loss of the naturalistic paradigm, which is in itself a welcome relief from earlier metaphysical dualism, into the ever-receding fragmentation and exploitative traffic in organic parts.

This shift of ground allows for all sorts of false assimilations: it denies time, the time of generational difference, "my uterus/my mother's uterus," thus creating a false symmetry among women and helping to cover up the racism of such practices. It also institutionalizes hierarchical race relations among women, who are called to play different roles in the reproductive technology industry, depending largely on their ethnic identity.

It also leads to false spatial symmetries, between men and women: abdomen = uterus; sperm-donor = ovum/uterus-donor. As if the two sexes were perfectly comparable; as if sexual difference did not mean that the sexes are asymmetrical.

From the interchangeability of organs, to the symmetry—and therefore the complementarity—of the sexes, we witness the rehabilitation of one of patriarchy's most persistent fantasies. The fantasy of sexual symmetry is very powerful in the cultural imaginary of this end of century,

where the image of the androgynous, sexless, angelic, unisexed body triumphs.

Popular culture is marketing perfectly manicured "gender-benders" of the quality of Michael Jackson (Diana Ross revisited), Boy George (the eternal feminine reconquered), and endless variations on Tootsie.<sup>31</sup> Outside sex, or beyond it, or before it, this is still a technique that aims at deferring time. The fantasy of being "beyond sex," that is to say outside time, is one of the most pernicious illusions of our era. Blurring sexual difference, desexualizing masculinity precisely at the historical moment when the feminism of sexual difference is calling for the sexualization of practices<sup>32</sup> seems to me an extraordinarily dangerous move for women.

As far as the project of feminism goes, this fantasy can lead to the homologation of women into a masculine model. The alleged "overcoming" of sexual difference<sup>33</sup> results in the circuiting the affirmation of the positivity of difference on the part of women. In a cultural order that, for centuries, has been governed by the male homosocial bond, the elimination of sexual difference can only be a one-way street toward the appropriation, elimination, or homologation of the feminine in/of women; it is a toy for the boys.

The fundamental lack of symmetry between the sexes needs therefore to be reasserted as the basis for a postmodern ethics that would take into account the "organs without bodies" as the basic element in our own historicity, while rejecting its perverse edge. For feminist practice, the question then becomes: what values do we posit, starting from this position? What is the ethics of sexual difference?<sup>34</sup> How can one judge as "perverse" the myth of the interchangeability of organs, without referring to a naturalistic paradigm?

How can a feminist defend the specificity of sexuality as a register of speech, while submitting it to critical analysis? How can we ostracize the last remaining vestiges of "the sacred" in trying to deal agnostically, lucidly, with the issue of the *totality* of the living organism meant by "organs without bodies"? Is materialism possible as a conceptual option, positing both the materiality of the body and its indivisible unity?

On the other hand, concerns over the discontinuity, overvisualization, and speedy consumption of the body in the age of biotechnology are only one side of the story. I certainly do not intend to infer from it any kind of nostalgia for a unified vision of the body, which would

threaten women with other, more familiar dangers. I would rather like to rest on this analysis of the embodied subject in order to argue for forms of representation of his/her multiplicity, discontinuity, and highly technologized complexity, which would empower alternative forms of feminist epistemological and political agency. I shall return to this issue in several of the essays contained in this volume.

Furthermore, in so far as fragmentation and disqualification from the position of subject are part of the historical heritage of women—how far and how fast can feminist theory propose a new form of bodily materiality, a sexual-specific reading of the totality of the bodily self?

I fear in fact that the dislocation of sexual differences, the new hiatus between reproduction and sexuality and the biotechnical appropriation of procreation, occurs precisely at the time in history when women have explicitly revindicated political control over their body and their sexuality.

The historical time lag of the oppressed is at work, once again; unless it is carefully monitored by political action, the biopower situation could mean that women run the risk of evolving backwards from the compulsory heterosexuality imposed by the male homosocial bond to high-tech reproductive technology. From the neolithic age to the postindustrial era, skipping the most important stage: the process of historical becoming subject by women. We would then short-circuit the most significant phase—that which aims at making sexual difference operational by bringing about a women-identified re-definition of female subjectivity, of motherhood, and of sexuality.

Stuck between the archaic material power and the postmodern mother-machine, between the mystical-hysterical body and the test tube, we run the risk of losing our most precious ally: time. The time of process, of working through, of expressing transformations of the self and other and having them implemented socially. This is the time of women's own becoming. It can be taken away before it could ever be actualized; it could be short-circuited, aborted.

The biotechnological intervention is providing a re-definition of the maternal, of sexual difference before women have had the opportunity to reformulate this complex question themselves—there's always someone who is faster than we are in telling us what it is that we were looking for . . .

This massive freezing out of time, however, leaves many questions unanswered: first and foremost among them, the urgency to reformulate

the unity of the human being—without moralism or nostalgia. If the minimal feminist position consists in bringing the asymmetry between the sexes to the forefront of the debate on the postmodern condition, the question remains: how far can we push the sexualization of the debate while remaining in tune with modernity's insight about the fundamental failure of identity? How can we affirm the positivity of female difference while resisting the reduction of subjectivity to consciousness, of self to willful rationality?

How can we re-think the bodily roots of subjectivity—after Nietzsche and after Adrienne Rich? Which body are we putting back into the picture? Intensive body, desiring body, sexually differentiated body, "organs without bodies" body, for whom anatomy is no longer a destiny? And yet this living sexed organism has a unity of its own, which hangs on a thread: the thread of desire in its inextricable relation to language and therefore to others.

Nothing but a thread with which to separate the possibility of a new ethics from the neobarbarism—but it's better than nothing. If spun correctly, it may well be one of the best chances women have had to act upon the course of a history that, far too often, has reduced us to the role of mere spectators in the theater of our own destitution.

# Body Images and the Pornography of Representation

An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties.

—Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

In this chapter I would like to try and situate some of the issues involved in the medicalization of the female reproductive body within the area of contemporary feminist theories of subjectivity. This problem area refers to the project of enacting and theorizing an alternative female subjectivity and of finding adequate forms of representation for it.

To situate this issue within the debate on the structures of the contemporary philosophical “subject”, I will be using Michel Foucault’s idea of embodiment, or of bodily materiality: the materialism of the flesh. This notion defines the embodied subject as the material, concrete effect, that is to say, as one of the terms in a process of which knowledge and power are the main poles. The idea of constant, continuous, and all-pervading normativity—which Foucault opposes to the notion of the violence of/as ideology—is alternatively defined as the microphysics of power, biopower, or as the technology of the self.

In trying to evaluate the position of the body in such a framework, Foucault<sup>1</sup> distinguishes between two lines of discourse I have mentioned in the previous chapter: the anatomo-metaphysical, which has to do with explanation, and the technopolitical, which has to do with control and manipulation. The two intersect constantly, but Foucault argues that they acquire different prominence at different points in time.

In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*,<sup>2</sup> Foucault analyzes the organization of sexuality in our postmetaphysical or postmodern world according to this double axis: on the one hand, we can make a distinction or a category called the techniques of medicalization of the reproductive body (*scientia sexualis*), and on the other, a category called the arts of existence or practices of the self (*ars erotica*). Modernity as a whole, argues Foucault, marks the triumph of the medicalization process, or rather of the simultaneous sexualization and medicalization of the body, in a new configuration of power that he describes as "biopower"—the power of normativity over the living organism.)

It can be argued, of course, that the management of living matter has always been a priority for our culture, and that what is new now is the degree of mastery that biotechnology has acquired over life: "What we could call the threshold of the biological modernity of a society can be situated at the moment when the species becomes one of the things at stake in political strategies. For centuries, man has been what he was for Aristotle: a living animal who was also capable of political existence; modern man is an animal in whose politics his own life as a living being is in question."<sup>3</sup>

The division of the human being into a mind-body dualism, of which the thinking of Descartes is the major example, is one of the founding gestures of the modern rational order. The classical rationalism of the Cartesian framework is extensively analyzed by Foucault as the background to the crisis of modernity. In Foucault's analysis, what marks the project of modernity is the critique of the dualistic scheme of thought and the revaluation of the bodily pole of the opposition. In many respects, the age of modernity is anti-Cartesian in that it marks the emergence of the material bodily self at the center of our theoretical attention:

No doubt, on the level of appearances, modernity begins when the human being begins to exist within his organism, inside the shell of his head, inside the armature of his limbs, and in the whole structure of his physiology; when he begins to exist at the center of a labor by whose principles he is governed and whose product eludes him; when he lodges his thought in the folds of a language so much older than himself that he cannot master its significations, even though they have been called back to life by the insistence of his words.<sup>4</sup>

Foucault emphasizes the fact that since the Enlightenment the embodied subject has been located at the center of the techniques of rational

control and productive domination that mark the order of discourse in modernity. As a consequence of the crisis of metaphysics, and the related decline in the Enlightenment, in the sense of the belief in reason as the motor of historical progress, however, a set of interrelated questions about the embodiment of the subject has become not only possible but also necessary. The body as mark of the embodied nature of the subject thus becomes the site of proliferating discourses and forms of knowledge, and of normativity: economy, biology, demography, family sociology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and so on, can all be seen as discourses about the body.

As a matter of fact, following the Foucauldian reading, a new division of labor seems to have emerged between the sciences of life—the biodiscourses—and the human or social sciences. The former concentrate on the anatomico-metaphysical analysis of how the embodied subject functions; their aim is to explain and analyze. The latter pertain to the technopolitical in that they elaborate a discourse about the nature of the human. In other words, the human sciences are intrinsically connected to normativity and control, in so far as they by definition take into account the question of the structure of the subject. In this respect they are necessarily connected to the question of an ethics or a politics, which is not necessarily the case for the hard, or for the biomedical sciences.

This division of labor corresponds to the splitting of the bodily entity according to the two-fold scheme Foucault proposes: on the one hand the body is simply another object of knowledge, an empirical object among others: an organ-ism, the sum of its organic parts, an assembly of detachable organs. This is the body that clinical anatomy studies, measures, and describes. On the other hand, no body can be reduced to the sum of its organic components: the body still remains the site of transcendence of the subject, and as such it is the condition of possibility for all knowledge.

A major role is played, within the landscape of modernity, by the discourse of psychoanalysis. Far from being a mere therapy, psychoanalysis has developed into a philosophy of desire and a theory of the body as libidinal surface, a site of multiple coding, of inscription—a living text. Although Foucault's theoretical relationship to psychoanalysis, and especially to Lacan,<sup>5</sup> is far from simple, I take it as a fact that Foucauldian epistemology acknowledges the corporeal roots of subjectivity and the noncoincidence of the subject with his/her consciousness.

There is, however, a paradox in this analysis of the embodied nature of the modern subject, which is rich in implications for feminists. The body emerges at the center of the theoretical and political debate at exactly the time in history when there is no more single-minded certainty or consensus about what the body actually is. Given the loss of the naturalist paradigm and of Cartesian certainty about the dichotomy mind/body, one can no longer take for granted what the body is. The absence of certainty generates a multiplicity of different discourses about it. Modernity is therefore the age of the inflationary overexposure and yet absence of consensus as to the embodied, material nature of the subject. The body has turned into many, multiple bodies.

Foucault defines modernity also as the age of biopower, that is to say of total control and manipulation over the living matter. Considering the proliferation of discourses about the body, however, one can conclude that the age of biopower is also, paradoxically, the age in which the notion of *bios* (as opposed to *zoe*) has exploded into a variety of life forms, losing all cohesion. In other words, because this kind of power has no definite object, it becomes all-pervasive and all-intrusive: the age of biopower is the age of constant normativity.

In this framework of simultaneous overexposure and disappearance of the body, the case of reproductive technologies is a very significant one, in that it both highlights and exacerbates the paradoxes of the modern condition. With the reproductive technologies, as I argued in the previous chapter, the split between reproduction, or *scientia sexualis*, and sexuality, or *ars erotica* becomes institutionalized and officially enacted.

Foucault develops this split into the possibility for the elaboration of a new paradigm, for a new homosexual order. It would be interesting in a feminist perspective to analyze the dissymmetry between male and female homosexuality and see how they affect our understanding of the modern body. I regret not to be able to develop this point here.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, the present situation does not arise out of the blue: the split between sexuality and reproduction, *as far as women are concerned*, has quite a history. The present situation, however, conceals, in my opinion, many theoretical and political challenges. I shall explore some of them in the next section.



## Biopower and Women

Of great significance for feminism is the way in which the new reproductive technologies, by officializing the instrumental denaturalization of the body, also institutionalize dismemberment as the modern condition, thus transforming the body into a factory of detachable pieces. I have referred to this problem as "organs without bodies," or the emancipation of the single organ from the bodily unity. I am extremely concerned as to the consequences this emancipation will entail for women.

The phenomenon of "organs without bodies" is, of course, a respectably ancient one: in the eighteenth century, with the transformations in the status of the embodied subject that I have already briefly sketched, the study of the body through the practice of anatomy was momentous enough as a biotechnological innovation to require the construction of special institutions devoted to this task. The clinic and the hospital are the new monuments of the new scientific spirit; they transform the body into an organ-ism, or a mass of detachable parts.

Foucault provides a lucid analysis of this shift; however, he devotes little or no attention and insufficient emphasis to the specific case of women's bodies. The case of the medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth and of the progressive emergence of hysteria as the women's disease signals not only the bracketing of the clinical space and of the medical gaze as the scene in which the body shows itself off but also the emergence of the feminist issue as one of the central queries of the modern era. That the body that is to be studied, comprehended, and intellectually possessed is also the woman's, and especially the mother's body, is a point that seems to escape Foucault's attention.

Nevertheless, the point remains: genealogically speaking, the invention of a clinical structure is linked to the medical practice of anatomy. This is the practice that grants to the medical sciences the right to go and see what goes on inside the human organism. The actual elaboration of the discourse of clinical anatomy can be considered as quite a scientific progress, when compared to the century-old taboos that had forbidden the access to the "secrets of the organism." We must remember that our culture had traditionally held the body in awe, severely regulating knowledge related to it. Not only was it forbidden to open up the body so as to disclose its mechanisms, it was also absolutely sacrilegious to use bodily parts for the purpose of scientific investigation. The dissection of corpses was forbidden till the fifteenth century, and after that it was very strictly regimented (of particular concern was the interdiction

to split open the head, reputed to be the organ of the intelligence). Nowadays the field of organ transplant is ruled by a web of laws and regulations that restrict the gift of organs and their usage for scientific experiments.

It is perfectly clear that clinical anatomy is a death technique, having to do with corpses and fresh supplies of organs. As such, it marks an epistemological shift in the status of the body; the living body becomes, in the process of clinical anatomy, a living text, that is to say, material to be read and interpreted by a medical gaze that can pick up its diseases and its functions. Anatomy results in a representation of the body as being clear and distinct—*visible* and therefore intelligible.

The French psychoanalyst Pierre Fedida<sup>7</sup> stresses the fact that the opening of corpses in the practice of anatomy marks an epistemological break vis-à-vis the scientific order of previous centuries. The rational, visible organism of modern science marks the end of the fantastic, imaginary representations of the alchemists, and consequently empties the body of all its opacity and mystery. The paradox is that this new process of decoding and classifying bodily functions—which opens up new, unexplored spaces to the medical gaze—also closes the body off in a new concept: that of the appropriate shape, form, and function of the organs. The different organs, in other words, only make sense and become decodable, readable, analyzable, thanks to the fact that they all belong to the same assembled unity—the same organ-ism. Like letters of a corporeal alphabet.

Organized in this manner, the knowledge that the biomedical sciences get from the organ-ism is, as Foucault put it, “epistemologically related to death,”<sup>8</sup> in that the dead body alone can disclose its mysteries about life.

In turn this changes the position of the doctor; whereas in the prescientific period the idea of illness was associated with a metaphysics of evil, in which the organ was a sign of disease or malfunction, in modern times it comes closer to a hermeneutics in which the organ produces a symptom. It is because people are mortal that they can fall ill; the notion of death becomes the horizon on which the idea of illness is indexed.

What is so striking about the discourse and the practice of clinical anatomy, with its closeness to death, is that it marks an experience of loss of illusions. The fantastic, imaginary dimension that was so strong in the discourse of the alchemists; the simple curiosity before the living

organism's complexity; these are replaced by the detached power of observation of the clinical standpoint.

Fedida adds that "the body doctors always forget is just the body of your childhood: the imaginary body of desire. It is the body that was buried by medicine when it turned into a scientific encyclopedia and technique."<sup>9</sup>

The body that is open to the scrutiny, the observation by the biomedical gaze is a body that can be manipulated; it is a useful, purposeful body that can produce knowledge, thus legitimating the power of the biomedical profession.

The biotechnological universe clarifies and makes manifest the tendencies that have been operative since the beginning of what we call modern technology and science. On this point, I think it important to compare and even contrast the French school of critical thought to the German one, especially Adorno and Horkheimer. In *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment*,<sup>10</sup> reference is made to the status of the body in modernity, and the criticism is advanced on the reduction of the body to an assembly of detachable parts. Adorno and Horkheimer criticize the bioscientific manipulation of the body as a factory of spare parts and see it as the denial of the unity and the specificity of the human being. They have a very negative view of the powers of science and an even worse one of technology.

For the French school of critical thought, on the other hand, technology—even the biotechnology of modernity—is not *a priori* opposed to or even inimical to humanity. Foucault tends rather to deflate the discourse about the ideologically dangerous nature of technology, in order to look at it as the extension of basic bodily functions. In his scheme, there is mutual receptivity between the hand and the machine.

Here the French school of philosophical materialism (that of Bachelard and Canguilhem) plays a very important role in that it stresses that a sort of primitive anthropomorphism pervades the technical universe: all machines obviously copy and multiply the potencies and potentialities of the human body. The organic and the technological complement each other, so that the nature-culture distinction is dropped in favor of the political reflection on the concrete materiality of the subject as an embodied organism or as a biocultural event. In Canguilhem's view, the aim of biology should be not only to dissect the organism but also to pursue a philosophical kind of enquiry about the structure of the living being.

Clearly, I feel closer to this kind of approach, though I remain very worried about the possible "perverse" effects of very advanced technologies. The central point of concern for me remains that modern science is the triumph of the scopic drive as a gesture of epistemological domination and control: to make visible the invisible, to visualize the secrets of nature. Biosciences achieve their aims by making the embodied subject visible and intelligible according to the principles of scientific representation. In turn this implies that the bodily unity can be split into a variety of organs, each of which can then be analyzed and represented.

In modern biochemical research, thanks to the advances of molecular biology, we have gone well beyond the organs, reducing the field of study to tissues, cells, and microorganisms. The phenomenon that I call "organs without bodies" has concentrated on smaller and smaller entities. The change in size also marks a shift in the scale of the exchanges. The commercialization of living matter has grown larger and more effective than ever and resulted in not only a traffic in organs but also in tissues and cells. In other words, the commercialization of living material for the purpose of medical research or treatment is a worldwide phenomenon, with the third world providing most of the bodily spare parts.

The idea of traffic in organs, or the exchange of living material, rests on a number of theoretical hypotheses that I find questionable: it confuses the parts for the whole, and it encourages what I consider to be the perverse notion of the interchangeability of organs. Consequently, all organs are equally exchangeable, and the laws trying to regulate this market are notoriously ineffective.

What worries me about the theoretical underpinnings of this practice is the falsely reassuring notion of the *sameness* of the bodily material involved. In my opinion it conceals the importance of *differences* as determining what I would call the singularity of each subject.

## Killing Time

Let me make the same point from another angle, one directly related to the new reproductive technologies: what is at stake in all this dismemberment and free circulation of organs or living cells is the disruption of time, or temporality. I stated before that clinical anatomical observations requires a corpse, dead material, as the basic matter or text to be decoded. It thus bears a direct relationship to death. The phenomenon of "body snatching" in the nineteenth century proved a very fertile

ground not only for a macabre trade but also for the popular imagination to speculate about the horrors of modern science.

In modern biotechnologies, time is arrested in a much more subtle manner; as I said in the previous chapter, just think of what happens to the reproductive process in the case of artificial insemination.

This dislocation of temporality has paved the way for another phenomenon that I would describe as perverse; it can be best illustrated by an extreme example: intragenerational procreation by transplant. This is not only the stuff that Fay Weldon's novels are made of<sup>11</sup>, there has already been a case of a mother carrying her daughter's babies to birth, and the issue has drawn the attention of the various bio-ethics committees that are supposed to legislate on this matter.

Intragenerational procreation seems to me to crystallize the dangers of the idea of *sameness*: if all uteruses are equal and interchangeable, all women are the same on the scale of their function as baby-carriers. That this alleged sameness might abolish all other axes of differentiation—be they race, or age—is for me a matter of great concern. What this means, in fact, is an illusion of commonness among women that conceals the very pernicious forms of social control—and therefore of hierarchical powers—that are being set up in the field of reproduction.

It is a sort of "equality" of all female bodies, which paves the way for deeper and more profitable forms of exploitation. Not the least of its dangers is the way in which renewed emphasis on fetal life has endangered abortion legislation right across the Western world.

The phenomenon of organs without bodies, moreover, with the institutionalization of the dismembered condition, is also the pre-text to the deployment of one of the oldest, not to say the primordial, of all fantasies: that of being in total control of one's origins, that is of being the father/mother of one's self. I think contemporary culture is fascinated by the myth of parthenogenesis. This implies the denial or the blurring of generational time—that is to say of one's position in time in relation to others. This is also a way of avoiding or short-circuiting the acknowledgment of one's origins in a woman's body. The merry-go-round of bodily parts, or cells, or tissues, that do not belong anywhere lays the preconditions for the fantasy that one does not really come from anywhere specific, from any one bodily point. The parental body being bracketed off, the mother as site of origin is dislocated. The maternal thus abstracted, the very notion of origin becomes suspended. This seems to me one of the side effects of the interchangeability of organs

that I have described as "organs without bodies." The time factor no longer allows us to symbolize fundamental differences; it is as if we were living in a continuous present.

The social and cultural repercussions of this bioscientific imaginary seem to me just as perverse; the fantasy of being at the origin of oneself, that is of not having to recognize one's beginning as originated from other, from one's parents, is manifested very strongly in popular culture, especially in cinema. Of late there have been many movies where the fantasy of being self-generated is very powerfully marketed. The denial of intergenerational time and space used to be the stuff neuroses were made of; today it is at the heart of commercial cinema.

The best representative of this trend is Steven Spielberg, whose characters sum up the main features of our contemporary scientific culture: one of them—Indiana Jones—has no mother, just a father who is an archaeologist, like himself, with a strong interest in the sacred. In almost every Indiana Jones film there is an encounter with God the Father. Spielberg's films, such as *E.T* and *The Gremlins*, flirt with an infantile imaginary about procreation; the films offer many fantastic answers to the question, "where do babies come from?" In the case of the *Gremlins* parthenogenesis is explicitly represented as they "pop" off like popcorns by contact with water. In other films it is more subtly hinted at. Very significant in this respect is the series *Back to the Future*, produced by Spielberg and directed by Robert Zemeckis, which features a young boy who builds a time machine and watches his "primal scene": he makes sure that his parents meet, fall in love, and actually conceive him.

Another striking example of the same tendency is James Cameron's *Terminator*, a very violent film that functions as one retrospective contraception technique in that the cyborg-killer (Schwarzenegger!) has to travel back in time to eliminate the mother of his future enemy, thus preventing that enemy's conception.

With no time left for the present, life is lived as a death-bound flashback.

## From the Visible to the Visual

I mention cinema and popular culture as well as written texts because more than anything else, the dismemberment of the body and the suspension of the time structure have to do with the idea of visibility, with looking, and consequently with the gaze. I have pointed out earlier how

Foucault analyzes the importance of visibility as a leading principle in the scientific representation of the human body.

According to psychoanalytic interpretation, the scopoc drive is linked to both knowledge and control or domination.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the practice that consists in opening something up so as to see how it functions; the impulse to go and see, to "look in" is the most fundamental and childlike form of control over the other's body. In this sense the curiosity that pushes the child to break his/her toy to see how it's made inside can be seen as the most primitive form of sadism. The desire to see, this basic curiosity that leads to knowledge and to control, is kept in check by a set of limits and taboos that are culturally imposed on representation. According to Freud, the taboo on representation is the mother's body, as site of both life and death.

Applied to the scientific practice, this analysis is quite devastating: it makes clinical anatomy into a more adult version of infantile sadism. It is the expression of curiosity linked to the most archaic sadistic impulses. The mother's body is the privileged target of this violence, in that it represents the origins of life, and one's own origins. Evelyn Fox Keller,<sup>13</sup> stresses the violent and sadistic implications of what we could call the contemporary biomedical perversion.

Paradoxically enough, clinical anatomy, with its sadistic subtext, is an exercise in mastery that aims at denying death. By trying to reduce the body to an organism, a sum of detachable parts, it implies that the body is but that: what you see is what you get. There is an inevitable slippage from the visible to the mirage of absolute transparency, as if the light of reason could extend into the deepest murkiest depths of the human organism. As if the truth consisted simply in making something visible.

Modern techniques of visual reproduction, especially echograms and echography, mark a powerful intensification of this trend. I have already argued that, by comparison with traditional clinical anatomy, the biosciences of today have acquired the means of intervening in the very structure of the living organism, right into the genetic program, thereby changing the bodily structure from within. On the technological front, molecular biology has increased the biomedical gaze to infinite proportions, allowing for an unprecedented investigation of the most intimate and infinitesimal fibers of nature. This shift corresponds to a much greater power of vision, and the unity of the organism is thus dissolved into smaller and smaller living parts.

We are moving beyond the idea of visibility, into a new culture of visualization; thanks to ultrasound techniques the invisible itself can today be visualized; that which the naked eye does not even begin to grasp can be the object of imaged representation. The bioscientist is, quite literally, the great spectator in the spectacle of life; he can at long last represent the unrepresentable: the bottom of the ocean, outer space, but also the inside of the womb, the depths of the uterine chamber—that great mystery that has always held *men* in suspense.

The fixing into images is a spatio-temporal system related to the stopping or arresting of time. Roland Barthes' book on photography is neither the first nor the last analysis of the image as being linked to death and immobility. In this respect, the sadistic impulse of the biomedical gaze becomes even more of a death drive with these new visualization techniques.

Offering everything for display or show, representing the unrepresentable, (like the origins of life), means producing images that displace the boundaries of space (inside/outside the mother's body) and of time (before/after birth). It amounts to suspending time in the illusion of total vision, of the absolute transparency of living matter.

Furthermore, these visualization techniques give a great autonomy or independence to the object they represent. The image acquires a life of its own, distinct from anything else. It is quite clear that echograms of the fetus confer upon it an identity, a visual shape, a visible and intelligible existence that the fetus would not usually have.

Apart from the fantasy of absolute domination that is expressed in this process, I want to stress also that this visualization produces an attitude that I would describe as medical pornography. A recent issue of the French journal *Science et vie*<sup>14</sup> presented a series of prebirth images, called, "The fetal life: do not miss it!" Many people dispose these days of pictures of their unborn baby, or videotapes of uterine life. This is a case of medical pornography. I am using the term pornography in the sense suggested by Susan Kappelar<sup>15</sup> as being a system of representation that reinforces the mercenary logic of a market economy. The whole body becomes a visual surface of changeable parts, offered as exchange objects.

Kappelar uses Adorno on the issue of pornography, especially his analysis of the nature of popular culture. Adorno defines this nature as pornographic in that it frustrates the very desire it stimulates. The function of the entertainment industry is to promise more than it delivers. It



is a very frustrating exercise, however; for instance, sex can be represented, but in inevitably normative, repressive ways. In pornography, sex is represented through the spectacle of organs interpenetrating each other, but that proves a very unsatisfactory image for the act itself. There is always something more to the experience than the image can show. And yet the triumph of the image is precisely what marks contemporary popular and scientific cultures alike. This is the source of the pornographic nature of visual culture; it cheats: it shows you a bloody mess of red flesh and it tells you, "This is the origin of life." It shows you organs moving in and out of each other, and it tells you, "This is sexual pleasure." It rests on the fantasy that visibility and truth work together. I want to argue that they do not and that there is always more to things than meets the eye. There is no adequate *simulacrum*; no image is a representation of the truth.

This new medical pornography, resting as it does on the detachment of the fetus from the mother's body, on the dismemberment of bodily unity, and on the traffic of the parts for the whole, has enormous social and political consequences. A film made by the antiabortion lobbies, *The Silent Scream*, proves this point. This is allegedly the film of an abortion, produced through echography, with a powerful reactionary sound track that gives a voice to the fetus's alleged "feelings" about being "murdered." It is interspersed with images of Nazi concentration camps. There is no question as to the effect that this piece of right-wing propaganda has had on the American audience, nor should the role it played in making abortion legislation recede in many states of the union be underestimated.

As Rosalind Petchesky and Ludmilla Jordanova<sup>16</sup> have pointed out, the theoretical point is that, detached from the mother's body, the fetus has an identity of its own, but it is also reduced to the level of a detachable organ. Unrelated to the site of its growth, the fetus gains a separate identity by being disembodied.

Even more recently, popular culture, which is always very quick in picking up developments in science and technology, has produced a more lighthearted version of the same principle: a film with John Travolta, called *Look Who's Talking*, starts with the image of a fetus, (clearly a puppet), with a voice of his own; to a feminist eye the resemblance to the text of *The Silent Scream* is striking. The baby boy is then born and continues to dominate the screen by his strong homosocial bond to Travolta.

In a paper called "Visual Images: Sources and Targets of American Sexual Politics,"<sup>17</sup> American feminist theorist Carol Vance analyzes the role played by images of this sort in the right-wing's campaign of against abortion as well as against pornography and erotic art. Through an elaborate analysis of the power of images, Vance argues that today the essence of the political struggle is a struggle over meaning and the value of representation. What we represent, and how we represent it, are at the heart of the debate these days. Carol Vance shows also the extent to which the rhetorical or narrative devices of television series such as *Dallas* or the *Harmony* romances influence the language of political and juridical speech. The secret is to titillate the audience without fulfilling it, arouse it so as to manipulate it. This is true pornography: that of the language of power and manipulation; it is a structure of representation not just a matter of content.

## Feminist In-sights

There is a pessimistic side to my position: that biomedical technology that is manipulating women by promising them a baby at all costs is also fitting into the logic of a system where sexuality is power, comes as no surprise. That biomedical technologies should encourage the masculine fantasy of self-generation, reversing the Oedipal chain so as to feed the infantile fantasies of all-powerfulness through self-generation, at a time when parental roles are being mechanized, is also a matter of great concern. That the emancipation of the fetus in our ever-so-patriarchal culture should happen at the expense of the mother is terrifying but not surprising. Although I do not mean to strike a note of total opposition to science and technology, I would like to repeat the warning against some of their perverse effects.

There is also, however, an optimistic side to my conclusion: feminists have been fast and effective in their critiques and actions against the perverse effects induced by the new technologies. For instance, over the last ten years many women and feminist theorists have done a great deal of work on the question of the power of the visible and of visibility. Their analysis is now being applied to the problem of reproductive technologies in order to try to elaborate effective policies. The starting point is the recognition that the visual metaphor is a constant in Western culture. The act of seeing, or the gaze as synonym for mental representation and for understanding, has been an important image ever since Plato. The idea as double, or mental image, of the real thing is part of

everything our culture has constructed in the ways of knowledge. Descartes' notion of "clear and distinct ideas" is only the modern rendition of a long-standing habit practiced by those Gayatri Spivak describes as "clarity fetishists."<sup>18</sup>

Psychoanalytic theory, which in many respects criticizes classical theories of representation, confirms the primacy of sight as a site of legitimation of knowledge: Lacan's mirror stage perpetuates the tyranny of the logocentric gaze.

This is what feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray have been arguing; Irigaray<sup>19</sup> focuses precisely on the issue of identification and on the overwhelming importance granted to the gaze. In many respects, Irigaray's project can be seen as an attempt to replace the visual with the tactile, the act of seeing with the act of touching.

In her analysis of Irigaray, Margaret Whitford<sup>20</sup> draws attention to the importance of the notion of the imaginary in Irigaray's work. She plays Irigaray's imaginary against Lacan's mirror and reads it as a critique of the primacy granted to the gaze as the dominant model of representation in our culture. Not only does Irigaray criticize the flat surface of Lacan's mirror as a reductive model of the human psyche—to which she opposes the concave surface (the speculum)—she also suggests that the mirror-function is the specific role that women are expected to play. A woman is the flat surface that is supposed to reflect the male subject; her bodily surface, deprived of any visible organs, without anything to see, is the mirror. Let me just remind you here of Freud's essay on the Medusa's head as the expression of the horror of the feminine: her flat bodily surface shows her lack—and also the importance—of the phallus as signifier of desire.

Evelyn Fox Keller<sup>21</sup> takes great issue with French critiques of the visual metaphor. She singles out the importance of sight—the most noble of the senses—as the qualifier for Western knowledge, stressing the ways in which it allows for the separation from subject to object. Keller emphasizes the way in which the scientific position is one of detached observation, one that identifies the objects of knowledge from a distance. This kind of position produces the idea of neutrality and objectivity in the sense of allowing for no particularity about the site of observation.

Keller points out the paradox, however, that this neutral and objective stance is available only to individuals who are socially and culturally constructed as normal, in the sense of corresponding to the stan-

dards of normality associated with masculinity. As a consequence, women are disqualified from the capacity to achieve adequate neutrality; they therefore lose the site/sight of the subject.

Evelyn Fox Keller, like Genevieve Lloyd<sup>22</sup> and Susan Bordo,<sup>23</sup> develops the argument about masculinization and rationality; they all emphasize that the opposition of knower and known, subject and object, is the same qualitative distinction as mind and body, *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. The masculine element on this consists precisely in the detachment, the perception of a clear and distinct determination of boundaries between self and world. Separation and autonomy are indeed the central features of the masculine standpoint.

In the feminist analysis, this detachment and objectivity are connected to the fantasy of self-generation, of being father/mother of oneself, thus denying the specific debt to the maternal. Adrienne Rich and Luce Irigaray have also related the notion of scientific detachment and objectivity to the unwillingness or the downright denial of the fact that one is of woman born. It is a form of flight from the feminine.

Another school of thought develops the point suggested by Irigaray in terms of stressing the tactile, or the importance of touching, as a countermodel for knowledge. Jessica Benjamin<sup>24</sup> turns to Winnicott's object-relations theory as a model for arguing that self and other are inextricably linked. Arguing that what allows for the creation of the subjective space is the idea of receptivity and mutuality, she develops a theory of the transitional space as the connecting space, an interface that allows for contact and not only for separation.

According to Teresa de Lauretis,<sup>25</sup> feminist theories of subjectivity today are moving in the direction of the subject as a process of interconnected relations. Central to this project, according to de Lauretis, is the need to detach the female feminist subject—that is to say real-life women as agents and empirical subjects—from the representation of Woman as the fantasy of a male imagination. The struggle is therefore over imaging and naming; it is about whose representations will prevail.

In a similar vein the postmodernist feminist philosopher Donna Haraway<sup>26</sup> also starts from the recognition that there is a structurally necessary connection between seeing and the mind, a connection she translates into the idea of disembodiment. Thus, Descartes sees only clear and distinct ideas because he has no body and denies his embodied nature. By the same token, androids, cyborgs, scanners,

satellites, electronic microscopes, and telescopes see the most clearly of all.

Haraway tries to rescue the faculty of seeing, of vision, and to re-possess it for feminist discourse, redefining objectivity along the way. She calls this new epistemological project "situated knowledges,"<sup>27</sup> as opposed to the "cannibal/eye" of unlimited disembodied vision that is the fantasy of phallogocentrism. Objectivity, in Haraway's terms, is not about the transcendence of limits but rather about partial perspectives, which make us accountable for what we learn how to see. Arguing that modern visualization techniques shatter the very idea of one-dimensional seeing or the passive mirror function, Haraway suggests that we learn to see in compound, multiple ways, in "partial perspectives"—she names this process "passionate detachment"—like the eye of a traveling lens.

Vision requires a politics of positioning; positioning implies responsibility. Vision is the power to see; thus "struggles over what counts as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see." Feminist embodiment implies "significant prosthesis," relating to the world as a material semiotic field of forces at play.

The world is no mere passive matter awaiting interpretation or decoding by a scanning eye. It is no mere screen ground or surface but actor and agent, requiring interaction. Haraway concludes that feminism is about "a critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning in unhomogeneous, gendered social space."

According to Haraway, in the present struggle over visual politics and the naming of new biotechnological realities, feminists must reject the knowledge ruled by phallogocentric premises and disembodied vision, for the sake of the connections that situated knowledges makes possible.

Faced with the wealth of feminist reflection on the power of vision, the visible, and the visual, I prefer to end on a rather optimistic note. It seems to me that effective feminist interventions in the field of biomedical power will require that strong attention be paid to the politics of visual culture and the pervasiveness of pornography as the dominant structure of representation in scientific as well as in popular discourse. The naked eye may have been replaced by the electronic lens, but the objectification and commercialization of what it beholds have grown bigger than ever. It is in those factors that I would locate the pornographic mode, as a form of discursive and material domination. In this

## BODY IMAGES

respect, it will be a great pity if the whole feminist debate in reproductive technologies does not use the instruments of analysis and the insights of cultural and literary disciplines. I think that reflection on technology from the perspective of the humanities allows for powerful new insights on how to criticize scientific practice from within, so as to enhance its liberatory potential.

# T H R E E

## Mothers, Monsters, and Machines

### Figuring Out

I would like to approach the sequence “mothers, monsters, and machines” both thematically and methodologically, so as to work out possible connections between these terms. Because women, the biological sciences, and technology are conceptually interrelated, there can not be only one correct connection but, rather, many, heterogeneous and potentially contradictory ones.

The quest for multiple connections—or conjunctions—can also be rendered methodologically in terms of Donna Haraway’s *figurations*.<sup>1</sup> The term refers to ways of expressing feminist forms of knowledge that are not caught in a mimetic relationship to dominant scientific discourse. This is a way of marking my own difference: as an intellectual woman who has acquired and earned the right to speak publicly in an academic context, I have also inherited a tradition of female silence. Centuries of exclusion of women from the exercise of discursive power are ringing through my words. In speaking the language of man, I also intend to let the silence of woman echo gently but firmly; I shall not conform to the phallogocentric mode.<sup>2</sup> I want to question the status of feminist theory in terms not only of the conceptual tools and the gender-specific perceptions that govern the production of feminist research but also of the form our perceptions take.

The “nomadic” style is the best suited to the quest for feminist figurations, in the sense of adequate representations of female experience

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as that which cannot easily be fitted within the parameters of phallogocentric language.

The configuration of ideas I am trying to set up: mothers, monsters, machines, is therefore a case study—not only in terms of its propositional content but also in defining my place of enunciation and, therefore, my relationship to the readers who are my partners in this discursive game. It is a new figuration of feminist subjectivity.

Quoting Deleuze,<sup>3</sup> I would like to define this relationship as “rhizomatic”; that is to say not only cerebral, but related to experience, which implies a strengthened connection between thought and life, a renewed proximity of the thinking process to existential reality.<sup>4</sup> In my thinking, “rhizomatic” thinking leads to what I call a “nomadic” style.

Moreover, a “nomadic” connection is not a dualistic or oppositional way of thinking<sup>5</sup> but rather one that views discourse as a positive, multilayered network of power relations.<sup>6</sup>

Let me develop the terms of my nomadic network by reference to Foucauldian critiques of the power of discourse: he argues that the production of scientific knowledge works as a complex, interrelated network of truth, power, and desire, centered on the subject as a bodily entity. In a double movement that I find most politically useful, Foucault highlights both the normative foundations of theoretical reason and also the rational model of power. “Power” thus becomes the name for a complex set of interconnections, between the spaces where truth and knowledge are produced and the systems of control and domination. I shall unwrap my three interrelated notions in the light of this definition of power.

Last, but not least, this style implies the simultaneous dislocation not only of my place of enunciation as a feminist intellectual but also accordingly of the position of my readers. As my interlocutors I am constructing those readers to be “not just” traditional intellectuals and academics but also active, interested, and concerned participants in a project of research and experimentation for new ways of thinking about human subjectivity in general and female subjectivity in particular. I mean to appeal therefore not only to a requirement for passionless truth but also to a passionate engagement in the recognition of the theoretical and discursive implications of sexual difference. In this choice of a theoretical style that leaves ample room for the exploration of subjectivity, I am following the lead of Donna Haraway, whose plea for “passionate detachment” in theory making I fully share.<sup>7</sup>



Let us now turn to the thematic or propositional content of my constellation of ideas: mothers, monsters and machines.

For the sake of clarity, let me define them: *mothers* refers to the maternal function of women. By *WOMEN* I mean not only the biocultural entities thus represented, as the empirical subjects of sociopolitical realities, but also a discursive field: feminist theory. The kind of feminism I want to defend rests on the presence and the experience of real-life women whose political consciousness is bent on changing the institution of power in our society.

Feminist theory is a two-layered project involving the critique of existing definitions, representations as well as the elaboration of alternative theories about women. Feminism is the movement that brings into practice the dimension of sexual difference through the critique of gender as a power institution. Feminism is the question; the affirmation of sexual difference is the answer.

This point is particularly important in the light of modernity's imperative to think differently about our historical condition. The central question seems to be here: how can we *affirm* the positivity of female subjectivity at a time in history when our acquired perceptions of "the subject" are being radically questioned? How can we reconcile the recognition of the problematic nature of the notion and the construction of the subject with the political necessity to posit female subjectivity?

By *MACHINES* I mean the scientific, political, and discursive field of technology in the broadest sense of the term. Ever since Heidegger the philosophy of modernity has been trying to come to terms with technological reason. The Frankfurt School refers to it as "instrumental reason": one that places the end of its endeavors well above the means and suspends all judgment on its inner logic. In my work, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, I approach the technology issue from within the French tradition, following the materialism of Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Foucault.

By *MONSTERS* I mean a third kind of discourse: the history and philosophy of the biological sciences, and their relation to difference and to different bodies. Monsters are human beings who are born with congenital malformations of their bodily organism. They also represent the in between, the mixed, the ambivalent as implied in the ancient Greek root of the word *monsters*, *teras*, which means both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration. Since the nineteenth century, following the classification system of monstrosity by Geoffroy Saint-

Hilaire, bodily malformations have been defined in terms of *excess*, *lack*, or *displacement* of organs.<sup>8</sup> Before any such scientific classification was reached, however, natural philosophy had struggled to come to terms with these objects of abjection. The constitution of teratology as a science offers a paradigmatic example of the ways in which scientific rationality dealt with differences of the bodily kind.

The discourse on monsters as a case study highlights a question that seems to me very important for feminist theory: the status of difference within rational thought. Following the analysis of the philosophical ratio suggested by Derrida<sup>9</sup> and other contemporary French philosophers, it can be argued that Western thought has a logic of binary oppositions that treats difference as that which is other-than the accepted norm. The question then becomes: can we free difference from these normative connotations? Can we learn to think differently about difference?<sup>10</sup>

The monster is the bodily incarnation of difference from the basic human norm; it is a deviant, an a-nomaly; it is abnormal. As Georges Canguilhem points out, the very notion of the human body rests upon an image that is intrinsically prescriptive: a normally formed human being is the zero-degree of monstrosity. Given the special status of the monster, what light does he throw on the structures of scientific discourse? How was the difference of/in the monster perceived within this discourse?

When set alongside each other, mothers/monsters/machines may seem puzzling. There is no apparent connection among these three terms and yet the link soon becomes obvious if I add that recent developments in the field of biotechnology, particularly artificial procreation, have extended the power of science over the maternal body of women. The possibility of mechanizing the maternal function is by now well within our reach; the manipulation of life through different combinations of genetic engineering has allowed for the creation of new artificial monsters in the high-tech labs of our biochemists. There is therefore a political urgency about the future of women in the new reproductive technology debate, which gives a polemical force to my constellation of ideas—mothers, monsters, and machines.

The legal, economic, and political repercussions of the new reproductive technologies are far-reaching. The recent stand taken by the Roman Catholic church and by innumerable "bioethics committees" all across Western Europe against experimentation and genetic manipulations may appear fair enough. They all invariably shift the debate, how-

ever, far from the power of science over the women's body in favor of placing increasing emphasis on the rights of the fetus or of embryos. This emphasis is played against the rights of the mother—and therefore of the woman—and we have been witnessing systematic slippages between the discourse against genetic manipulations and the rhetoric of the antiabortion campaigners. No area of contemporary technological development is more crucial to the construction of gender than the new reproductive technologies. The central thematic link I want to explore between mothers, monsters, and machines is therefore my argument that contemporary biotechnology displaces women by making procreation a high-tech affair.

## Conjunction 1: Woman/Mother as Monster

As part of the discursive game of nomadic networking I am attempting here, let us start by associating two of these terms: let us superimpose the image of the woman/mother onto that of the monstrous body. In other words, let us take the case study of monsters, deviants, or anomalous entities as being paradigmatic of how differences are dealt with within scientific rationality. Why this association of femininity with monstrosity?

The association of women with monsters goes as far back as Aristotle who, in *The Generation of Animals*, posits the human norm in terms of bodily organization based on a male model. Thus, in reproduction, when everything goes according to the norm a boy is produced; the female only happens when something goes wrong or fails to occur in the reproductive process. The female is therefore an anomaly, a variation on the main theme of man-kind. The emphasis Aristotle places on the masculinity of the human norm is also reflected in his theory of conception: he argues that the principle of life is carried exclusively by the sperm, the female genital apparatus providing only the passive receptacle for human life. The sperm-centered nature of this early theory of procreation is thus connected to a massive masculine bias in the general Aristotelian theory of subjectivity. For Aristotle, not surprisingly, women are not endowed with a rational soul.<sup>11</sup>

The *topos* of women as a sign of abnormality, and therefore of difference as a mark of inferiority, remained a constant in Western scientific discourse. This association has produced, among other things, a style of misogynist literature with which anyone who has read *Gulliver's Travels* must be familiar: the horror of the female body. The inter-

connection of women as monsters with the literary text is particularly significant and rich in the genre of satire. In a sense, the satirical text is implicitly monstrous, it is a deviant, an aberration in itself. Eminently transgressive, it can afford to express a degree of misogyny that might shock in other literary genres.

Outside the literary tradition, however, the association of femininity with monstrosity points to a system of pejoration that is implicit in the binary logic of oppositions that characterizes the phallogocentric discursive order. The monstrous as the negative pole, the pole of pejoration, is structurally analogous to the feminine as that which is other-than the established norm, whatever the norm may be. The actual propositional content of the terms of opposition is less significant for me than its logic. Within this dualistic system, monsters are, just like bodily female subjects, a figure of devalued difference; as such, it provides the fuel for the production of normative discourse. If the position of women and monsters as logical operators in discursive production is comparable within the dualistic logic, it follows that the misogyny of discourse is not an irrational exception but rather a tightly constructed system that requires difference as pejoration in order to erect the positivity of the norm. In this respect, misogyny is not a hazard but rather the structural necessity of a system that can only represent "otherness" as negativity.

The theme of woman as devalued difference remained a constant in Western thought; in philosophy especially, "she" is forever associated to unholy, disorderly, subhuman, and unsightly phenomena. It is as if "she" carried within herself something that makes her prone to being an enemy of mankind, an outsider in her civilization, an "other." It is important to stress the light that psychoanalytic theory has cast upon this hatred for the feminine and the traditional patriarchal association of women with monstrosity.

The woman's body can change shape in pregnancy and childbearing; it is therefore capable of defeating the notion of fixed *bodily form*, of visible, recognizable, clear, and distinct shapes as that which marks the contour of the body. She is morphologically dubious. The fact that the female body can change shape so drastically is troublesome in the eyes of the logocentric economy within which to see is the primary act of knowledge and *the gaze* the basis of all epistemic awareness.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the male sexual organ does, of course, change shape in the limited time span of the erection and that this operation—however precarious—is not exactly unrelated to the changes of shape undergone by the

female body during pregnancy constitutes, in psychoanalytic theory, one of the fundamental axes of fantasy about sexual difference.

The appearance of symmetry in the way the two sexes work in reproduction merely brings out, however, the separateness and the specificity of each sexual organization. What looks to the naked eye like a comparable pattern: erection/pregnancy, betrays the ineluctable difference. As psychoanalysis successfully demonstrates, reproduction does not encompass the whole of human sexuality and for this reason alone anatomy is *not* destiny. Moreover, this partial analogy also leads to a sense of (false) anatomical complementarity between the sexes that contrasts with the complexity of the psychic representations of sexual difference. This double recognition of both proximity and separation is the breeding ground for the rich and varied network of misunderstandings, identifications, interconnections, and mutual demands that is what sexual human relationships are all about.

Precisely this paradoxical mixture of "the same and yet other" between the sexes generates a drive to denigrate woman in so far as she is "other-than" the male norm. In this respect hatred for the feminine constitutes the phallogocentric economy by inducing in both sexes the desire to achieve order, by means of a one-way pattern for both. As long as the law of the One is operative, so will be the denigration of the feminine, and of women with it.<sup>13</sup>

Woman as a sign of difference is monstrous. If we define the monster as a bodily entity that is anomalous and deviant vis-à-vis the norm, then we can argue that the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of *fascination and horror*. This logic of attraction and repulsion is extremely significant; psychoanalytic theory takes it as the fundamental structure of the mechanism of desire and, as such, of the constitution of the neurotic symptom: the spasm of the hysteric turns to nausea, displacing itself from its object.

Julia Kristeva, drawing extensively on the research of Mary Douglas, connects this mixture<sup>14</sup> to the maternal body as the site of the origin of life and consequently also of the insertion into mortality and death. We are all of woman born, and the mother's body as the threshold of existence is both sacred and soiled, holy and hellish; it is attractive and repulsive, all-powerful and therefore impossible to live with. Kristeva speaks of it in terms of "abjection"; the abject arises in that gray, in between area of the mixed, the ambiguous. The monstrous or deviant is

a figure of abjection in so far as it trespasses and transgresses the barriers between recognizable norms or definitions.

Significantly, the object approximates the sacred because it appears to contain within itself a constitutive ambivalence where life and death are reconciled. Kristeva emphasizes the dual function of the maternal site as both life- and death-giver, as object of worship and of terror. The notion of the sacred is generated precisely by this blend of fascination and horror, which prompts an intense play of the imaginary, of fantasies and often nightmares about the ever-shifting boundaries between life and death, night and day, masculine and feminine, active and passive, and so forth.

In a remarkable essay about the head of the Medusa, Freud connected this logic of attraction and repulsion to the sight of female genitalia; because there is *nothing to see* in that dark and mysterious region, the imagination goes haywire. Short of losing his head, the male gazer is certainly struck by castration anxiety. For fear of losing the thread of his thought, Freud then turns his distress into the most overdetermined of all questions: "what does woman want?"

A post-Freudian reading of this text permits us to see how the question about female desire emerges out of male anxiety about the representation of sexual difference. In a more Lacanian vein, Kristeva adds an important insight: the female sex as the site of origin also inspires awe because of the psychic and cultural imperative to separate from the mother and accept the Law of the Father. The incest taboo, the fundamental law of our social system, builds on the mixture of fascination and horror that characterizes the feminine/maternal object of abjection. As the site of primary repression, and therefore that which escapes from representation, the mother's body becomes a turbulent area of psychic life.

Obviously, this analysis merely describes the mechanisms at work in our cultural system; no absolute necessity surrounds the symbolic absence of Woman. On the contrary, feminists have been working precisely to put into images that which escapes phallogocentric modes of representation. Thus, in her critique of psychoanalysis, Luce Irigaray points out that the dark continent of all dark continents is the mother-daughter relationship. She also suggests that, instead of this logic of attraction and repulsion, sexual difference may be thought out in terms of recognition and wonder. The latter is one of the fundamental passions in Descartes' treatise about human affectivity: he values it as the

foremost of human passions, that which makes everything else possible. Why Western culture did not adopt this way of conceptualizing and experiencing difference and opted instead for difference as a sign of negativity remains a critical question for me.

It is because of this phallogocentric perversion that femininity and monstrosity can be seen as isomorphic. Woman/mother is monstrous by excess; she transcends established norms and transgresses boundaries. She is monstrous by lack: woman/mother does not possess the substantive unity of the masculine subject. Most important, through her identification with the feminine she is monstrous by displacement: as sign of the in between areas, of the indefinite, the ambiguous, the mixed, woman/mother is subjected to a constant process of metaphorization as "other-than."

In the binary structure of the logocentric system, "woman," as the eternal pole of opposition, the "other", can be assigned to the most varied and often contradictory terms. The only constant remains her "becoming-metaphor," whether of the sacred or the profane, of heaven or hell, of life or death. "Woman" is that which is assigned and has no power of self-definition. "Woman" is the anomaly that confirms the positivity of the norm.

## Conjunction 2: Teratology and the Feminine

The history of teratology, or the science of monsters, demonstrates clearly the ways in which the body in general and the female body in particular have been conceptualized in Western scientific discourse, progressing from the fantastic dimension of the bodily organism to a more rationalistic construction of the body-machine. The monster as a human being born with congenital malformations undergoes a series of successive representations historically, before it gives rise, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, to an acceptable, scientific discourse.

The work of French epistemologist and philosopher of science Georges Canguilhem and of his disciple Michel Foucault is extremely useful in studying the modes of interaction of the normal and the pathological, the normative and the transgressive in Western philosophy. For Canguilhem, the stakes in theory of monstrosity are the questions of reproduction, of origins: "how can such monstrous creatures be conceived?" The conception of monsters is what really haunts the scientific imagination. Whereas psychoanalysts like Lacan and Irigaray argue that the epistem(ophilic) question of the origin lies at the heart of *all* scien-

tific investigation, Canguilhem is interested in providing the historical perspective on how the scientific discourse about monsters emerged. He argues that teratology became constituted as a discipline when it required the conceptual and technological means of mastering the pro/reproduction of monsters. In other words, the scientific and technological know-how necessary for the artificial reproduction of human anomalies is the precondition for the establishment of a scientific discipline concerned with abnormal beings.

This means that on the discursive level, the monster points out the major epistemological function played by anomalies, abnormalities, and pathology in the constitution of biological sciences. Historically, biologists have privileged phenomena that deviate from the norm, in order to exemplify the normal structure of development. In this respect the study of monstrous births is a forerunner of modern embryology. Biologists have set up abnormal cases in order to elucidate normal behavior; psychoanalysis will follow exactly the same logic for mental disorders. The proximity of the normal and the pathological demonstrates the point Foucault made in relation to madness and reason: scientific rationality is implicitly normative, it functions by exclusion and disqualification according to a dualistic logic.

The history of discourse about monsters conventionally falls into three chronological periods. In the first, the Greeks and Romans maintained a notion of a "race" of monsters, an ethnic entity possessing specific characteristics. They also relied on the notion of "abjection," seeing the monster not only as the sign of marvel but also of disorder and divine wrath. The practice of exposing monstrous children as unnatural creatures was inaugurated by the Greeks. Thus Oedipus himself—"swollen foot"—was not "normal," and his destruction should have been in the order of things.

More generally, classical mythology represents no founding hero, no main divine creature or demigod as being of woman born. In fact, one of the constant themes in the making of a god is his "unnatural" birth: his ability, through subterfuges such as immaculate conceptions and other tricks, to short-circuit the orifice through which most human beings pop into the spatio-temporal realm of existence. The fantastic dimension of classical mythological discourse about monsters illustrates the paradox of aberration and adoration that I mentioned earlier, and it therefore inscribes an antimaternal dimension at the very heart of the matter.



We can make a further distinction between the baroque and enlightened or "scientific" discourses on monsters. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the monster still possesses the classical sense of something wonderful, fantastic, rare, and precious. Just like the madman, the dwarf and other marvels, it participates in the life of his/her town and enjoys certain privileges. For instance, dwarves as court jesters and fools can transgress social conventions, can say and do things that "normal" human beings cannot afford to say or do.

The imagination of the times runs wild as to the origins of monsters as objects of horror and fascination, as something both exceptional and ominous. The question of the origins of monsters accompanies the development of the medical sciences in the prescientific imagination; it conveys an interesting mixture of traditional superstitions and elements of reflection that will lead to a more scientific method of enquiry. Out of the mass of documentary evidence on this point, I will concentrate on one aspect that throws light on my question about the connection between monstrosity and the feminine. Ambroise Paré's treatise<sup>15</sup> on wondrous beings lists among the causes for their conception various forms of unnatural copulation ranging from bestiality to everyday forms of immorality, such as having sexual intercourse too often, or on a Sunday night (sic), or on the night of any major religious holiday. As a matter of fact, all sexual practices other than those leading to healthy reproduction are suspected to be conducive to monstrous events. Food can also play a major role; the regulation of diet is extremely important and implicitly connected to religious regulations concerning time, season and cycles of life.<sup>16</sup>

Bad weather can adversely affect procreation, as can an excess or a lack of semen; the devil also plays an important role, and he definitely interferes with normal human reproduction. Well may we laugh at such beliefs; many still circulate in rural areas of Western Europe. Besides, the whole fantastic discourse about the origins of monsters becomes considerably less amusing when we consider that women paid a heavy price for these wild notions. The history of women's relationship to "the devil" in Western Europe is a history too full of horrors for us to take these notions lightly.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the baroque mind gave a major role to the maternal imagination in procreation generally and in the conception of monsters particularly.<sup>17</sup> The mother was said to have the actual power of producing a monstrous baby simply by: (a) *thinking*

about awful things during intercourse (it's the close-your-eyes-and-think-of-England principle); (b) *dreaming* very intensely about something or somebody; or (c) *looking* at animals or evil-looking creatures (this is the Xerox-machine complex: if a woman looked at a dog, for instance, with a certain look in her eyes, then she would have the power of transmitting that image to the fetus and reproducing it exactly, thus creating a dog-faced baby).

I let you imagine the intense emotion that struck a village in Northern France in the seventeenth century when a baby was born who looked remarkably like the local bishop. The woman defended herself by claiming gazing rights: she argued that she had stared at the male character in church with such intense devotion that . . . she xeroxed him away! She saved her life and proved the feminist theory that female gaze as the expression of female desire is always perceived as a dangerous, if not deadly, thing.

In other words, the mother's imagination is as strong as the force of nature; in order to assess this, one needs to appreciate the special role that the *imagination* plays in the seventeenth century theories of knowledge. It is a fundamental element in the classical worldview, and yet it is caught in great ambivalence: the imagination is the capacity to draw connections and consequently to construct ideas and yet it is potentially antirational.

The Cartesian *Meditations* are the clearest example of this ambivalence, which we find projected massively onto the power of the mother. She can direct the fetus to normal development or she can de-form it, un-do it, de-humanize it.

It is as if the mother, as a desiring agent, has the power to undo the work of legitimate procreation through the sheer force of her imagination. By deforming the product of the father, she cancels what psychoanalytic theory calls "the Name-of-the-Father." The female "signature" of the reproductive pact is unholy, inhuman, illegitimate, and it remains the mere pre-text to horrors to come. Isn't the product of woman's creativity always so?

This belief is astonishing however, when it is contextualized historically: consider that the debate between the Aristotelian theory of conception, with its sperm-centered view of things, and mother-centered notions of procreation, has a long history. The seventeenth century seems to have reached a paroxysm of hatred for the feminine; it inau-

gured a flight from the female body in a desire to master the woman's generative powers.

Very often feminist scholars have taken this point as a criticism of classical rationalism, especially in the Cartesian<sup>18</sup> form, far too provocatively. The feminist line has been "I think therefore *he* is," thus emphasizing the male-centered view of human nature that is at work in this discourse. Whatever Descartes' responsibility for the flight from womanhood may be—and I maintain that it should be carefully assessed—for the purpose of my research what matters is the particular form that this flight took in the seventeenth century.

### Conjunction 3: The Fantasy of Male-Born Children

The flight from and rejection of the feminine can also be analyzed from a different angle: the history of the biological sciences in the prescientific era, especially the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I argue that the flight from the feminine, and particularly from the monstrous power of the maternal imagination and desire, lies at the heart of the recurring fantasy of a child born from man alone.

We find, for instance, alchemists busy at work to try to produce the philosopher's son—the homunculus, a man-made tiny man popping out of the alchemists' laboratories, fully formed and endowed with language. The alchemists' imagination pushes the premises of the Aristotelian view of procreation to an extreme, stressing the male role in reproduction and minimizing the female function to the role of a mere carrier. Alchemy is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the male fantasy of self-reproduction.

How can a child be of man born? In a recent article, S. G. Allen and J. Hubbs<sup>19</sup> argue that alchemical symbolism rests on a simple process—the appropriation of the womb by male "art," that is to say the artifact of male techniques. Paracelsus, the master theoretician of alchemy, is certain that a man should and could be born outside a woman's body. Womb envy, alias the envy for the matrix or the uterus, reaches paradoxical dimensions in these texts—art being more powerful than nature itself.

The recipe is quite simple, as any reader of *Tristram Shandy* will know. It consists of a mixture of sperm and something to replace the uterus, such as the alchemist's jars and other containers so efficiently

described in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. At other times the matrix is replaced by an ox-hide, or by a mere heap of compost or manure. The basic assumption is that the alchemists can not only imitate the work of woman, they can also do it much better because the artifact, the artificial process of science and technique, perfects the imperfection of the natural course of events and thus avoids mistakes. Once reproduction becomes the pure result of mental efforts, the appropriation of the feminine is complete.

On the imaginary level, therefore, the test-tube babies of today mark the long-term triumph of the alchemists' dream of dominating nature through their self-inseminating, masturbatory practices. What is happening with the new reproductive technologies today is the final chapter in a long history of fantasy of self-generation by and for the men themselves—men of science, but men of the male kind, capable of producing new monsters and fascinated by their power.

Ever since the mid nineteenth century, the abnormal monstrous beings, which had been objects of wonder, have fallen prey to the massive medicalization of scientific discourse. The marvelous, imaginary dimension of the monster is forgotten in the light of the new technologies of the body. Michel Foucault's analysis of modern rationality describes the fundamental shift that has taken place in scientific discourse of the modern era.

By the late eighteenth century, the monster has been transferred to hospital or rather, to the newly established institution of the anatomy clinic, where it could be analyzed in the context of the newly evolved practice of comparative anatomy and experimental biomedicine. Thus is born the science of teratology. Founded by G. Saint-Hilaire, by the end of the century it had become an experimental science. Its aim was to study malformations of the embryo so as to understand in the light of evolutionary theory the genesis of monstrous beings. Notice that the initial curiosity as to the origin of such horrendous creatures remains, but it is expressed differently.

The experimental study of the conditions that would lead to the production of anomalous or monstrous beings provides the basic epistemological structure of modern embryology. Foucault's analysis of modernity emphasizes the epistemological shifts between the normal and the pathological, reason and madness, in terms of the understanding of the body, the bodily roots of human subjectivity. The biomedical

sciences occupy a very significant place in the discursive context of modernity.

Two institutions of learning appear in the modern era—the clinic and the hospital. The appearance of these structures is in turn related to a major theoretical breakthrough—the medical practice of anatomy. In Foucault's archaeological mode, for comparative clinical anatomy to come into being as a scientific discourse, a century-old taboo had to be lifted, the one that forbade the dissection of corpses for the purpose of scientific investigation.

Western culture had respected a fundamental taboo of the body up until then—the medical gaze could not explore the inside of the human body because the bodily container was considered as a metaphysical entity, marked by the secrets of life and death that pertain to the divine being. The anatomical study of the body was therefore forbidden until the fifteenth century and after then was strictly controlled. The nineteenth century sprang open the doors of bodily perception; clinical anatomy thus implies a radical transformation in the epistemological status of the body. It is a practice that consists in deciphering the body, transforming the organism into a text to be read and interpreted by a knowledgeable medical gaze.

Anatomy as a theoretical representation of the body implies that the latter is a clear and distinct configuration, a visible and intelligible structure. The dead body, the corpse, becomes the measure of the living being, and death thus becomes one of the factors epistemologically integrated into scientific knowledge.

Today, the right to scrutinize the inside of the body for scientific purposes is taken for granted, although dissections and the transfer of organs as a practice are strictly regulated by law. As a matter of fact, contemporary molecular biology is making visible the most intimate and minute fires of life.

Where has the Cartesian passion of wonder gone? When compared to the earlier tradition, the medicalization of the body in the age of modernity and its corollary, the perfectibility of the living organism and the gradual abolition of anomalies, can also be seen—though not exclusively—as a form of denial of the sense of wonder, of the fantastic, of that mixture of fascination and horror I have already mentioned. It marks the loss of fascination about the living organism, its mysteries and functions.

Psychoanalytic theory has explained this loss of fascination as the necessary toll that rational theory takes on human understanding. In the psychoanalytic perspective, of Freudian and Lacanian inspiration, the initial curiosity that prompts the drive and the will to know is first and foremost *desire*, which takes knowledge as its object.

The desire to know is, like all desires, related to the problem of representing one's origin, of answering the most childish and consequently fundamental of questions: "where did I come from?" This curiosity, as I stated in the previous chapter, is the matrix for all forms of thinking and conceptualization. Knowledge is always the desire to know about desire, that is to say about things of the body as a sexual entity.

Scientific knowledge becomes, in this perspective, an extremely perverted version of that original question. The desire to go and see how things work is related to primitive sadistic drives, so that, somewhere along the line, the scientist is like the anxious little child who pulls apart his favorite toy to see how it's made inside. Knowing in this mode is the result of the scopophilic drive—to go and see, and the sadistic one—to rip it apart physically so as to master it intellectually. All this is related to the incestuous drive, to the web of curiosity and taboos surrounding the one site of certain origin—the mother's body.

From a psychoanalytic perspective the establishment of clinical comparative anatomy in the modern era is very significant because it points out the rationalistic obsession with visibility, which I have analyzed earlier. Seeing is the prototype of knowing. By elaborating a scientific technique for analyzing the bodily organs, Western sciences put forward the assumption that a body is precisely that which can be seen and looked at, no more than the sum of its parts. Modern scientific rationality slipped from the emphasis on visibility to the mirage of absolute transparency of the living organism, as I have argued previously.

Contemporary biological sciences, particularly molecular biology, have pushed to the extreme these assumptions that were implicit in the discourse of Western sciences. When compared to the clinical anatomy of the nineteenth century, contemporary biomedical sciences have acquired the right and the know-how necessary to act on the very structure of the living matter, on an infinitely small scale.

Foucault defined the modern era as that of biopower; power over life and death in a worldwide extension of man's control of outer space, of the bottom of the oceans as well as of the depths of the maternal body. There are no limits today for what can be shown, photographed, repro-

duced—even a technique such as echography perpetuates this pornographic re-presentation of bodily parts, externalizing the interior of the womb and its content.

The proliferation of images is such that the very notion of the body, of its boundaries and its inner structure is being split open in an ever-regressing vision. We seem to be hell bent on xeroxing even the invisible particles of matter.

Philosophers of science, such as Kuhn and Feyerabend, have stressed the modern predicament in scientific discourse. Kuhn points out the paradoxical coincidence of extreme rationalism of the scientific and technological kind, with a persisting subtext of wild fantastic concoctions. In the discourse of monstrosity, rational enquiries about their origin and structure continue to coexist with superstitious beliefs and fictional representations of “creeps.” The two registers of the rational and the totally nonrational seem to run alongside each other, never quite joined together.

The question nevertheless remains—where has the wonder gone? What has happened to the fantastic dimension, to the horror and the fascination of difference? What images were created of the bodily marks of difference, after they became locked up in the electronic laboratories of the modern alchemists?

Was there another way, other than the phallogocentric incompetence with, and antipathy to, differences—its willful reduction of otherness, to negativity? Is there another way out, still?

## Conjunction 4: The Age of Freaks

As the Latin etymology of the term *monstrum* points out, malformed human beings have always been the object of display, subjected to the public gaze. In his classic study, *Freaks*, Leslie Fiedler<sup>20</sup> analyses the exploitation of monsters for purposes of entertainment. From the county fairs, right across rural Europe to the Coney Island sideshows, freaks have always been entertaining.

Both Fiedler and Bogdan<sup>21</sup> stress two interrelated aspects of the display of freaks since the turn of the century. The first is that their exhibition displays racist and orientalist undertones: abnormally formed people were exhibited alongside tribal people of normal stature and bodily configuration, as well as exotic animals.

Second, the medical profession benefited considerably by examining these human exhibits. Although the freak is presented as belonging to

the realm of zoology or anthropology, doctors and physicians examined them regularly and wrote scientific reports about them.

Significantly, totalitarian regimes such as Hitler's Germany or the Stalinist Soviet Union prohibited the exhibition of freaks as being degenerate specimens of the human species. They also dealt with them in their campaigns for eugenics and race or ethnic hygiene, by preventing them from breeding.

Fiedler sees a connection between the twentieth-century medicalization of monsters, the scientific appropriation of their generative secrets, and an increased commodification of the monster as freak, that is, the object of display.

Contemporary culture deals with anomalies by a fascination for the freaky. The film *Freaks* by Tod Browning (1932) warns us that monsters are an endangered species. Since the sixties a whole youth culture has developed around freaks, with special emphasis on genetic mutation as a sign of nonconformism and social rebellion. Whole popular culture genres such as science fiction, horror, rock'n'roll comics, and cyberpunk are about mutants.

Today, the freaks are science fiction androids, cyborgs, bionic women and men, comparable to the grotesque of former times; the whole rock'n'roll scene is a huge theater of the grotesque, combining freaks, androgynes, satanies, ugliness, and insanity, as well as violence.

In other words, in the early part of our century we watch the simultaneous formalization of a scientific discourse about monsters and their elimination as a problem. This process, which falls under the rationalist aggression of scientific discourse, also operates a shift at the level of representation, and of the cultural imaginary. The dimension of the "fantastic," that mixture of aberration and adoration, loathing and attraction, which for centuries has escorted the existence of strange and difficult bodies, is now displaced. The "becoming freaks" of monsters both deflates the fantastic projections that have surrounded them and expands them to a wider cultural field. The whole of contemporary popular culture is about freaks, just as the last of the physical freaks have disappeared. The last metaphorical shift in the status of monsters—their becoming freaks—coincides with their elimination.

In order not to be too pessimistic about this aspect of the problem, however, I wish to point out that the age of the commodification of freaks is also the period that has resulted in another significant shift: abnormally formed people have organized themselves in the handi-



capped political movement, thereby claiming not only a renewed sense of dignity but also wider social and political rights.<sup>22</sup>

## In Transit; or, For Nomadism

Mothers, monsters, and machines. What is the connection, then? What con/dis-junctions can we make in telling the tale of feminism, science, and technology? How do feminist fabulations or figurations help in figuring out alternative paradigms? To what extent do they speak the language of sexual difference? Where do we situate ourselves in order to create links, construct theories, elaborate hypotheses? Which way do we look to try and see the possible impact modern science will have on the status of women? How do we assess the status of difference as an ontological category at the end of the twentieth century? How do we think about all this?

The term *transdisciplinary* can describe one position taken by feminists. Passing in between different discursive fields, and through diverse spheres of intellectual discourse. The feminist theoretician today can only be "in transit," moving on, passing through, creating connections where things were previously dis-connected or seemed un-related, where there seemed to be "nothing to see." In transit, moving, dis-placing—this is the grain of hysteria without which there is no theorization at all.<sup>23</sup> In a feminist context it also implies the effort to move on to the invention of new ways of relating, of building footbridges between notions. The epistemic nomadism I am advocating can only work, in fact, if it is properly situated, securely anchored in the "in between" zones.

I am assuming here a definition of "rigor" away from the linear Aristotelian logic that dominated it for so long. It seems to me that the rigor feminists are after is of a different kind—it is the rigor of a project that emphasizes the necessary interconnection-connections between the theoretical and the political, which insists on putting real-life experience first and foremost as a criterion for the validation of truth. It is the rigor of passionate investment in a project and in the quest of the discursive means to realize it.

In this respect feminism acts as a reminder that in the postmodern predicament, rationality in its classical mode can no longer be taken as representing the totality of human reason or even of the all-too-human activity of thinking.

By criticizing the single-mindedness and the masculine bias of rationality I do not intend to fall into the opposite and plead for easy ready-made irrationalism. Patriarchal thought has for too long confined women in the irrational for me to claim such a non-quality. What we need instead is a redefinition of what we have learned to recognize as being the structure and the aims of human subjectivity in its relationship to difference, to the "other."

In claiming that feminists are attempting to redefine the very meaning of thought, I am also suggesting that in time the rules of the discursive game will have to change. Academics will have to agree that thinking adequately about our historical condition implies the transcendence of disciplinary boundaries and intellectual categories.

More important, for feminist epistemologists, the task of thinking adequately about the historical conditions that affect the medicalization of the maternal function forces upon us the need to reconsider the inextricable interconnection of the bodily with the technological. The shifts that have taken place in the perception and the representation of the embodied subject, in fact, make it imperative to think the unity of body and machine, flesh and metal. Although many factors point to the danger of commodification of the body that such a mixture makes possible, and although this process of commodification conceals racist and sexist dangers that must not be underestimated, this is not the whole story. There is also a positive side to the new interconnection of mothers, monsters, and machines, and this has to do with the loss of any essentialized definition of womanhood—or indeed even of motherhood. In the age of biotechnological power motherhood is split open into a variety of possible physiological, cultural, and social functions. If this were the best of all possible worlds, one could celebrate the decline of one consensual way of experiencing motherhood as a sign of increased freedom for women. Our world being as male-dominated as it is, however, the best option is to construct a *nomadic* style of feminism that will allow women to rethink their position in a postindustrial, postmetaphysical world, without nostalgia, paranoia, or false sentimentalism. The relevance and political urgency of the configuration "mothers, monsters and machines" makes it all the more urgent for the feminist nomadic thinkers of the world to connect and to negotiate new boundaries for female identity in a world where power over the body has reached an implosive peak.

# Re-figuring the Subject

There are no fragments where there is no whole.

—Martha Rosler, Decade Show,  
New York City, 1990

## The Postmetaphysical Condition

The era commonly referred to as “modernity,” “modernization,” or “modernism” (despite the different implications and nuances of each of these terms) is marked by the changing socioeconomic and discursive conditions in the status of all minorities, especially women. For a number of reasons that I have analyzed elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> the emancipation of women and their integration into not only the labor force but also into an intellectual and political life, has become a pressing necessity in the Western world. The first paradox to explore in a discussion between modernity and the feminist quest is therefore that of a historical period that needs to integrate women socially, economically, and politically, thus reversing the traditional patterns of exclusion and oppression of women.

In this chapter I will adopt a more theoretical approach to this question. I will argue that in this new context the women’s movement has placed on the agenda serious questions as to the structures, the values, and the theoretical foundations of the very system that women, like other minorities, are urged to integrate. The leading line of questioning is both ethico-political and epistemological: what is the exact price to be paid for “integration”? What values shall feminist women propose to the old system? What representations of themselves will they oppose to those already established? One can read the whole of contemporary Western feminism, as well as related and equally complex cultural and political phenomena, such as women’s modernist literature,<sup>2</sup> in the light of this line of questioning.

On the discursive and theoretical level,<sup>3</sup> modernity in the Western world marks the crisis and decline of the classical system of representation of the subject, in the political, epistemological, and ethical sense of the term. The established conventions about what subjectivity is and what it entails are radically challenged by a number of "minorities," who claim representation in the political and discursive sense. In the European postwar intellectual landscape, as I stated in previous chapters, two major schools of thought emerged on the issue of the crisis of modernity: the German critical theory school, represented today by J. Habermas, and the French school, of which Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and Irigaray are leading figures. Both schools have repercussions for feminism, though in my opinion the latter had a larger impact.

One point these two schools have in common is that they subject the notion of the Enlightenment to serious questioning. Both argue that the notion of progress and liberation through an adequate use of reason is to be reexamined in the light of history—particularly in the light of such extreme phenomena in contemporary Western history as totalitarian political systems, genocides, colonialism, and domination. The emphasis on the political need for a revision of the Enlightenment as "myth of liberation through reason" is particularly strong in the work of Foucault and Deleuze.<sup>4</sup> In their perspective, faith in the self-regulating power of reason is, for us moderns, incorrect as a theoretical, political, and ethical position. It must be replaced by a more radical critique of reason from within, that is, by an analysis of its structural limitations as a theoretical and human ideal; this is a point Foucault and Deleuze share with feminism.<sup>5</sup> Critical theory is an ethics that takes the production of knowledge as its central concern.

The two main schools of critical thought also represent two ways of assessing the Enlightenment tradition; if I can summarize brutally a debate that would require a great deal more careful attention:<sup>6</sup> for Habermas the problem, while criticizing scientific rationality, is to safeguard the primacy of reason as a principle, and of modernity as a project that is still open before us. For Foucault, on the other hand, the project of the Enlightenment has come to an end historically—which means that modernity requires new forms of scientific legitimation and new modes of discourse to go with it.

It is also clear that these two schools represent very different readings and conceptual re-elaborations of both Marxist and psychoanalytical theory and, even more importantly, of the connection between those

theories. The tools of analysis they use are radically different—especially on the question of the unconscious and, therefore, of language as a symbolic structure.

I am less interested in working out the exact relationship between these two traditions of critical theory than in stressing their importance and their implications. One of them is that the feminist epistemological debate, marked by issues of gender or sexual difference and the critique of eighteenth-century notions such as “liberation” and “equality,” is both necessary and central to critical theory, be it of the German or French variety. Second, as Evelyn Fox-Keller pointed out,<sup>7</sup> the historical context in which feminism has emerged as theory and practice rests on structural conditions that are conducive to the revision and the extension of the meaning of reason and of scientific rationality. In other words, if the crisis of modernity consists in the decline of the rationalist paradigm, then feminist theory and practice are historically and conceptually coextensive with, or built into, the modernist project. I would go as far as to say, with Alice Jardine,<sup>8</sup> that feminism may even provide modernity with some of its inner coherence.

In other words, I see modernity as the moment of decline of classical rationalism and the view of the subject attached to it. The century-old identification of the subject with his/her rational self is challenged by the new scientific discourses related to changing historical conditions. The very idea of what it means to be human is thrown open to questioning, as Adorno and Foucault, in very different ways, never cease to tell us.

I have already stated my skepticism at the very idea of a “crisis” of the philosophical subject that takes place at the same time as the emergence of feminism as a theoretical and political force, and I have argued for the relevance of French poststructuralism for feminist theory. I have also emphasized the fact that there is little scope within the feminist framework for nihilism or cynical acceptance of the state of crisis as loss and fragmentation. On the contrary, this crisis is taken by women as the opening up of new possibilities and potentialities. It leads women to rethink the link between identity, power, and the community.

Feminist analyses of the “crisis,” therefore, stress its positivity, that is to say the extent to which feminist philosophy allows for alternative values to be postulated.

## Feminism as Philosophy

Feminism as a critical philosophy rests on the assumption that what we used to call "the universal subject of knowledge" is a falsely generalized standpoint. The discourses of science, religion, the law, as well as the general assumptions that govern the production of knowledge, tacitly imply a subject that is male (and also white, middle-class, and heterosexual). If, in a nomadic movement of strategic mimesis, such as Irigaray<sup>9</sup> suggests, this subject is replaced with one that is structured by other variables, such as gender or sexual difference but also ethnicity or race, what used to be seen as "the universal" appears as a most particular and specific approach. This particularity also explains its power of exclusion over categories of people who are deemed "minorities," or "others." What I want to argue, therefore, is that the decline of the universal in the age of modernity, marks the opportunity for the definition of a nomadic standpoint that is based on differences while not being merely relativistic. I shall return to this point in chapter 8 ("Sexual Difference as a Political Project").

In other words, gender is a notion that allows us to think the interdependence of sexual identity and other variables of oppression such as race, age, culture, class, and life-style.

What remains as the constant factor, or point of consensus among the different theories of gender is the critique of dualistic ways of thinking. Classical universalism, which conflates the masculine and the white with the universal and confines the feminine to a secondary position of difference, rests upon an oppositional or dualistic logic. Radical feminists, especially Irigaray, argue that this dualistic mode creates binary differences only to ordain them in a hierarchical scale of power relations.

In what I see as one of the most fruitful aspects of feminist theory, it is further argued that this conceptual scheme has served the purpose of comforting Western culture in the belief in the "natural," that is to say inevitable and therefore historically invariable structure of its system of representation, its myths, symbols, and the dominant vision of the subject.

These new theorists rest accordingly on a vision of the subject as process; they work along the lines of a multiplicity of variables of definition of female subjectivity: race, class, age, sexual preference, and lifestyles count as major axes of identity. They are radically materialistic in that they stress the concrete, "situated" conditions that structure

subjectivity, but they also innovate on the classical notion of materialism, because they redefine female subjectivity in terms of a process network of simultaneous power formations. I will argue next that a new trend seems to be emerging that emphasizes the situated, specific, embodied nature of the feminist subject, while rejecting biological or psychic essentialism. This is a new kind of female embodied materialism.

For instance, Teresa de Lauretis borrows the Foucauldian notion of "technology of the self" to express the material foundations of this vision of the subject and, more important, of the ways in which gender functions<sup>10</sup> as a variable that structures subjectivity.

In other words, what lies at the heart of the redefinition of gender as the technology of the self is the notion of the politics of subjectivity. This has a twofold sense: it refers both to the constitution of identities and to the acquisition of subjectivity, meant as forms of empowerment or entitlements to certain practices. The French term *assujettissement* renders both levels of this process of subjectification: it is both a material and a semiotic process that defines the subject through a number of regulative variables: sex, race, age, and so forth. The acquisition of subjectivity is therefore a process of material (institutional) and discursive (symbolic) practices, the aim of which is both positive—because they allow for forms of empowerment, and regulative—because the forms of empowerment are the site of limitations and disciplining.

To sum up, I would say that at the beginning of the feminist 1990s a paradox has emerged: the paradox of a theory that is based on the very notions of "gender" and "sexual difference," which it is historically bound to criticize on the basis of the new vision of subjectivity as process. Feminist thought rests on a concept that calls for deconstruction and de-essentialization in all of its aspects. More specifically, I think that the central question in feminist theory has become: how to reassemble a vision of female subjectivity after the certainties of gender dualism have collapsed?

The issue at stake is: how do we reconcile the radical historical specificity of women with the insistence on constructing the new figuration of humanity?

Can we speak of and act on differences as positivity, not as deviations, not as subordinated forms of being? How can we build a new kind of collectivity in differences?

## Rhizomatic Figurations

Pursuing an argument I have developed more fully elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> I would like to pursue next the quest for points of intersection between the new feminist thought and contemporary poststructuralist concerns about the structures of subjectivity. My starting point is the assumption that French poststructuralism is relevant for feminism not for what it has to say about women, sexuality, or the body; of rather greater importance is the redefinition of thinking and especially of the theoretical process in a creative or nonreactive manner that accompanies the poststructuralist quest for new visions of subjectivity.

As an example, I will choose Deleuze's effort to "image" the activity of thinking differently. Deleuze shares with feminism a concern for the urgency, the necessity to re-define, re-figure and re-invent theoretical practice, and philosophy with it, in a reactive/sedentary mode. This urgency is due to the crisis of the philosophical logos and the decline of the classical system of representation of the subject. Consequently, the challenge to which Deleuze is trying to respond is how to think about and account for changes and changing conditions: not the staticness of formulated truths, but the living process of transformation of the self.

In his determination to undo the Western style of theoretical thought, Deleuze moves beyond the dualistic oppositions that conjugate the monological discourse of phallogocentrism.

Deleuze stresses the extent to which in Western thought the classical notion of the subject treats difference as a subset of the concept of identity. The subject is defined in terms of sameness, that is to say as equating to a normative idea of a Being that remains one and the same in all its varied qualifications and attributes.

The univocity of metaphysical discourse about the subject has been reproduced by the moral discourse of metaphysics, which rests on a inherently normative image of thought.<sup>12</sup> Modernity is for Deleuze the moment when this image collapses, opening the way to other forms of representation.

What Deleuze aims at is the affirmation of difference in terms of a multiplicity of possible differences; difference as the positivity of differences. In turn, this leads him to redefine consciousness in terms of a multiplicity of layers of experience that does not privilege rationality as the organizing principle. In his attempt to overcome the classical idea of the subject as coinciding with his/her consciousness, Deleuze emphasizes the unconscious as a creative field, in other words, the



unconscious not as the deep container of yet unknown sources but rather as marking the structural noncoincidence of the subject with his/her consciousness. This noncoincidence is a radical disjunction that separates the thinking subject from the normative image of thought based on the phallogocentric system.

The rejection of the principle of equation to and identification with a phallogocentric image of thought lies at the heart of the nomadic vision of subjectivity that Deleuze proposes as the new, postmetaphysical *figuration* of the subject. Deleuze argues and acts upon the idea that the activity of thinking cannot and must not be reduced to reactive (Deleuze says sedentary) critique. Thinking can be critical, if by critical we mean the active, assertive process of inventing new images of thought—beyond the old icon where thinking and being joined hands together under the Sphynxlike smile of the sovereign Phallus. Thinking is life lived at the highest possible power—thinking is about finding new images, new representations. Thinking is about change and transformation.

The notion of “rhizome” is Deleuze’s leading figuration; as I noted earlier, it points to a redefinition of the activity of philosophy as the quest for new images of thought, better suited to a nomadic, disjuncted self. An idea is an active state of very high intensity, which opens up hitherto unsuspected possibilities of life and action. For Deleuze, ideas are events, lines that point human thought toward new horizons. An idea is that which carries the affirmative power of life to a higher degree.

For Deleuze, thought is made of sense and value; it is the force, or level of intensity, that fixes the value of thought, not the equation of an idea to a preestablished normative model. Deleuze’s rhizomatic style brings to the fore the affective foundations of the thinking process. It is as if beyond/behind the propositional content of an idea there lay another category: the affective force, level of intensity, desire or affirmation, which conveys the idea and ultimately governs its truth-value. Thinking, in other words, is to a very large extent unconscious in that it expresses the desire to know, and this desire is that which cannot be adequately expressed in language, simply because it is what sustains it as its prelinguistic condition. With this intensive theory of the thinking process, Deleuze points to the prephilosophical, that is to say affective, foundations of philosophy.

This impersonal style is rather “postpersonal” in that it allows for a

web of connections to be drawn, not only in terms of the author's "intentions" and the reader's "reception" but also in a much wider, more complex set of possible interconnections that blur established, that is to say hegemonic, distinctions of class, culture, race, sexual practice, and others. The image of the rhizome pops up here as a figuration for the kind of political subjectivity Deleuze is promoting.

In other words, as interlocutors in a Deleuzian philosophical text, we—as post-Enlightenment thinkers—are expected to be readers in an intensive mode; we are transformers of intellectual energy, processors of the "insights" Deleuze is giving us. These "in"-sights are not to be thought of as plunging us inwards, toward a mythical "inner" reservoir of truth nor are they manifestations of a phallogocentric "gaze" of disembodied order. On the contrary, they are represented as propelling us along the multiple directions of extratextual experiences, of multiple becomings. Thinking is living at a higher degree, a faster pace, a multi-directional manner.

This philosophical stance imposes not only the conventional academic requirements of neutrality but also the passionate engagement in the recognition of the theoretical and discursive implications of rethinking the subject. It is all a question of what kind of rhizomatic connections we can draw among ourselves, here and now, in the act of doing philosophy.

In the next section I will argue that Deleuze's concerns are both echoed and redesigned politically by contemporary feminist theory, taking the case of Donna Haraway as exemplary.

## Cyborg-Feminism as Anti-Relativism

Three notions are crucial to Donna Haraway's radical postmodernism, and they all have to do with transformations in both an ethical and an epistemological sense. First, the notion of feminist theory is redefined in terms of nontaxonomical *figurations*; second, feminist subjectivity is reconceptualized as *cyborg*; and third, scientific objectivity is redefined as *situated knowledges*.

If the term *postmodernism* means anything, Haraway offers a convincing example of positive postmodernist situated epistemology. Taking as her main point of reference the impact of the new technologies (microelectronics, telecommunication, and video games—including video wars) on the condition of women in society, Haraway stresses the importance of the global village, which implies a new wave of offshore

and electronic cottage industries, most of which employ women.<sup>13</sup> Reflecting on the changes that this new system of production imposes on society at large, Haraway challenges feminists to respond to the political and conceptual complexity of their times.

In her analysis, the significant fact about the 1990s is the existence of biotechnologies, that is to say the power attained by devices that take "life" and "the living organisms" as object. A great deal of this technology is optical, having to do with increased powers of vision. Nowadays, as I argue in previous chapters, the biotechnological gaze has penetrated into the intimate structure of living matter, seeing the invisible and representing what used to be "unrepresentable." Haraway's focus is on the notion of the body as situated knowledge and the visual as location of power.

Firmly implanted in the tradition of materialism, Haraway reminds us that thinking about the subject amounts to rethinking his/her bodily roots. The body is not a biological given but a field of inscription of sociosymbolic codes: it stands for the radical materiality of the subject. Following Foucault,<sup>14</sup> Haraway draws our attention to the construction and manipulation of docile, knowable bodies in our present social system. She invites us to think of what new kinds of bodies are being constructed right now, that is, what kind of gender system is being constructed under our very eyes.

In a Foucauldian analysis, as I have stated earlier, the contemporary body is a paradox: on the one hand, it is merely an empirical notion, meant as the sum of its organic and therefore detachable parts. This is the notion of "the body" at work in all the biosciences, and it is historically linked to the classical discourse on clinical anatomy.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the body remains as the foundation of subjectivity. The discourse of psychoanalysis stresses this point: the body as libidinal surface, field of forces, screen of imaginary projections, site of constitution of identity.

However, while she shares many of these French epistemological premises, Haraway at the same time challenges Foucault's analysis of "biopower" or power over the body. Supporting Jameson's idea that a postmodernist politics is made necessary by the historical collapse of the traditional left, and that it represents the left's chance to reinvent itself from within, Haraway notes that contemporary power does not work by normalized heterogeneity anymore but rather by networking, communication, and multiple interconnections. She concludes that

Foucault "names a form of power at its moment of implosion. The discourse of biopolitics gives way to technobabble."<sup>16</sup>

Two points are noteworthy here: first that Haraway analyzes the contemporary scientific revolution in more radical terms than Foucault does, mostly because she bases it on first-hand knowledge about today's technology. Haraway's training in biology and the sociology of science are very useful here. By comparison with her approach, Foucault's analysis of the disciplining of bodies appears already out of date (let alone the fact that it is intrinsically androcentric).

Second, Haraway suggests a point that I think worthy of further development, namely that the Foucauldian diagrams of power describe what we have already ceased to be; like all cartography, they act *a posteriori* and therefore fail to account for the situation here and now. In this respect, Haraway opposes to Foucault's strategy of biopower an approach based on the deconstructive genealogy of the embodied subjectivities of women. The notion of "women's experience" and the constant reference to feminist theory—a field of which Foucault is totally ignorant—helps Haraway to draw up a sort of psychopathology of this end of millennium.

Whereas Foucault's analysis rests on a nineteenth-century view of the production system, Haraway inscribes her analysis of the condition of women into an up-to-date analysis of the postindustrial system of production. Arguing that white capitalist patriarchy has turned into the domination by information technology, Haraway thinks that women have been cannibalized by the new technologies, that they have disappeared from the field of visible social agents. The postindustrial system makes oppositional mass politics utterly redundant; a new politics must be invented, on the basis of a more adequate understanding of how the contemporary subject functions in the postindustrial power framework.

More specifically, her question then becomes: what counts as human in this post-human world? How to re-think the unity of the human subject, without reference to humanistic beliefs, without dualistic oppositions, linking instead body and mind in a new flux of self? What is the view of the self that is operational in the world where computer science dominates?

Haraway takes very seriously the point that contemporary feminism rests on the very signifier "woman," which it must deconstruct in order to prevent its exclusionary and normative effects. As I state in chapter 2, feminists in the 1990s must replace naive belief in global sisterhood or

more strategic alliances based on common interests, with a new kind of politics, based on temporary and mobile coalitions and therefore on *affinity*. Arguing that the insistence on victimhood as the only ground for political legitimation has done enough damage, Haraway calls for a kind of feminist politics that could embrace "partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves."<sup>17</sup>

The central question here is the extent to which sexual difference meant as the difference that women can make to society,—that is, not as a naturally or historically given difference, but as an open-ended project to be constructed—also allows women to think of all their other differences. Foremost among these differences are race, class, age, and sexual lifestyles. The female subject of feminism is constructed across a multiplicity of discourses, positions, and meanings, which are often in conflict with one another; therefore the signifier *woman* is no longer sufficient as the foundational stone of the feminist project.

This is linked to the problem of how to go beyond the particular. Can women be represented as a collective political and epistemological subject? If the universal necessitates neutrality, the question then becomes not so much how to think sexual difference as positivity (Irigaray) but rather how to avoid essentialism and biological or psychic determinism in the feminist project to redefine female subjectivity.

Haraway invites us instead to think of the community as being built on the basis of a commonly shared foundation of collective figures of speech, or foundational myths. These myths, which are also purposeful tools for intervention in reality, are figurations in that they make an impact on our imagination, but they are also forms of situated knowledge. In other words, feminism is about grounding, it is about foundations and about political myths.

It is within this framework that Haraway proposes a new figuration for feminist subjectivity: the *cyborg*. As a hybrid, or body-machine, the cyborg is a connection-making entity, it is a figure of interrelationality, receptivity, and global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions (human/machine; nature/culture; male/female; oedipal/nonoedipal). It is a way of thinking specificity without falling into relativism. The cyborg is Haraway's representation of a generic feminist humanity; it is her answer to the question of how feminists reconcile the radical historical specificity of women with the insistence on constructing new values that can benefit humanity as a whole.

To understand how Haraway's "cyborg-feminism" fits into the post-modernist debate, let us compare two figurations: not just two rhetorical figures of speech but also two representations of political struggle, two different ways to deal with feminist critiques of rationality. The first is Haraway's "cyborg," the second is Gena Corea's "mother-machine,"<sup>18</sup> the artificial breeder or fertility farm, which Corea criticizes in terms of "the reproductive brothel."

As I have already stated, the first figuration embodies a positive, friendly vision of the body-machine relationship in our high-tech world, and throws open a brand new set of innovative epistemological and ethical questions. As a political manifesto, the cyborg renews the language of political struggle, moving away from the tactic of head-on confrontations in favor of a more specific and diffuse strategy based on irony, diagonal attacks, and coalitions on the basis of affinity. Not unlike other contemporary movements of thought, the cyborg aims at reconceptualizing the human being as an embodied and yet nonunified, and therefore non-Cartesian, entity.

The second image—the mother machine—embodies a negative and rather hostile view of the body-machine relation, stressing its potential for exploitation and manipulation. It therefore highlights the need for a politics of opposition. It puts into question the liberating force of scientific reason and its impact on the relationship between the sexes in our society. Haraway defends a vision of the body as machine as an image of the multiple, de-naturalized subject. On the other hand, Corea expresses in dramatic terms the fear that the body, especially the woman's, might become just a machine. In both cases, there is a powerful question mark about the future of science and technology and their repercussions on gender differences. These two images can be taken as two aspects of the debate about the status of rationality in feminist epistemology.

The pioneer work of Gena Corea and others has brought to our attention the dangers and the costs of reproductive technologies for women. On the political front, the concern is shared by all. Among other things, the debate over artificial reproduction has contributed to the neoconservative campaign in favor of the rights of the fetus and even of embryos, thus contributing to the antiabortionist frenzy.

Many feminist theoreticians are also concerned by the gap that these technologies open between "real" women—and particularly "sterile" women who seek biomedical help to reproduce—and the feminists

who criticize biotechnologies. This gap is often unfairly represented by the media as a conflict of interests between the "real" women who seek motherhood and the bad girls—feminists who are allegedly against it.

It is important to keep in mind the fact that this debate has quite a long history in feminism: in the seventies, Shulamith Firestone's Marxist utopia<sup>19</sup> of reproductive technologies as liberating women from their anatomical destiny, struck an optimistic note that was subsequently rejected by the more ecologically minded new generations. The work of theologians on empowering the female potential for creativity and nurturance and the ecofeminists' naturalist rejection of technology set the tone for the feminist position through the eighties. Gena Corea's negative analysis falls in between the two.

One of the things at stake in this entire debate is how to assess the tradition of the Enlightenment, that is, the grand rationalist tradition that wove together, in a teleological process, reason, history, and the ideal of social progress. In other words, one of the great theoretical dividing lines in feminist epistemology seems to be between those who claim that feminism is an alternative science project, capable of enlarging the scope of scientific rationality, and those who believe that meaningful change can only come by down-playing the very notion of reason.

The political implications are quite far-reaching; the modernist school (Corea) believes in the historical complicity between reason and domination, rationality and oppression. It also asserts that this complicity can be corrected by appropriate social pressure and that it is not endemic to rationality as such (women can act as a pressure group to change science).

The other position (Haraway) consists in pointing out precisely the structural, implicit complicity of rationality with domination, and both of these with masculinity. The historical necessity of freeing scientific rationality from its hegemonic connotations therefore requires fundamental internal transformations that will not leave the structure of scientific thought untouched. According to this framework, one can speak of the historical decline of rationality as a scientific and human ideal.

I would add that to argue for a structural, implicit link between Western reason and domination—in terms of race, class, or sex—and to argue for the need to dismantle such a link, amounts to putting rationality back in its place. Once the idea of reason as a set of God-given principles is set aside, the road is open to the deconstruction of the con-

ceptual dichotomies on which reason rested. But what are we going to put in its place?

Are feminists closet humanists, wanting to rescue what is left of rationality, needing some realist theory of discourse, or an alternative female religion? Or can they adopt a radical form of epistemology that denies access to a real world and to a final truth, attempting to approach discourse analysis in a problematic mode? What is the image of thought—the representation of the act of thinking—which best represents the feminist theoretical corpus: the postmodern affinity to a cyborg, or the modernist fear of the artificial mother-machine?

To come back to these two images—the cyborg and the mother-machine—I would say that the opposition between them is real conceptually and less so politically. As Haraway has pointed out herself, the political struggle consists in seeing the problem of scientific rationality from both the perspectives of domination and of liberation. The political struggle of women for control of the reproductive technologies, in other words, does not necessarily lead to feminist rejections of science and technology. I think that it is at this point that Haraway's approach goes beyond the oppositional logic and opens up new paths of reflection.

The cyborg as an epistemological model is, in my opinion, a perfectly adequate one in so far as it breaks down the dualistic barriers between the body and its technological and technical supports. The "mother-machine" model, on the other hand, upholds the dualistic opposition and calls for a confrontational kind of politics that is totally inadequate in this historical time of information technology.

Moreover, the cyborg model implies a vision of the body that is neither physical nor mechanical, nor just textual. The cyborg functions rather as a counterparadigm for the bodily intersection with external reality; it is an adequate reading not only of the body, not only of machines but rather of what goes on between them. As a new functional replacement of the mind/body split, the cyborg is a postmetaphysical construct.

Metaphysics is not an abstract construction, it is a political ontology; the classical dualism body/soul is not simply a gesture of separation and of hierarchical coding, it is also a theory about their interaction, about how they hang together: it is a proposition about how we should go about thinking about the fundamental unity of the human being. What is at stake here is the definition and the political viability of materialism.



The postmodernist epistemological project is not specifically feminist, though feminism has contributed historically to creating the a priori conditions for the decline of the universal, rationalist paradigm. The specificity of the feminist standpoint is in terms of gender differences and of gender-specific analyses, but everything in feminist theory and practice makes it capable of elaborating general theoretical frameworks.

Whereas for the modernists, a world beyond gender will be a concentration camp for women, a form of "gendercide" (as Corea puts it) that would flatten out all differences, replacing women with artificial uteruses, Haraway warns us that, our techno-world being what it is, the future of feminist politics will depend to a large extent on how women *negotiate* the transition to high-tech motherhood. Leaving behind naturalistic nostalgia, and paranoid fears, Haraway calls for the ethics of modernity as the starting point: in such a context, women must work through the issue of their implication with technology and face up to its complexity. This is a call for the courage of living up to the historical as well as epistemological contradictions of postmodernity.

In keeping with the positive, creative approach that characterizes feminist postmodernism and differentiates it from nihilistic or nostalgic reactions to the crisis of the philosophical subject, Haraway seizes the opportunities offered by this historical context in order to redesign the parameters of a new vision of the subject, which takes gender into account but does not stop there.

The central concern here is not only the epistemological issue of scientific revolutions but also how fiction (the imagination) and science (logos) can be recombined in a new unity. What can be of most help in taking the leap across the postmodern void, with its corollary the postindustrial loss of political creed—mythos or logos? The challenge is how to speak cogently of the techno-scientific world, while maintaining a certain level of mythical wonder and admiration about it. We simply need new forms of literacy in order to decode today's world.

Haraway recommends that we start rethinking the world as other, as semiosis, that is, a semiotic-material agent with which we interact so as to produce knowledge, as opposed to getting locked in a relationship of mastery and domination. Theory is corporeal, bodily, literal, figurative, not metaphorical. One cannot know properly, or even begin to understand, that toward which one has no affinity. Intelligence is sympathy.

One should never criticize that which one is not complicitous with; criticism turns into a nonreactive mode, a creative gesture.

All other differences notwithstanding—and they are considerable—I see a coalition of interests between feminist figurations of a posthuman subjectivity and Deleuze's positive reaction to the decline of phallogocentrism, with his emphasis on rhizomatic thinking. Both stress the need to work on transforming the very image of thought and of subjectivity as an intensive, multiple, and discontinuous process of becoming.

# Discontinuous Becomings: Deleuze on the Becoming- Woman of Philosophy

For us . . . there are as many sexes as there are terms in symbiosis, as many differences as elements contributing to a process of contagion. We know that many beings pass between a man and a woman; they come from different worlds, are born on the wind, form rhizomes around roots; they cannot be understood in terms of production, only in terms of becoming.

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

The concept of “becoming” is central to Deleuze’s philosophical concerns. It is linked to his stated aim of imaging the activity of thinking differently, that is, redefining the scene of philosophy.

Deleuze’s notion of becoming is adapted from Nietzsche; it therefore is deeply anti-Hegelian. Becoming is neither the dynamic opposition of opposites nor the unfolding of an essence in a teleologically ordained process leading to a synthesizing identity.<sup>1</sup> The Deleuzian becoming is the affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation. Both teleological order and fixed identities are relinquished in favor of a flux of multiple becoming.

This emphasis on processes, dynamic interaction, and fluid boundaries is a materialist, high-tech brand of vitalism, which makes Deleuze’s thought highly relevant to the analysis of the late industrialist patriarchal culture we inhabit.

The focus of Deleuze's work is very much on the present and more especially on the difficulty of and the necessity for thinking the present. This emphasis on actuality must be read in the background of Deleuze's stern rejection of the canonized, institutionalized history of philosophy as a tradition based on the past and bent upon upholding it.

In his effort to move beyond the dogmatic image of thought upheld by this tradition, that expresses the monological discourse of phallogocentrism, Deleuze redefines philosophy as the nonreactive activity of thinking the present, the actual moment, so as to account adequately for change and changing conditions.

In his quest for postmetaphysical figurations of the subject, Deleuze also redefines the philosophical idea in intensive terms as a flow of intensity, capable of carrying the affirmative power of life to a higher degree. Accordingly, as I point out in the previous chapter, thinking is not for Deleuze the expression of in-depth interiority, or the enactment of transcendental models; it is a way of establishing concrete material and semiotic connections among subjects that are conceived in terms of a multiplicity of impersonal forces.

This intensive redefinition of the activity of thought entails in fact a vision of subjectivity as a bodily, affective entity. The embodiedness of the subject is for Deleuze a form of bodily materiality, not of the natural, biological kind. He rather takes the body as the complex interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces. The body is not an essence, let alone a biological substance; it is a play of forces, a surface of intensities; pure simulacra without originals.

The embodied subject is a term in a process of intersecting forces (affects), spatio-temporal variables that are characterized by their mobility, changeability, and transitory nature. In this sense, his work does not rest upon a dichotomous opposition of masculine and feminine subject positions but rather on a multiplicity of sexed subjectivities. The differences in degree between them mark different lines of becoming, in a web of rhizomic connections.

A kind of order or apparent progression can be established for the segments of becoming in which we find ourselves; becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming animal, vegetable, or mineral; becoming-molecular of all kinds, becoming-particles.<sup>2</sup>

These lines of becoming are diagrams of thought, Nietzschean typologies of ideas, variations on intensive states. Multiplicity does not reproduce one single model—in the Platonic mode—but rather creates

and multiplies differences. Deleuze posits the idea of a minority consciousness as opposed to molecular rationality to defend this view of the subject as a flux of successive becomings.

In identifying the points of exit from the phallogocentric modes of thought, toward a new, intensive image of philosophy, Deleuze stresses the need for new images of thought.

This results in the elaboration of a new philosophical style that aims at expressing new, postmetaphysical figurations of the subject. The notion of the *figural* (as opposed to the more conventional aesthetic category of the "figurative") is central to this project;<sup>3</sup> it stresses the need for a positive, assertive style of thought, which expresses an active state of being.

In his *Nietzsche et la philosophie*,<sup>4</sup> Deleuze describes the activity of thinking as life lived at the highest possible level of intensity. In this framework, ideas are events, active states that open up unsuspected possibilities of life. Faithful to his topology of forces, Deleuze argues that thought is made of sense and values and that it rests on affective foundations. In other words, beyond the propositional content of an idea, there lies another category: the affective force, the level of intensity that ultimately determines its truth-value.

Alternative figurations consequently are figural modes of expressing affirmative ideas, thus displacing the vision of consciousness away from the phallogocentric mode: rhizomes, becomings, lines of escape express the fundamentally Nietzschean nomadism of Deleuze. He emphasizes in particular a general becoming-minority, or becoming-nomad, or becoming-molecular. The minority marks a crossing or a trajectory; nothing happens at the center, for Deleuze: the heart of being is still, like the center of a nuclear reactor. But at the periphery there roam the youthful gangs of the new nomads: the horsemen and the horsewomen of the postapocalypse.

All becomings are already molecular. That is because becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to proportion formal relations. Neither of these two figures of analogy is applicable to becoming: neither the imitation of a subject nor the proportionality of a form. Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movements and rest, speed and slowness, that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes.<sup>5</sup>

The space of becoming is therefore a space of affinity and symbiosis between adjacent particles. Proximity is both a topological and a quantitative notion, which marks the space of becoming of sensitive matter, independently of the subjects involved and their determined forms.

Deleuze's theory of becoming, however, displays a double pull, which I find problematic. On the one hand, the becoming-minority/nomad/molecular/woman is posited as the general figuration for the new philosophical subjectivity. On the other hand, however, not all the forms taken by the process of becoming are equivalent. Let us analyze this argument carefully.

Insofar as man, the male, is the main referent for thinking subjectivity, the standard-bearer of the Norm, the Law, the Logos, woman is dualistically, that is, oppositionally, positioned as the "other." The consequences accordingly are that: (a) there is no possible becoming-minority of man; (b) the becoming-woman is a privileged position for the minority-consciousness of all.

Deleuze explicitly states that all the lines of deterritorialization go necessarily through the stage of "becoming-woman." In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze states that the "devenir-femme" is not just any other form of becoming minority but rather is the key, the precondition, and the necessary starting point for the whole process of becoming.

The becoming-woman is necessarily the crucial step in so far as woman is the privileged figure of otherness in Western discourse. "Although all becomings are already molecular, including becoming-woman, it must be said that all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman."<sup>6</sup>

The reference to "woman" in the process of "becoming-woman," however, does not refer to empirical females but rather to topological positions, levels or degrees of affirmation of positive forces, and levels of nomadic, rhizomatic consciousness. The becoming woman is the marker for a general process of transformation:

There is a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, that do not resemble the woman or the child as clearly distinct entities. . . . What we term a molecular entity is, for example, the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions an assigned as a subject. Becoming-woman is not imitating this entity or even transforming oneself into it. . . . Not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemi-

ninity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman, create the molecular woman.<sup>7</sup>

I would like to point out bluntly the kind of difficulty Deleuze gets into with his theory of the becoming woman: it is as if all becomings were equal, but some were more equal than others.

The problem for Deleuze is how to disengage the subject position "woman" from the dualistic structure that opposes it to the masculine norm, thereby reducing it to a mirror image of the same. In other words, set against the molecular or sedentary vision of woman as an operator of the phallogocentric system, Deleuze proposes the molecular or nomadic woman as process of becoming.

The rejection of sexual polarizations or of gender dichotomy as the prototype of the dualistic reduction of difference to a subcategory of being affects Deleuze's treatment of the becoming-woman. Considering also the emphasis that Deleuze places on decolonizing the embodied subject from the sexual dualism on which the phallus has erected its document and monuments, it does follow that for him the primary movement of renewal of the subject is the dissolution of gender dichotomies and of the identities that rest upon them.

This results in a confrontation between Deleuze's theories of multiplicity and becoming-minority and feminist theories of sexual difference and of becoming subject of women.

To put it in more feminist terms, the problem is also how to free "woman" from the subjugated position of annexed "other," so as to make her expressive of a different difference, of pure difference, of an entirely new plane of becoming, out of which differences can multiply and differ from each other.<sup>8</sup> Here the focus is more on the experience and the potential becoming of real-life women, in all of their diverse ways of understanding and inhabiting the subject position of "woman."<sup>9</sup>

To attempt a synthesis between the two positions, I would say that what is at stake is how to make "woman" the referent of the intensity of becoming of all, but especially of women and not the necessarily self-effacing servant at the banquet of the Socratic club. For me it is unthinkable that the question of the deconstruction of phallogocentrism could be disconnected from the concrete changes taking place in women's lives. The two questions: "How to free woman from the icon function to which phallogocentrism has confined her?" and "How to express a different, positive vision of female subjectivity?" are inseparable.

Let me develop this position further.

The becoming-woman of women is the subversive process; Deleuze uses it also, however, as the basis for a critique of feminism. He complains that feminists display the irritating tendency to refuse to dissolve the subject "woman" into a series of transformative processes that pertain to a generalized and "postgender" becoming. In other words, feminists are conceptually mistaken, though they are politically right, in their assertion of a specifically feminine sexuality. Deleuze suggests that they should instead draw on the multisexed structure of the subject and claim back all the sexes of which women have been deprived; emphasis on the feminine is restrictive.

Thus women would be revolutionary if, in their becoming, they contributed both socially and theoretically to constructing a non-oedipal woman, by freeing the multiple possibilities of desire meant as positivity and affirmation. Women, in other words, can be revolutionary subjects only to the extent that they develop a consciousness that is not specifically feminine, dissolving "woman" into the forces that structure her. The ultimate aim is to achieve not a sex-specific identity but rather the dissolution of identity into an impersonal, multiple, machinelike subject.

This new general configuration of the feminine as the post, or rather un-oedipal subject of becoming, is explicitly opposed to what Deleuze sees as the feminist configuration of a new universal based on extreme sexualization or rather an exacerbation of the sexual dichotomy.<sup>10</sup>

I feel quite unconvinced by this call for the dissolution of sexed identities by neutralization of gender dichotomies, because I think that this road is historically dangerous for women. I shall return to this point in the next chapter. For instance, the feminist philosopher Irigaray, in her defense of sexual difference against a hasty dismissal or deconstruction by the postmetaphysical subject, refers negatively to the Deleuzian diagram of the desiring machines. The notion of "the body without organs" is for Irigaray reminiscent of a condition of dispossession of the bodily self, a structurally splintered position that is historically associated with femininity. She points out that the emphasis on the machinelike, the inorganic, as well as the notions of loss of self, dispersion, and fluidity are all too familiar to women; is not the "body without organs" women's own historical condition?<sup>11</sup> Irigaray's critique of Deleuze is radical; she points out that the dispersal of sexuality into a generalized "becoming" results in undermining the feminist claims to a redefinition of the female subject.



Developing this insight further, I have subsequently argued that one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never controlled. Self-determination is the first step of any program of deconstruction. I concluded that Deleuze gets caught in the contradiction of postulating a general "becoming-woman" that fails to take into account the historical and epistemological specificity of the female feminist standpoint. A theory of difference that fails to take into account sexual difference leaves me as a feminist critic in a state of skeptical perplexity.

I do not mean to suggest, of course, that Deleuze does not have excellent reasons for doing so; the critique of psychoanalytic discourse, which he shared with Guattari, is one systematic deconstruction of institution of sexuality and sexed identities such as our culture has constructed them. It is therefore no wonder that in his theory of the becoming-minority Deleuze argues for the dissolution of all identities based on the phallus.

Moreover, by dissolving the subject in a flux of desire without negativity, Deleuze: (a) does not recognize any priority to sexual difference, therefore attributing the same psychic and political gestures to men and women alike; (b) gets stuck on a fundamental ambivalence about the position of sexual difference within the project of "becoming-woman," which is both one of many possible becomings and the one through

Nevertheless, in a feminist perspective, there are three sets of inter-related problems with Deleuze's position: (1) an inconsistent approach to the issue of the "becoming-woman"; (2) the reduction of sexual difference to one variable among many, which can and should be dissolved into a generalized and gender-free becoming; and (3) an assumption of symmetry in the speaking stances of the two sexes. Let me explore briefly each one of these.

First, Deleuze is not consistent enough in thinking through the problem of the "becoming-woman"; rather, he proceeds in a contradictory manner about it. In this respect, he is (paradoxically) reminiscent of Freud's dilemma over the "dark continent" of femininity and its exact function in the structures of the unconscious.

Deleuze actually knows this quite well and even acknowledges it; in *A Thousand Plateaus* he shows both awareness and hesitation on this point. He writes: "It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molecular politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity . . . . But it is dangerous to con-

fine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow.<sup>12</sup> It is the position of "yes, but . . .," or "I know what you mean, but . . .," and this is the mode of denial, that is to say of a structural and systematic indecision.

Second, from a perspective of feminist philosophies of difference, sexual difference cannot be considered as one difference among many but rather as a founding, fundamental structural difference, on which all others rest and that cannot be dissolved easily. Contrary to Deleuze's ambivalent attitude toward the position of sexed identities in the scale of possible becomings, however, feminist philosophers lucidly state that sexuality is the site of power struggles and of contradictions. In other words, that the signifier *woman* be both the concept around which feminists have gathered in the recognition of a general practical identity, and that it be also the very concept that needs to be analyzed critically and eventually deconstructed, is no contradiction, but rather a suitable description of the historical condition of women in postmodern late capitalism.

Third, Deleuze proceeds as if there were clear equivalence in the speaking positions of the two sexes, as if—all other differences notwithstanding—the masculine or feminine speaking positions shared, if not the starting point, the same point of exit from the phallogocentric mode.

Deleuze consequently omits any reference to and consequently fails to take seriously what I see as the central point of the feminist revindication of sexual difference, namely that there is no symmetry between the sexes. This dissymmetry functions at the psychic, conceptual, but also at the political level; it implies that the points of exit from the monological position of being—in the phallogocentric mode that has been institutionalized by philosophical discourse—are dissymmetrical in the two sexes as well. Let me develop this point.

The assertion of the positivity of sexual difference challenges the century-old identification of the thinking subject with the universal and of both of them with the masculine. It posits as radically other a female, sexed, thinking subject, who stands in an dissymmetrical relationship to the masculine. Given that there is no symmetry between the sexes, women must speak the feminine—they must think it, write it, and represent it in their own terms. The apparent repetition or reassertion of feminine positions is a discursive strategy that engenders difference. I shall return to this in a later chapter.

It is precisely on the basis of the dissymmetry between the sexes that Irigaray, while remaining very close conceptually to Deleuze's structures of thought, and especially his emphasis on the positive role of the unconscious in the production of theoretical discourse, is nonetheless politically opposed to his proposal of "becoming" as a way of overcoming sexual bipolarization. Where the two differ, in other words, is in the political priority that must be granted to the elaboration of adequate systems of representation for an alternative female subject.

We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine." . . . Subjectivity denied to woman: indisputably this provides the financial backing for every irreducible constitution as an object: of representation, of discourse, of desire. Once imagine that woman imagines and the object loses its fixed, obsessional character. As a bench mark that is ultimately more crucial than the subject, for he can sustain himself only by bouncing off some objectiveness, some objective. If there is no more "earth" to press down/repress, to work, to represent, but also and always to desire (for one's own), no opaque matter which in theory does not know herself, then what pedestal remains for the existence of the "subject"?<sup>13</sup>

In this perspective, which I would describe as a radical feminist bodily materialism, the woman, like the earth, is the basic stratum on which the multilayered institution of phallogocentric subjectivity is erected. She is the primary matter and the foundational stone, whose silent presence installs the master in his monologic mode.

In the feminist analysis, in other words, women's position as designated other is radicalized into the "politics of location," that is, into a speaking stance that is incommensurable with that of man. Feminists have argued that women have borne both materially and symbolically the costs of the masculine privilege of autonomous self-definition. Women have been physically and symbolically dispossessed of a place from whence to speak. By raising the question of whether the links between reason and exclusion/domination are implicit and therefore inevitable, feminists have questioned the idea of rationality. They have therefore challenged the equation between being and logocentric language.

Feminist philosophy is the critique of the power in/as discourse and the active endeavor to create other ways of thinking; it is the engagement in the process of learning to think differently.

There are a number of conceptual—and not only political—differences between Deleuze and the feminist philosophy of difference. Feminism as critical thought is a self-reflexive mode of analysis, aimed at articulating the critique of power in discourse with the affirmation of alternative forms of subjectivity. It aims at the articulation of questions of individual gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity. The interaction of identity with subjectivity also spells out the categorical distinction between dimensions of experience that are marked by desire, and therefore the unconscious, and others that are rather subjected to wailful self-regulation.

The vision of the subject as an interface of will with desire is therefore the first step in the process of rethinking the foundations of subjectivity. It amounts to saying that what sustains the entire process of becoming-subject, is the will to know, the desire to say, the desire to speak, to think, and to represent. In the beginning there is only the *desire to*, which is also the manifestation of a latent knowledge about desire. Desire is that which, being a *a priori* condition for thinking, is in excess of the thinking process itself.

This is why I want to argue that the task of thinking about new forms of female subjectivity, through the project of sexual difference understood as the expression of women's desire to exit from identities based on the phallus, implies the transformation of the very structures and images of thought, not just the propositional content of the thoughts. Thinking through the question of sexual difference implies the reformulation of the relation of thought to life and also of thought to philosophy. In other words: sexual difference opens out toward the redefinition of general structures of thought, not only female-specific ones.

I repeat, Deleuze's "becoming-woman" amalgamates men and women into a new, supposedly beyond gender, sexuality; this is problematic, because it clashes with women's sense of their own historical struggles. I want to stress the extent to which the time factor is important here.

You may recall the distinction Deleuze makes between the longer, molecular time of becoming (*aion*) and the continuous sense of recorded time (*chronos*). If we apply this distinction to the discussion of the becoming-woman, we could argue that, on the level of *chronos*, women, at this point in history, are legitimate in claiming a redefinition of their political subjectivity and identity and simply cannot afford to let go of their sexual-specific forms of political agency. Deleuze seems to suggest this quite strongly in the passage I have quoted. It also follows

from the same argument that, in order to demystify categories based on the phallus, one must first have gained a location from whence to speak. Fragmentation being women's historical condition, we are left with the option of either disagreeing with Deleuze's theory of becoming, or of flatly stating that women have been Deleuzian since the beginnings of time (in the sense of *chronos*).

Again, I find that Deleuze does not cross the time variable with the other, just as powerful, variable of sexual difference, thus failing to contemplate the possibility of the genderization of both time and history.

Kristeva, in her article on "Women's time," expands on this point and argues for a two-tiered level of becoming.<sup>14</sup> One is the longer, linear model of historical teleology and the other is the more discontinuous timing of personal genealogy and unconscious desire. Kristeva, under the influence of Lacan, develops this into a topology of feminist positions, organized in different discursive generations, each marked by a specific sense of their historicity. This rather automatic coupling of certain forms of female subjectivity with certain forms of historical consciousness has been heavily criticized, among other reasons because of its inherent ethnocentrism and Eurocentered sense of history.<sup>15</sup> This debate falls beyond the scope of this chapter, but the one point I wish to retain from it is the genderization of time, with the consequent sexualization of historical sequences.

In Kristeva's work, as in that of most philosophers of sexual difference, the dissymmetry between the sexes stretches all the way to the most fundamental structures of being, including space and time. By comparison, Deleuze's theory of becoming, and philosophy of time appear naively undifferentiated.

A similar naïveté about sexual difference is also expressed in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, when Deleuze contemplates the possibility of the crucial conceptual character in philosophy being a woman: "Et qu'arrive-t-il si la femme elle-même devient philosophe?"<sup>16</sup> May I be so bold as to venture that only a nonwoman would contemplate this possibility as a great novelty, an unprecedented event, or a catastrophe internal to the philosophical order and capable of subverting it?

The more I read Deleuze, the more I am struck by the very real, that is, conceptually plausible notion that the process of becoming, far from being the dissolution of all identities in a flux where different forms and connections will emerge, may itself be sex-specific, sexually differentiated, and consequently take different forms according to different gendered positions.

In other words, it seems to me that Deleuze's theory of becoming is obviously determined by his location as an embodied male subject for whom the dissolution of identities based on the phallus results in bypassing gender altogether, toward a multiple sexuality. This, however, may not be the option best suited to female embodied subjects.

How can Deleuze fail to see that this neutralization of sexual differences can only damage the process of reclaiming a political subjectivity for women?

To substantiate my anxiety about the dissolution of sexual difference, let me remind you of the issues I have raised earlier about the new reproductive technologies. What is especially problematic in a feminist perspective is that the biotechnological appropriation of the maternal occurs precisely at the time in history when women have explicitly demanded the political control over their bodies and their reproductive capacity.

We come thus back to the question of *chronos*; if we follow the logic of biopower, women will be forcefully removed from the traditional forms of motherhood, based on the heterosexual patriarchal family, to equally masculine high-tech reproduction. From feudalism to postindustrialism in one clean sweep, skipping the most important stage—the process of becoming a subject at all—by bringing about a woman-based redefinition of female subjectivity.

I come back therefore, to my question: how can a philosopher of Deleuze's subtlety not bring this contradiction further than the systematic indecision and hesitation that mark his discussion of the becoming-molecular of women? May I again be so bold as to suggest once again that it is because Deleuze is "located" elsewhere: close enough to the feminist claim to the empowerment of alternative female subjectivity, but distant enough to solve it by avoidance—"I know, but . . ."

I would like to expand on the point about being "located" and to make it clear that it does not have to do with biological but with sociosymbolic differences. Here is another example, drawn from the position Deleuze took on the war against Iraq. He condemned the war as the effect of American, that is, planetary, capital, which bombed one of its bureaucratic dependents (Hussein) back to preindustrial conditions, so as to trigger off in turn the genocide of an entire population by murder and epidemics. Pure war.

In putting his case this way, Deleuze chose a specifically situated point of view, one that starts from his quarrel against capitalism. He

could have also, however, chosen a different starting point, equally “minority-based” but based on ethnic identity: that of the Kurds, for instance, or other people opposed to Hussein. Politics being no more than a theoretically informed map, however, Deleuze draws his own topology, and he is fully entitled to it.

The “I know, but . . .” mode is therefore less the moment of avoidance or denial—Deleuze has far too much integrity for that—than that of wailful choice or judgment. This in turn entails the fact that if you draw your own map, it is from your own situated point of view. Speaking as a feminist I see this as confirming the importance of the “politics of location” and of sexual difference as marking asymmetrical positions between the sexes. The positioning that comes from our embodied and historically located subjectivities also determines the sort of political maps and conceptual diagrams we are likely to draw. In other words, in doing philosophy, the moment inevitably comes when selection and priorities occur, and at that particular point sexual difference plays a major role.

In her critical analysis of the notion of location, Caren Kaplan illuminates the extent to which the politics of location can turn into a political and methodological tool to respect differences. She argues :

Whether it encourages resistance to hegemonic formations, whether it becomes its own academic reification—turning into an instrument of hegemony itself—or whether it marks important shifts in discourses of location and displacement depends, not surprisingly, upon who utilizes the context in what particular context.<sup>17</sup>

This implies that, to make adequate political and theoretical sense of the politics of location, we need to take into account embodied realities, contextual concerns, and other factors that influence even the most radical attempts to undo hegemonic modes of thinking.

Speaking as a Deleuzian who believes that desire is the effective motor of political change, as opposed to wailful transformation, I experience that “I know, but . . .” mode as a genuine, positive contradiction in Deleuze’s thinking.

Foucault once said, “Un jour notre siècle sera deleuzien”; I suppose he meant the twenty-first century. Quite clearly, we are not there yet, and Deleuze may well be the first one to demonstrate just how difficult it is to become consistently Deleuzian.

# The Ethics of Sexual Difference: The Case of Foucault and Irigaray

Over a century ago, Nietzsche stated that all decadent, diseased, and corrupted cultures acquired a taste for “the feminine”—if not for the effeminate. The “feminine” thus described is, as I have said before, nothing more than a very elaborate metaphor, or a symptom, of the profound discontent that lies at the heart of phallogocentric culture. It is a male disease, expressing the crisis of self-legitimation that, according to J. F. Lyotard<sup>1</sup> is the mark of postmodern societies. This “feminine” bears no immediate or even direct relationship to real-life women. It is a typically masculine attitude, which turns male disorders into feminine values. Thinking of Freud’s President Schreber,<sup>2</sup> who in his delirium declared that he was both male and female and all the more female as he was God’s own favorite, well may we wonder at the depths of the trend of the “becoming-woman” in modern thought—a trend of which Derrida is the main spokesman in France.<sup>3</sup>

It seems to me that the relationship between the metaphorizations of the feminine and feminist discourse and practice is to be thought out in terms of power and strategy. The real issue is the head-on collision between patriarchal assumptions about the feminine and the existential reality of women’s lives and thought—that feminism has allowed us to express. I have described this clash in chapter 7 in this book (“Sexual Difference as a Nomadic Political Project”) as the tension between images and man-made representations of “*Woman*” and the experiences of real-life women in their great diversity.



That is what is at stake for me in the postmodern, poststructuralist, “post-postcard”<sup>4</sup> debate. To demonstrate this I have chosen to displace the debate onto a side issue that is highly significant—the question of ethics and the extraordinary interest that it is receiving in contemporary French philosophy. Why has the question of “ethics” come back to the philosophical agenda—after all the years when “politics” was top of the hit parade of ideas?

The sheer importance of the ethical issue in the work of some male philosophers is an offshoot of the crisis of the rational subject that has shaken the phallogocentric system to its very foundations. The question of alterity, of otherness, is receiving renewed attention precisely because of the problematization of the structures of subjectivity in modern thought. It is my firm belief that the women’s movement is one of the primary sources for the dislocation of the rational subject.<sup>5</sup>

My hypothesis is that the so-called “crisis” of the rational subject, with the related inflation of the notion of the feminine, has had some beneficial effects on some male philosophers.

I will juxtapose Foucault’s notion of ethics with the focus on sameness to the ethics of sexual difference of Irigaray—a woman psychoanalyst and philosopher. Just as in the earlier part of my work on women and philosophy (see chapter 1, “Organs Without Bodies,” in this book), I will therefore argue that we are faced with a fundamental dissonance between on the one hand the discourse of the crisis of the logos and of its feminine, and on the other the project of feminism in terms of sexual difference.

By setting Foucault’s and Irigaray’s notions of ethics side by side, I wish to point out first the radically different directions in which their respective thought is moving. I will argue that Foucault elaborates a new ethics that remains within the confines of sexual sameness, whereas Irigaray is arguing for sexual otherness as a strategy that allows for the assertion of feminine subjectivity.

Second, I will argue that the profound “dissonance” between these two thinkers, their variations on the common theme of ethics, demonstrates the lack of symmetry in the discourse of the two sexes. It consequently adds further weight of evidence to the feminist project of positing sexual differences as the central question in the postmodern debate.

## Foucault

In the afterword of Dreyfus's and Rabinow's book *Michel Foucault—Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*,<sup>6</sup> Foucault defined the general outline of his thought and stated as his central theme the critical, historical analysis of the modes of constitution of the subject: the ways in which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects. His analytics of the subject is committed to revealing, denouncing, and ultimately undoing the specific form of violence—that is to say, the power formations that are at work in the philosophical game. What really interests Foucault is the materiality of ideas—the fact that they exist in an in-between space caught in a network of material and symbolic conditions, between the text and history, between theory and practice, and never in any one of these poles. His philosophy is a philosophy of relations, of in-betweens, and in that sense he represents the absolute antithesis of sociology.

The central concern of Foucault's work is the criticism of the despotic power exercised by the philosophical text and by the history of philosophy as a monolithic block of knowledge. It seems to me that this critique provides the overall unity of his intellectual project.

As he states in his introduction to volume two of *The History of Sexuality, The Use of Pleasure*:

There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The "essay"—which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication—is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an "ascesis," askesis—an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.<sup>7</sup>

The choice of this place of enunciation implies a redefinition of philosophy, the "exercise of oneself in the activity of thought," a "test in the game of truth." It is a practice that entails a relationship to oneself and to alterity and is consequently an ethical stance.

Foucault's analytic of subjectivity outlines three main modes of objectification that transform human beings into subjects. These correspond to different stages of his work.

In the first phase he analyses the type of discourse that claims the status of science, especially in the field of the human sciences; this phase of his work, marked by *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, leads him to the critique of the role that the “knowing subject” plays in the history of Western philosophy.

The second stage of Foucault’s work deals with the constitution of the subject through what he calls “the dividing practices”: exclusion, separation, and domination within oneself as well as toward the others. This part of his reflection starts with *Madness and Civilization* and *Birth of the Clinic* and continues through to *The Order of Discourse* and *Discipline and Punish*. The central notion is that the modes in which human beings are made into subjects in our culture rest on a complex network of power relations, which he defines in terms of “the microphysics of power.” “Power” being the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a given society, the body is the privileged target of the mechanisms of power relations. Foucault develops a political economy of the body—a body defined in terms of materiality, that is to say, as subject matter that is prone to a variety of symbolic and material operations: it must be made docile, submissive, erotic, usable, productive, and so on.

These techniques of control and codification of the living body as the site of subjectivity also produce “truth effects” in that they generate specific types of knowledge about the subject and his/her social inscription. The normative aspects of the power relations in which the body is caught are consequently positive, that is to say, productive in terms of knowledge in the sense of truth about the living subject. Thus Foucault’s notion of the subject rests on a technology of the body as connected to both the rational nature of power and the normative character of reason.

This idea also provides the link between the second and the third stages of Foucault’s work; in the latter he concentrates on the ways in which a human being turns him/herself into a subject: the internal modes of submission and domination by the subject. He takes sexuality as the field in which the proliferation of discursive practices and therefore of normative truth effects is the strongest in our culture. In the first volume of his history of sexuality he defines Western culture as “sex-centric”: we are the ones who invented *scientia sexualis*, turning sexuality into the site of self-revelation and truth about oneself. His question then becomes: what is this “sexuality” with which we are all so concerned? And by what means do we become sexual subjects?

In the second and third volume of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault analyses the ancient Greek and Roman practices of discourse and control of sexuality; he thus points out that the practices that for us come under the general blanket "sexuality" constituted what Graeco-Roman culture called "the arts of existence," that is to say: "these intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria."<sup>8</sup>

Foucault argues that the array of "arts of existence" in the sense of "techniques of the self" were later assimilated into the exercise of priestly power in early Christianity and then into educational, medical, and psychological types of practices. It seems to me that the evolution of Foucault's thought traces the progressive sexualization of these discursive practices; the intersection of the archaeological phase with the genealogical decoding of the practices of the self—which produces his *History of Sexuality*—also marks his increasing awareness of his own speaking stance as a man, a male philosopher. It is possible to argue for instance that in his early texts Foucault's androcentric bias is manifest; he uses the term *man* as a universal form, thus betraying his blindness to sexual difference. In his later works, however, he is conscious of the fact that the system of control of sexuality that he is analyzing rests on a profound dissymmetry between the sexes. Speaking of the "practices of the self," he states: "Women were generally subjected . . . and yet this ethics was not addressed to women; it was not their duties, or obligation, that were recalled, justified, or spelled out. It was an ethics for men: an ethics though, written and taught by men, and addressed to men—to free men, obviously."<sup>9</sup>

The point Foucault makes here concerns not so much the exclusion as the disqualification of women as ethical agents and consequently as subjects. He stresses the interconnection between entitlement to moral status and the right to citizenship in the social, political and judicial sense of the term. The rules and regulations of a moral life—which also transform the subject into an ethical substance—are implicitly connected to sociopolitical rights and women are kept on the margin of both.

Arguing that governing oneself, managing one's estate, and participating in the administration of the city were three practices of the same kind, Foucault emphasizes the key value of "ethical virility" as the ideal on which the system as a whole rests. In turn this implies perfect coincidence between one's anatomical sex—male—and the imaginary con-

struction of masculine sexuality; moreover, he stresses the accordance of both to the ruling social representations of what ought to be the universal ethical standard; symbolic virility. Thus the male body is all one with the body politic.

If we read Foucault's project from this perspective, it can be taken as the critical anatomy of phallogocentric structures in discourse; the practice of "ethical virility" in fact also lays the foundations of the philosophical game as such, that is to say that it provides the basic parameters of the political economy of truth, as submitted to the authority of the logos.

Moreover, the phallogocentric economy thus analyzed also reveals the male homosexual bond that constitutes the basis of the social contract as well as the discursive practices that society adopts for itself: it is a world for and by men.

Whatever the female "use of pleasure" may have been like, with its truth effects and production of knowledge about the female subject, remains a matter of speculation. The discursive gap translates into historical absence; thus, the whole history of philosophy as we have come to inherit it, has been conjugated in the male masculine and virile mode. History—rather than anatomy—is destiny.

According to this reading of Foucault, it can be argued that he is a male philosopher who is bringing out the highly sexed rules governing philosophical discourse. Far from being universal, the scene of philosophy rests on the most sexual-specific premises: those that posit the primacy of masculine sexuality as a site of social and political power. In Foucault's latest work, phallogocentric discourse is a specific political and libidinal economy—one that assigns the sexes to precise roles, poles, and functions, to the detriment of the feminine.

## Irigaray

As a feminist, a psychoanalyst, a powerful writer, and as a philosopher, Luce Irigaray cannot be situated very easily; she is forever in between different fields, disciplines, levels of experience, and places of enunciation. Her work on the philosophical subject is related to the crisis of the logos I have just discussed, and in many ways it is a positive, non-reactive response to the masters of the crisis of philosophy. Irigaray addresses the same tradition of classical Western ontology on which Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and other contemporary French philosophers have also focused. But there is a fundamental difference in the very place of enunciation that she adopts: for Irigaray the crisis that for

Foucault spells the death of philosophy is already over—she is standing among the ruins and already sees what is to come to replace the old order.

There is a visionary, utopian, and at times even prophetic quality in Irigaray's writing, which expresses her faith in the force of the feminine as a new symbolic and discursive economy. A comparable force of affirmation and quality of intensity is found in the work of feminist theology (Mary Daly), of lesbian poetry (Adrienne Rich), and in the work of Italian radicals (Carla Lonzi and, more recently, Luisa Muraro and Adriana Caravero)<sup>10</sup> on the question of the female symbolic system.

Women can see the light where men just stare into empty space, watching the downfall of the phallic monuments and documents they had erected by and for themselves. Women have something to say—failing to say it would amount to an historical abortion of the female subject.

For Irigaray, as I have argued throughout this book, the crisis that spells the death of the logocentric subject opens the condition of possibility for the expression of female subjectivity. The crisis is only the death of the universal subject—the one that disguised its singularity behind the mask of logocentrism. That men are greatly shaken by this is no wonder; however, the crisis allows us to ask at long last the question that for Irigaray is fundamental—that of sexual difference.

What makes Irigaray's critique of modernity very significant is that she attacks the complicity between rationality and masculinity. The subject of discourse is always sexed, "it" can never be pure, universal, or gender-free. Irigaray's work rests on a double purpose: (1) to undo the association of masculinity with rationality and universality—through the rereading of the history of Western ontology; and (2) to voice and embody in her own texts women's own "feminine," as distinct from the kind of "feminine" that is implicitly annexed to the logocentric economy.

What is at stake in Irigaray's project is the double urge to express the radical novelty of a feminine corporeal reality that has never been adequately represented and also not to interrupt the dialogue with the masters of Western philosophy. This is particularly true of her first phase; in *Speculum* and *This Sex Which is not One*<sup>11</sup> her very special style mediates most effectively the intense effort of critique and creation which marks her work.

Irigaray's textual strategy is eminently political: it consists of refusing to separate the symbolic from the empirical, to dissociate the discourse on "the feminine" from the historical realities of the condition and status of women in Western culture. In other words, the fact that "the feminine" is the "blind spot" of all textual and theoretical processes means that women's voices are buried underneath someone else's—man's—own words. There is therefore a direct equivalence between the process of metaphorization of "the feminine" and the phenomenon of the historical oppression of women. Irigaray's project is to re-cover, un-veil, and express that voice, starting from the major texts of Western philosophy.

"The feminine" she is after is a woman-defined-feminine and as such it is still a blank, it is not yet there, we are to think of it in the conditional mode: how can the feminine of/in/by women come into being in the sexually undifferentiated system of our culture? What are the conditions that would make the first coming of the female subject possible? The strategy Irigaray proposes in response to this challenge consists in strategic repetition, or mimesis. She claims as her place of enunciation the position to which "the feminine" is assigned in various texts of classical philosophy. Thus she reads, or rather un-reads, the texts in terms of their representation of and relation to the "feminine": it is a game of specular/speculative reflection of the inner logic of phallogocentric discourse. This game of strategic repetition of throwing back to the text what the text does to the "feminine" becomes a highly subversive practice of the critique of discourse.

Irigaray's project of redefining the parameters of subjectivity and the very understanding of what thinking is all about rests on one major assumption: the belief in the ontological basis of sexual difference. In other words, the difference between the sexes is radical, and it is constitutive of the human experience; it should be listed alongside mortality as the ineluctable frame of reference of the human being.

Just like death, sexual difference is always already there, whether we acknowledge it or not. The ontological claim for sexual difference is what makes Irigaray so important theoretically and politically; the essentialist belief in ontological difference is a political strategy aimed at stating the specificity of female subjectivity, sexuality, and experience while also denouncing the logic of sexual indifferenciation of phallogocentric discourse.<sup>12</sup>

The now famous image that Irigaray proposes of the lips of the female sex—close together and yet apart—stands for the multiplicity, the excess, and the unique combination of plurality and singularity that characterizes the bodily, sexed reality of the female. This highly suggestive image, with its implicit reference to the psychoanalytic theory of female narcissism, is however very ambivalent. Irigaray is not a theoretician of the male homosexual and of the lesbian experience; on the contrary she has made it quite clear that she aspires to genuine and radical heterosexuality in the sense of full recognition of sexual difference by each sex. The process must start with each woman recognizing other women in a system of symbolic reference, of mutual and autorecognition of “the woman as other.” Irigaray’s notion of sexual difference therefore stresses the importance of the second level of difference: that which takes place among women in the recognition of diversity and yet of common experiences and concerns.

Another way of exploring the polyvalence of the images Irigaray proposes is the mother-daughter relationship already mentioned, which exemplifies the specificity of the female libido and of female desire that are unexplored and misunderstood in psychoanalytic theory and practice. The emphasis that Lacanian psychoanalysis places on the Name-of-the-Father and the primacy of the Phallus is such that the mother-daughter dyad is represented in terms of a woman-to-woman relationship separated and denied by phallogocentric power. Consequently for Irigaray, recognizing the bond of women is the first step towards the elaboration of another symbolic system, one in which the patterns of separation would be mediated differently.

*The Ethics of Sexual Difference* is one of the clearest manifestations of Irigaray’s notion of “otherness” in relation to the project of expressing female subjectivity. In comparison with her earlier works, this book marks a shift already visible in *Amante marine*, *La croyance même*, and *Femmes divines*—namely that the double-layer structure of address, the fact that Irigaray has been addressing both the great masters of classical ontology and women who are existentially involved in the process of transformation of the “feminine” in our culture, becomes streamlined. In *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray is addressing the great masters almost exclusively, and this narrowing of the interlocutor, combined with the vocative mode of speech, produces an intense poetic text that reads as a major treatise on love.



The focus of Irigaray's text is the politics of radical heterosexuality; she argues that the mystery of alterity, of relationship to the other and especially to the Other that is the Divine Being, is summed up in the other who is sexually different from one, that is to say the other sex for each sex. Irigaray takes great care, however, to stress that woman as man's other (the other of the same) needs to explore first her link to other women, to her own gender (the other of the other or, women's symbolic system) so as to find adequate expressions for it. Emphasis is laid on the classical Cartesian passion of "wonder" as the perfect mode of encounter of men and women, each sex in its specificity, the perfection of two sexually different beings. The quality of "wonder" expresses the sort of receptivity to the other, a kind of open-ended availability to others, which Clarice Lispector describes so movingly in her text *The Passion according to G. H.* Being able to approach any other in full respect of his/her living singularity; respecting the presence and the boundaries, while moving and being moved by an other toward the recognition of our respective and irreducible differences—this is the basis for the new love ethics that Irigaray proposes as part of her practice of sexual difference. And while the feminists cried out in horror at what reads at first sight as a manifesto for monogamous heterosexual couples, Irigaray has been quite adamant, particularly in her work on female gods and the female experience of the divine, that the politics of radical heterosexuality as the underlying theme of the thought of sexual difference is a necessary step in order to ensure the emergence of female subjectivity and of an imaginary and symbolic system morphologically suited to female corporeal reality.

Ethics is for Irigaray a move toward the other (sex) as the paradigm for a new mode of relation to the other, including the other woman who, while sexually the same-as me, remains nevertheless an-other, a mediator between self and reality. The ethics of sexual difference aims at finding and enacting enabling representations of a new female humanity and a female sense of the divine.

## Of Dissonance and Other Games

If one sets side by side the two projects of ethics that I have briefly summarized here, the opposite directions in which the respective thoughts of Foucault and Irigaray are moving will be seen quite clearly. Foucault elaborates a critique that remains within the confines of sexual same-

ness; Irigaray emphasizes sexual difference as a way of asserting female subjectivity.

Foucault's account of classical Greek and Roman ethics, of the use of pleasure and the apprenticeship of the arts of subjectivity in all its political and symbolic connotations—as distinct from the Christian form of ethics—is not meant as an apology for either discursive system. The focus of his work on ethics is the discontinuity between the modern predicament and earlier ethics, both Christian and Classical, which would be historically and conceptually of inspiration for the postmodern predicament. Foucault turns to the past only to find practices that are suited to the here and now of our place of enunciation. The question is: how can we move beyond the historicity of our modern condition? Foucault argues that the age of modernity is one for which no morals are possible; we are historically condemned to rethink the basis of our relationship to the values that we have inherited, especially from the nineteenth century.

Irigaray's project of redefining the basis for interpersonal relationship, her ethics of sexual difference, is another response to the same historical challenge: how can we learn to think differently about human subjectivity and alterity? This question has been on the philosophical agenda ever since Heidegger, and it seems to me that feminism as a movement of thought is caught up in this problematic and has a major role to play within it.

And yet it may well be that the feminist reply to the challenge of modernity is radically different from the response of male philosophers; the cases of Foucault and Irigaray tend to prove that on the conceptual level patterns of great dissonance are emerging between male and female philosophers. It may well be that we differ as to the nature and structure of difference; it may well be that sexual difference as a movement of thought will open the door to the recognition of multiple differences that spell the death of the One and Only logic of phallogocentrism.

The lack of symmetry in the thought of difference—such as it emerges in the work about ethics—also confirms Irigaray's insight that conceptual thinking is not neutral but rather very sexual-specific. That major divergences should appear between male and female thinkers on the question of difference is therefore rather reassuring; I would even argue that the fundamental asymmetry in the thought of sexual differ-

ence as elaborated by men and women is precisely what makes the intellectual dialogue between them possible.

Dissonance is related to sexual difference as one of its modes of expression. If we are to take seriously the nomadic practice of sexual difference, we should grow accustomed to playing this game of dissonant voices moving in between positions in a nomadic quest for alternative representations of female feminist subjectivity.

## SEVEN

# Envy; or, with Your Brains and My Looks

The male is a biological accident: the Y (male) gene is an incomplete X (female) gene, that is it has an incomplete set of chromosomes . . . . Being an incomplete female, the male spends his life attempting to complete himself, to become female . . . . The male, because of his obsession to compensate for not being female, combined with his inability to relate and feel compassion, has made of the world a shit-pile.

—Valerie Solanis, *The SCUM Manifesto*, 1983

Mine is the century of Death. Mine is the century of male-birthed children, precocious with radiation.

—Phyllis Chesler, *About Men*, 1978

Not only is it difficult to be consistently on the side of joyful, positive affirmation of alternative values, according to the Dionysian spirit of neo-Nitzschean philosophy, there are also times when a dose of resentful criticism appears as irresistible as it is necessary.

Such is the case for this chapter, in which I cast an ironical glance at “male-stream” poststructuralist philosophy, in an informal, more lively tone than I have used so far. Perfectly aware of the fact that I am lapsing into a polemic that may not advance the feminist cause very far in the long run, I shall nevertheless gleefully enjoy the whole performance.

As I anticipated in the first chapter, changes of mood and mode are an integral part of the nomadic project I have undertaken here, and I hope that a slightly more critical tone at this stage may also provide my readers with some relief.

In order not to disrupt the general argument of my book too much, however, I will make amends by exploring in the next chapter, the issue

of the positivity of sexual difference in a fuller way than I have done so far. The in-depth analysis of the more affirmative edge of the feminist nomadic project in chapter 8 can therefore be taken as a counterpoint to the gloomier affects expressed in this chapter.

I will begin with the following questions: What is the position of men in feminism? How does the nomadic feminist regard this issue?

There is something both appealing and suspect in the notion of “men in feminism;” my gaze lingers on the preposition “IN”—wondering about the spatial dimension it throws open. Is it the battleground for the eternal war of the sexes? Is it the space where bodily sexed subjectivities come to a head-on collision? I can only envisage this topic as a knot of interconnected tensions, an area of intense turmoil, a set of contradictions.

Somewhere along the line I am viscerally opposed to the whole idea: men aren’t and shouldn’t be IN feminism: the feminist space is not theirs and not for them to see. Thus, the discursive game we are trying to play is either profoundly precarious or perversely provocative—or both at once. A sort of impatience awakens in me at the thought of a whole class/caste of men who are fascinated, puzzled, and intimidated by the sight of a pen-handling female intelligentsia of the feminist kind. I do not know what is at stake in this for them and thus, to let my irony shine through IN-BETWEEN the lines, I shall de/re-form a sign and write instead of phallic subtexts: “men in Pheminism.” Why insist on a letter, for instance?

## Contextual Constraints

Of all Foucault ever taught me, the notion of the “materiality of ideas” has had the deepest impact. One cannot make an abstraction of the network of truth and power formations that govern the practice of one’s enunciation; ideas are sharp-edged discursive events that cannot be analyzed simply in terms of their propositional content.

There is something incongruous for me to be sitting here in ethnocentric, messed-up Europe, thinking about “men in Pheminism.” I cannot say this is a major problem in my mind, or in the context within which I am trying to live. There is something very American, in a positive sense, about this issue. The interest that American men display in Pheminism reflects a specific historical and cultural context, one in which feminist scholarship has made it to the cutting edge of the academic scene.

As a European feminist I feel both resistant to and disenchanted with the reduction of feminism to "feminist theory" and the confining of both within academic discourse. This attitude points out a danger that the pioneers of women's studies courses had emphasized from the start: that our male "allies" may not be able to learn how to respect the issues raised by feminism. Following a century-old mental habit, which Adrienne Rich<sup>1</sup> analyzes so lucidly, they cannot resist the temptation of short-circuiting the complexity, in an attempt to straighten out feminist theory and practice, streamlining the feminist project in a mold that they can recognize. Blinded by what they have learned to recognize as "theory," they bulldoze their way through feminism as if it were not qualitatively different from any other academic discipline.

"They" are those white, middle-class, male intellectuals who have "got it right" in that they have sensed where the subversive edge of feminist theory is. "They" are a very special generation of postbeat, pre-yuppie twenty-eight-to-forty-five-year-old men who have "been through" the upheavals of the 1960s and have inherited the values and the neuroses of that period. "They" are the "new men" in the "postfeminist" context of the politically confusing 1990s, where the Hillary and Bill Clinton effect is in full swing. "They" are the best male friend we've got, and "they" are not really what we had hoped for. "They" can circle round women's studies departments in crisis-struck Arts faculties, knowing that here's one of the few areas of the Academy that is still expanding financially and in terms of students' enrollment at both undergraduate and graduate level. "They" play the academic career game with great finesse, knowing the rule about feminist separatism and yet ignoring it. "They" know that feminist theory is the last bastion of radical thought amidst the ruins of the postmodern gloom. "They" are conscious of the fact that the debate about modernity and beyond is coextensive with the woman's question. Some of them are gay theorists and activists, whose political sensibility may not always be the closest to feminist concerns. Next are heterosexual "ladies' men," whose preoccupation with the feminine shines for its ambiguity.

What the heterosexual men are lacking intellectually—the peculiar blindness to sexual difference for which the term *sexism* is an inadequate assessment—is a reflection of their position in history. They have not inherited a world of oppression and exclusion based on their sexed corporal being; they do not have the lived experience of oppression

because of their sex. Thus, most of them fail to grasp the specificity of feminism in terms of its articulation of theory and practice, of thought and life.

Maybe they have no alternative. It must be very uncomfortable to be a male, white, middle-class, heterosexual intellectual at a time in history when so many minorities and oppressed groups are speaking up for themselves; a time when the hegemony of the white knowing subject is crumbling. Lacking the historical experience of oppression on the basis of sex, they paradoxically lack a minus. Lacking the lack, they cannot participate in the great ferment of ideas that is shaking up Western culture: it must be very painful indeed to have no option other than being the empirical referent of the historical oppressor of women, and being asked to account for his atrocities.

The problem is that the exclusion of women and the denigration of the feminine are not just a small omission that can be fixed with a little good will. Rather, they point to the underlying theme in the textual and historical continuity of masculine self-legitimation and ideal self-projection.<sup>2</sup> It's on the woman's body—on her absence, her silence, her disqualification—that phallogentric discourse rests. This sort of "metaphysical cannibalism," which Ti-Grace Atkinson analyzed in terms of uterus envy, positions the woman as the silent groundwork of male subjectivity—the condition of possibility for his story. Psychoanalytic theory, of the Freudian or the Lacanian brand, circles around the question of origins—the mother's body—by elucidating the psychic mechanisms that make the paternal presence, the father's body, necessary as a figure of authority over her.

Following Luce Irigaray I see psychoanalysis as a patriarchal discourse that apologizes for metaphysical cannibalism: the silencing of the powerfulness of the feminine. Refusing to dissociate the discourse about the feminine, the maternal, from the historical realities of the condition and status of women in Western culture, Irigaray equates the metaphorization of women (the feminine, the maternal) with their victimization or historical oppression. One does not become a member of the dark continent, one is born into it. The question is how to transform this century-old silence into a presence of women as subjects in every aspect of existence. I am sure "they" know this, don't "they"?

The age of so-called modernity, which Alice Jardine has read critically in *Gynesis*,<sup>3</sup> has seen the emergence and the merging of two parallel phenomena: on the one hand, the revival of the women's move-

ment and women-centered analyses; on the other hand, a crisis of the idea of rationality as a human ethical idea as well as the epistemological guideline in Western philosophical discourse. Ever since Nietzsche, and continuing through every major European philosopher, the question of woman has accompanied the decline of the classical view of human subjectivity. The problematic of the "feminine" thus outlined is nothing more than a very elaborate metaphor, a symptom, of the profound illness of Western culture and of its phallogocentric logic.<sup>4</sup> It is a male disease, expressing the critical state of the postmodern condition that J. F. Lyotard<sup>5</sup> describes; my argument is that this "feminine" bears no direct or even necessary relation to real-life women. In some ways, it even perpetuates the century-old mental habit that consists in assigning to the "feminine" disorders or insufficiencies pertaining to the male of the species.

Right across the spectrum of contemporary Continental and especially French philosophy the "feminine" functions as a powerful vehicle for conveying the critical attempts to redefine human subjectivity. From Lacan's assertion that woman cannot speak<sup>6</sup> because her silence, her absence from, or ex-centricity vis-à-vis phallogocentric discourse allows for the edifice of male discursivity to Derrida's injunction that in so far as it cannot be said the "feminine" functions as the most pervasive signifier;<sup>7</sup> from Foucault's bland assertion that the absence of women from the philosophical scene is constitutive of the discursive rules of the philosophical game<sup>8</sup> to Deleuze's notion of the "becoming-woman" as marking a qualitative transformation in human consciousness<sup>9</sup>—the feminization of thought seems to be prescribed as a fundamental step in the general program of anti-humanism that marks our era.

The combination of conceptual elements is quite paradoxical: deconstructing, dismissing, or displacing the notion of the rational subject at the very historical moment when women are beginning to have access to the use of discourse, power, and pleasure; while at the same time advocating the "feminine" or the "becoming-woman" of theoretical discourse—woman as the figure of modernity—seems to me highly problematic. What is missing from this scheme is the elaboration of a political project.

Well may the high priests of postmodernism preach the deconstruction and fragmentation of the subject, the flux of all identities based on phallogocentric premises; well may they keep reading into feminism the image of the crisis of their own acquired perceptions of human con-



sciousness. The truth of the matter is: one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted; one cannot diffuse a sexuality that has historically been defined as dark and mysterious. In order to announce the death of the subject one must first have gained the right to speak as one; in order to demystify metadiscourse one must first gain access to a place of enunciation. The fragmentation of the self being woman's basic historical condition, as Luce Irigaray points out, we are left with the option of theorizing a general "becoming-woman" for both sexes, or else of flatly stating that women have been postmodern since the beginning of time.<sup>10</sup>

Knowing that the debate about modernity and postmodernism looms dangerously close to the subtle discursive ground of feminism, I would just like to stress that the idea of the "death of the subject" has been overestimated ever since the early days of structuralism in France. Just because, thanks to the formidable advances of science and technology, the so-called human and social sciences have had to come to terms with their own limitations as systems of interpretation and analysis of reality, it does not follow that there is no system, no interpretation or understanding, and no reality. Just because modern philosophy has discovered an area of twilight within human subjectivity and discourse; and just because this is blurring the century-old distinction between self and other, it does not inevitably follow that there is no more certainty about the self. Just because ever since the end of the nineteenth century the ontological security of the knowing subject has been shaken up, it does not mean that all the old notions—such as subjectivity, consciousness, and truth—are no longer operational. What the "Krisis" of modernity means is that philosophy must struggle to redefine the terms within which it would be possible for us to think adequately about our historical condition. What is needed—paradoxical as it may sound—is a reasoned critique of reason.

I think that feminism and philosophical modernity can only be related in terms of power and strategy. While I remain extremely critical of the theoreticians of the "becoming-woman" or the feminization of the (postmodern) subject, as I have argued earlier, I wonder what it is that makes them want to embark on this sudden program of de-phallicization? What is being exorcized by male thinkers in the act of their becoming "feminized"? What do these new hysterics want? I see nothing more in this maneuver than a contemporary version of the old metaphysical cannibalism: it expresses the male desire to carry on the hege-

monic tradition that they inherited; it reveals their attachment to their traditional place of enunciation, despite all. Envy.

Envious of a history of oppression that the political will of the women's movement has turned into a major critical stance for women to use to their best advantage. As a close male friend put it, sadly: "Your position is, after all, ideal." In whose imaginary? I wonder. Are we not confronted here by a variation on the theme of male midlife crisis? Aren't "they" simply caught in a professional and personal context of intense disorder? Aren't "they" merely projecting on the feminists some of the traditional images of "Woman" as a threatening, all-powerful, devouring entity? Is the feminist woman, insofar as she claims to be neither mother nor whore and both of them at once, a new ideal imago? Are we stuck, once again, in heterosexist perversity thinly disguised as an authoritative intellectual inquiry on "feminist theory"?

In an age of advanced capitalism where the social manifestations of sexual difference are dislocated by a new androgyny,<sup>11</sup> while the reproductive technology revolution has given men the means of realizing their ancient dream of giving birth to children by and for themselves,<sup>12</sup> it seems to me that male uterus envy is reaching a peak of paroxysm. (Except of course for the few melancholy runaways who just sit and stare into a Beckettlike empty space in which the monuments and documents of the Phallus have already crumbled). What will be the place and role of real-life women in this fragmented universe? I fear that a postmodern world, which will have made sexual difference redundant, proposing an image of the subject as deprived of fixed sexual identity, reproducing outside sexual intercourse, may even be able to afford the luxury of being Pheminist. Alone at last!

### Three Guineas, Four Pennies, and Other Bargains

Three books are lying at my side: three titles to remind me of where I come from as a feminist: *La presenza dell'uomo nel femminismo*, by radical Italian feminist Carla Lonzi;<sup>13</sup> Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*;<sup>14</sup> and Phyllis Chesler's *About Men*.<sup>15</sup> I cannot think of a French feminist text about men in Pheminism.

Books: slices of female corporeal lived experience, to make sure that in raising the topic of "men" I will have exorcized what's left of my adolescent fantasies. Back in the days when the idea of "men" seemed to contain the answer to the question of my identity as not just a, but rather as *the Woman*. My entire conditioning, enforced by a whole sociopo-

litical system, pushes me to rejoicing at having yet another opportunity to think, talk, dream about “men.” And so I hesitate. There is something both appealing and suspect in the ease with which the topic pops up, offering itself to my attention. I am against compulsory heterosexuality, even of the sublimated kind;<sup>16</sup> I am not prepared to, or even interested in, sharing confidences about men. The topic of men in feminism triggers off primarily a solemn de facto discontent.

Where am I speaking from? So many links are missing. At least Virginia Woolf chose an in-transit position; she stood on a bridge and watched the crazy world of patriarchy—the learned men, the men of power, the warlords—marching off to the fulfillment of their in-built death wish. She wrote her magnificent *Three Guineas* on the eve of the World War II, and I think very strongly of her today, in post-1989, post-Gulf-War Europe. Once again, as many times before, I feel great fear and an unspeakable sadness about our genocidal world.

Virginia Woolf watched it from afar, as if suspended in mid-air, ecstatic—implicated and yet exterior, radically other but a dutiful daughter of the patriarchs nevertheless. Peripherally involved, marginally connected, not all entirely in agreement with what she could see, and yet sufficiently close to the common cause of humanity to actually take responsibility for the grueling mess and to dare speak the words: “that’s not it, that’s not the way to do it all.”

For there is no outside, no absolute purity or uncontamination from patriarchal practices of the material and discursive kind. Although the non-mixity of the women’s movement is a powerful strategy, a device prompting a woman-centered mode of analysis, it cannot be conceptually allowed to conceal our implication in a system that has actively discriminated against us, in a culture that has assigned us to a depreciated set of values. Born free, we have lived at a discount. We have no choice but staying IN, with one foot out—split twice over, and over.

There is also a separatism of the mind. My speaking stance as a feminist has accustomed me to address women as my privileged interlocutors—I can only view the prospect of addressing Pheminist men with a touch of benevolent fatigue. The feminist in me is a fighter, a winner, a (re)vindicator, an activist, a social figure. She is fully involved with the patriarchy through rejection; anger, rebellion, and passion for justice keep her IN, tied to a death-and-life-struggle with her main enemy. Consciously phallic, she wants to get IN—she is politically reformist: wanting to put women IN, all the way.

However, the feminist is not all of me; she is directly and intimately related to my being-a-woman-alongside-other-women-in-the-world. There exists a common world of women, as Adrienne Rich put it, a continuum in the woman-centered vision of the world: my subjectivity is attached to the presence of the other woman. The-woman-in-me is not a full-time member of the patriarchy, neither by rejection nor by acceptance; she is elsewhere—on the margin, in the periphery, in the shade (to the delight of Lacanian psychoanalysts)—she cannot be contained in one sentence. Contrary to Lacan, I maintain that my ex-centricity vis-à-vis the system of representation points to another logic, another way of “making sense”: the woman-in-me is not silent, she is part of a symbolic referential system by and of women themselves. She just speaks an-other language; radically different (Irigaray). Whereas Monique Wittig, in her article on “The Straight Mind,”<sup>17</sup> claims that the margin of noninvolvement by women with the patriarchal system has to do with lesbian identity, I think that the patterns of symbolic female homosexuality transcend the mere choice of women as erotic objects. Choosing to love a woman is not a sufficient (though it may be necessary) condition to escape from the logic of patriarchy. Language and sexuality are not spatial structures that one can just avoid, bypass, and eventually step out of.

The woman-in-me is IN language but in process within it; directly connected to the feminist I chose to be, the woman-in-me has taken her distance from compulsory heterosexuality while remaining involved with men—though not necessarily Pheminist men. The project of redefining the content of the woman-in-me so as to disengage her from the trappings of a “feminine” defined as dark continent, or of “femininity” as the eternal masquerade, will take my lifetime, all the time I have. The woman-in-me is developing, alongside other women but not exclusively on their behalf, a redefinition of what it means to be human. Being-a-woman is always-ready there as the ontological precondition for my existential becoming as a subject: one has to start with the body and the bodily roots of subjectivity (Rich).

This is why feminism matters: it carries ethical and transcendental values that simply cannot be reduced to yet another ideology or theory—a doxa or a dogma for general consumption. Feminism is also the liberation of women’s ontological desire to be female subjects: to transcend the traditional vision of subjectivity as gender-free, to inscribe the subject back into her/his corporeal reality. To make sexual difference operative at last.

Feminism as the theoretical project aimed at affirming female subjectivity acts as the threshold through which the fundamental dissymmetry between the sexes turns at last into the question of sexual difference. As Irigaray puts it: this is the utopia of our century.

So as to avoid the pitfalls of ready-made essentialism, of positing woman as originally and constitutionally other; so as to avoid her plural lips repeating a certain uniformity, we feminists need a political project, a practice, a movement. Difference, to be operative, has to be acted ON and acted OUT, collectively, in the here and now of our common world.

Beyond the principle of envy—the ethics of sexual difference. And if love means, as Lacan puts it, giving what you haven't got to someone who doesn't want it anyway, then I guess love is what I have been thinking about throughout this chapter, after all.

# Sexual Difference as a Nomadic Political Project

I think that the women who can get beyond the feeling of having to correct history will save a lot of time.

—Marguerite Duras, 1991

As I have stated earlier, the nomadic condition that I am defending is a new figuration of subjectivity in a multidifferentiated nonhierarchical way. In this chapter I will explore more specifically how it intersects with the axis of sexual difference. I agree with Luce Irigaray that sexual difference is the question with which we late twentieth-century Westerners are historically bound to struggle; it is our horizon and our utopia. The two main reasons for this have to do with the role played by difference in European history and the very specific place it occupies in feminist practice.

First, the European dimension. I think that the notion, the theme, and the problem known as "sexual difference" is more topical than ever in the context of the European Community today. The renewed emphasis on a common European identity, sponsored by the project of the unification of the old continent, is resulting in "difference" becoming more than ever a divisive and antagonistic notion. What we are witnessing is an explosion of vested interests that claim their respective differences in the sense of regionalisms, localisms, ethnic wars, and relativisms of all kinds. "Difference," in the age of the disintegration of the Eastern block, is a dangerous term. As several feminist Yugoslav philosophers put it: when "difference" is used negatively and divisively, a postmodernist attempt to redefine it positively becomes desperate and vain. Fragmentation and the reappraisal of difference in a poststructuralist mode can only be perceived at best ironically, and at worst tragically, by somebody living in Zagreb, not to speak of Dubrovnik or Sarajevo.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, the notion of “difference” is a concept rooted in European fascism that has been colonized and taken over by hierarchical and exclusionary ways of thinking. Fascism, however, does not come from nothing. In the European history of philosophy, “difference” is a central concept insofar as Western thought has *always* functioned by dualistic oppositions, which create subcategories of otherness, or “difference-from.” Because in this history, “difference” has been predicated on relations of domination and exclusion, to be “different-from” came to mean to be “less than,” to be *worth* less than. Difference has been colonized by power relations that reduce it to inferiority, as Simone de Beauvoir pertinently put it in *The Second Sex*.<sup>2</sup> Difference consequently acquired essentialistic and lethal connotations; it made entire categories of beings disposable—that is to say, just as human but slightly more mortal.

In modern European history, “difference” was taken over by totalitarian and fascist political regimes who defined it as biological determinism and proceeded to exterminate large numbers of human beings who were constructed in terms of inferiority or pejorative otherness. In critical theory, of the German, French, or any other variety, the exploitative and murderous usage that was made of “difference” in the Nazi Holocaust remains a point of no return. As I noted earlier in chapter 4 (“Re-figuring the Subject”), there is a difference between the French and German critical schools on how to evaluate totalitarianism and the Nazi emphasis on difference as a hierarchical notion. The French believe in the *intrinsic* complicity of reason with violence and domination and reject the category of “instrumental reason,” which is what Adorno and other German critical theorists cling on to, in order to try and reform reason from within. In any case, as Foucault put it in his preface to the American edition of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, thinking through Auschwitz has become an historical imperative for all European intellectuals.

As a critical thinker, an intellectual raised in the baby-boom era of the new Europe, as a feminist committed to enacting empowering alternatives, I choose to make myself *accountable* for this aspect of my culture and my history. I consequently want to think through difference, through the knots of power and violence that have accompanied its rise to supremacy in the European mind. This notion is far too important and rich to be left to fascist and hegemonic interpretations.

Second, within Western feminist practice and history of ideas, the notion of difference has enjoyed a long and eventful existence. I cannot think of a notion that has been more contradictory, polemical, and important. "Difference" within feminist thinking, is a site of intense conceptual tension. My firm defense of the project of sexual difference as an epistemological and political process also expresses my concern for the ways in which many "radical" feminists have rejected difference, dismissing it as a hopelessly "essentialistic" notion. Let me retrace briefly the vicissitudes of the notion of difference within feminist theory, before returning to my own ideas on the project of sexual difference.

Simone de Beauvoir set the agenda with her insightful analysis of the hierarchical scheme of dialectics of consciousness, which she adapted from Hegel. In a move that sets the foundations of feminism as theory, Beauvoir both identifies difference as the central notion and calls for overcoming the hierarchical scheme within it that came to be coupled with devalored otherness, especially feminine difference. In this phase of her work, Beauvoir turns to Poulain de la Barre—a disciple of Descartes—to argue for the transcendence of gender dualism—and therefore of gender bias—in the name of rationality. Beauvoir's analysis and program of liberation via an egalitarian use of reason constitutes the single most important conceptual legacy for contemporary feminist theory.

The poststructuralist feminists in the mid-seventies challenged Beauvoir's emphasis on the politics of egalitarian rationality and emphasized instead the politics of difference. As Marguerite Duras puts it, in the epigraph to this chapter,<sup>3</sup> women who continue to measure themselves against the yardstick of masculine values, women who feel they have to correct male mistakes will certainly waste a lot of time and energy. In the same vein, in her polemical article called "Equal to whom?"<sup>4</sup> Luce Irigaray recommends a shift of political emphasis away from reactive criticism, into the affirmation of positive countervalues. In a revision of Beauvoir's work, poststructuralist feminist theory has reconsidered difference and asked whether its association with domination and hierarchy is as intrinsic as the existentialist generation would have it and therefore as historically inevitable.

Because of the crisis of modernity, since Freud and Nietzsche the notion of "difference" has been at the heart of the European philosophical agenda. Within modernity, however, the focus on difference marks a shift away from the century-old habit that consists in equating it with



inferiority. Moreover, in the thought and theoretical practice of Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx—the apocalyptic trinity of modernity—another provocative innovation comes into the picture: the notion that subjectivity does not coincide with consciousness. The subject is ex-centric with his/her conscious self—because of the importance of structures such as unconscious desire, the impact of historical circumstances, and the social conditions of production. The ontological security of the Cartesian subject being shattered, the road is thus open also to the analysis of the link that had been conventionally established between subjectivity and masculinity. In this sense, the crisis of modernity can be seen, as I argued in my *Patterns of Dissonance*,<sup>5</sup> as a disruption of the masculinist foundations of classical subjectivity. From a feminist perspective, such a crisis is not only a positive event but also one that is rich in potential forms of empowerment for women.

Throughout the feminist eighties, a polemic divided the “difference-inspired” feminists, especially the spokeswomen of the “*écriture féminine*” movement, from the “Anglo-American” “gender” opposition. This polemic fed into the debate on essentialism and resulted in a political and intellectual stalemate from which we are just beginning to emerge. I shall return to this point in the next section of this chapter. Nowadays, the anti-sexual difference feminist line has evolved into an argument for a “beyond gender” or a “postgender” kind of subjectivity. This line of thought argues for the overcoming of sexual dualism and gender polarities, in favor of a new, sexually undifferentiated, subjectivity. Thinkers such as Monique Wittig<sup>6</sup> go as far as to dismiss emphasis on sexual difference as leading to a revival of the metaphysics of the “eternal feminine.”

As opposed to what I see as the hasty dismissal of sexual difference, in the name of a polemical form of “antiessentialism,” or of a utopian longing for a position “beyond gender,” I want to valorize sexual difference as a project. I have also called it a nomadic political project because this emphasis on the difference that women embody provides positive foundational grounds for the redefinition of female subjectivity in all of its complexity. In the rest of this chapter, I shall outline what I see as the interconnection between female identity, feminist subjectivity, and the radical epistemology of nomadic transitions from a perspective of positive sexual difference. In the first instance, however, I shall proceed to outline my criticism of gender-based frameworks of analysis and thereby clarify what I see as the epistemological advantages and the

political relevance of frameworks inspired by sexual difference qua project.

## Feminist Theory in the Nineties

My starting point is that the notion of "gender" is at a crisis point in feminist theory and practice and that it is undergoing intense criticism both for its theoretical inadequacy and for its politically amorphous and unfocused nature. The areas from whence the most pertinent criticism of "gender" has emerged are: the sexual difference theorists; the post-colonial and black feminist theorists; the feminist epistemologists working in the natural sciences, especially biology; and the lesbian thinkers.

A second remark: the crisis of gender as a useful category in feminist analysis is simultaneous with a reshuffling of theoretical positions that had become fixed and stalemated in feminist theory, most notably the opposition between on the one hand "gender theorists" in the Anglo-American tradition and on the other, "sexual difference theorists" in the French and continental tradition,<sup>7</sup> to which I referred briefly before. The debate between these two camps had become stuck in the 1980s in a fairly sterile polemic between opposing cultural and theoretical frameworks that rest on different assumptions about political practice. This polarized climate was reshuffled partly because of the increasing awareness of the culture-specific forms undertaken by feminist theory. This resulted in a new and more productive approach to differences in feminist positions.

A third related phenomenon is the recent emergence in the international debate of Italian, Australian, Dutch, and other kinds of feminist thought as alternatives that help split asunder the comfortably binary opposition between French Continental and Anglo-American positions.<sup>8</sup> These publications have contributed not only to putting another, however "minor," European feminist culture on the map but also to stressing the extent to which the notion of "gender" is a vicissitude of the English language, one that bears little or no relevance to theoretical traditions in the Romance languages.<sup>9</sup> As such, it has found no successful echo in the French, Spanish, or Italian feminist movements. For example, in French "*le genre*" can be used to refer to humanity as a whole ("*le genre humain*"); it is a culture-specific term and consequently untranslatable.

This also means that the sex/gender distinction, which is one of the pillars on which English-speaking feminist theory is built, makes neither

epistemological nor political sense in many non-English, Western European contexts, where the notions of "sexuality" and "sexual difference" are currently used instead. Although much ink has been spilled either to praise or attack theories of sexual difference, little effort has been made to try and situate the debates in their cultural contexts. Nor has there been sufficient attention paid to the nationalistic undertones that often mark the discussions around sexual difference as opposed to the discussions on gender theories.

The fourth and final remark I would like to make about "gender" concerns the institutional practice to which it gives rise, which I find problematic for feminists. The scientific-sounding term *gender* appears to strike a more reassuring note in the academic world than the more explicitly political term, *feminist* studies. This factor is partly responsible for the success encountered by "gender studies" in universities and publishing houses of late. In my opinion, this success has resulted in a shift of focus away from the feminist agenda toward a more generalized attention to the social construction of differences *between* the sexes. It is a broadening out that is also a thinning down of the political agenda.

Arguing that men have a gender too, many institutions started claiming the establishment of "men's studies" courses as a counterpart to or, alternatively, as a structural component of women's studies. Masculinity comes back in, under the cover of "gender." Although the male critiques of masculinity are extremely important and necessary, I think this institutional competition between the broadening out of "gender studies"—to include men as a presence and as a topic—and the keeping up of the feminist agenda is regrettable. This situation has led feminists to view "gender" with suspicion at the level of institutional practice.

On a more theoretical level I think that the main assumption behind "gender studies" is of a new symmetry between the sexes, which practically results in a renewal of interest for men and men's studies. Faced with this, I would like to state my open disagreement with this illusion of symmetry and revindicate instead sexual difference as a powerful factor of dissymmetry. Moreover, I think that the historical texts of the feminist debate on gender do not lend themselves to a case for sexual symmetry. In a perspective of historiography of feminist ideas, I would define gender as a notion that offers a set of frameworks within which feminist theory has explained the social and discursive construction and representation of differences between the sexes. As such, "gender" in feminist theory primarily fulfills the function of challenging the univer-

salistic tendency of critical language and of the systems of knowledge and scientific discourse at large.

This tendency consists in conflating the masculine viewpoint with the general, "human" standpoint, thereby confining the feminine to the structural position of "other." Thus, the masculine qua human is taken as the "norm," and the feminine qua other is seen as marking the "difference." The corollary of this definition is that the burden of sexual difference falls upon women, marking them off as the second sex, or the structural "other," whereas men are marked by the imperative of carrying the universal. The symbolic division of labor between the sexes, which the term "gender" helps to explain, is the system set up by phallogocentrism, which is the inner logic of patriarchy. In other words, this system is neither necessary as in historically inevitable, nor is it rational as in conceptually necessary. It simply *has come to be*, as the powerful foundations of a system in which we are all constructed as either men or women by certain symbolic, semiotic, and material conditions.

In such a system, the masculine and the feminine are in a structurally dissymmetrical position: men, as the empirical referents of the masculine, do not have a gender because they are expected to carry the phallus, that is to say, to uphold the view of abstract virility, which is hardly an easy task.<sup>10</sup> Simone de Beauvoir observed fifty years ago that the price men pay for representing the universal is a kind of loss of embodiment; the price women pay, on the other hand, is a loss of subjectivity and the confinement to the body. The former are disembodied and through this process gain entitlement to transcendence and subjectivity, the latter are overembodied and thereby consigned to immanence. This results in two very dissymmetrical positions and two opposed problem areas.

This analysis by Beauvoir has received some new theoretical input, through the joint impact of semiotics, structuralist psychoanalysis, and autonomous developments within the women's movement in the eighties.<sup>11</sup> Central to this new approach is a shift away from the mere critique of patriarchy to the assertion of the positivity of women's cultural traditions and range of experiences; the work of Adrienne Rich is very influential here.<sup>12</sup> This shift resulted in new emphasis and value being placed on language and consequently on representation as the site of constitution of the subject.

One of the most striking forms of this new development in feminist scholarship is the French theory of "sexual difference," also known as

the "*écriture féminine*" movement. The conceptual foundations of this movement are drawn from linguistics, literary studies, semiotics, philosophy, and psychoanalytic theories of the subject. The sexual difference theorists<sup>13</sup> gave a new impetus to the feminist debate by drawing attention to the social relevance of the theoretical and linguistic structures of the differences between the sexes. They claimed that the social field is coextensive with relations of power and knowledge: that it is an intersecting web of symbolic and material structures.<sup>14</sup> In other words, this school of feminist thought argues that an adequate analysis of women's oppression must take into account both language and materialism<sup>15</sup> and not be reduced to either one. They are very critical of the notion of "gender" as being unduly focused on social and material factors, to the detriment of the semiotic and symbolic aspects.

The debate between sexual difference and gender theorists in the 1980s resulted in a polemical opposition that led to two quite comparable forms of reductivism: on the one hand an idealistic form that reduces everything to the textual and on the other hand a materialistic one that reduces everything to the social. These led to two extreme versions of "essentialism."<sup>16</sup>

It seems to me that, beyond the polemic, one of the points of real, that is to say conceptual difference between the two camps is in the question of how to identify points of exit from the universalism implicit in the patriarchal or phallogocentric system and from the binary way of thinking that characterizes it. Whereas sexual difference theorists argued for the process of working through the old system, through the strategy of "mimetic repetition," gender theorists resorted to the "critique of ideology." This resulted in the investment by the sexual difference theorists of the "feminine" pole of the sexual dichotomy in order to create different meanings and representations for it. On the part of gender theorists it led to the rejection of the scheme of sexual bipolarization, in favor of a desexualized and gender-free position. In other words, we come to opposing claims: the argument that one needs to redefine the female feminist subject, which is reiterated by sexual difference theorists, is echoed by the contradictory claim of gender theorists, that the feminine is a morass of metaphysical nonsense and that one is better off rejecting it altogether, in favor of a new androgyny.

Not surprisingly, these positions also imply quite different theoretical understandings of female sexuality in general and of female homosexuality in particular.<sup>17</sup>

What strikes me, however, as a fundamental point of consensus between the two positions is the idea that feminist practice, and women's studies with it, must challenge the universalistic stance of scientific discourse by exposing its inherent dualism. The rejection of dualistic thinking as the way of being of patriarchy provides common grounds for the unblocking of otherwise opposed feminist positions. Feminist scholars right across the board have been arguing that the universalistic stance, with its conflation of the masculine to represent the human and the confinement of the feminine to a secondary position of devalued "otherness," rests upon a classical system of dualistic oppositions, such as, for instance: nature/culture, active/passive, rational/irrational, masculine/feminine. Feminists argue that this dualistic mode of thinking creates binary differences only to ordain them in a hierarchical scale of power relations.

Thus, Joan Scott argues that the notion of gender as marking a set of interrelations between variables of oppression could help us understand the intersection of sex, class, race, lifestyle, and age as fundamental axes of differentiation.<sup>18</sup> In a more recent essay,<sup>19</sup> Scott goes further and argues for a definition of gender as marking the intersection of language with the social, of the semiotic with the material. Quoting Foucault's notion of "discourse," which she defends as one of the major contributions of poststructuralist thought to feminist theory,<sup>20</sup> Scott suggests that we reinterpret "gender" as linking the text to reality, the symbolic to the material, and theory to practice in a new powerful manner. In Scott's reading feminist theory in this poststructuralist mode has the advantage of politicizing the struggle over meaning and representation.

What emerges in poststructuralist feminist reaffirmations of difference is a radical redefinition of the text and of the textual away from the dualistic mode; the text is now approached as both a semiotic and a material structure, that is to say not an isolated item locked in a dualistic opposition to a social context and to an activity of interpretation. The text must rather be understood as a term in a process, that is to say a chain reaction encompassing a web of power relations. What is at stake in the textual practice, therefore, is less the activity of interpretation than that of decoding the network of connections and effects that link the text to an entire sociosymbolic system. In other words, we are faced here with a new materialist theory of the text and of textual practice.

The feminist theorists of the nineties have been exposed to the impact of theories of both gender and difference and have moved beyond them

in a productive manner. I would distinguish the following groupings within this new generation:

1. The feminist critical theorists in the German tradition, united in their attachment to the Frankfurt tradition: Benhabib,<sup>21</sup> Benjamin,<sup>22</sup> and Flax.<sup>23</sup>
2. The French-based thinkers, introduced into American academia via the literature departments and consequently taken up mostly by scholars in the humanities and literary studies. It must be noted, however, that the works of the philosopher Irigaray<sup>24</sup> were translated into English as late as 1985. One of the immediate consequences of this cultural export is that in the United States theories of sexual difference now become synonymous with literature.<sup>25</sup> As a consequence, a hiatus on this theme was created between the humanities and philosophy and the social sciences in the United States.<sup>26</sup>
3. The Italian group; here the key figure is Irigaray: whereas she was slow in coming into the English-speaking world, (where Cixous swept in on the back of the Derrida fad), Irigaray found a fertile and receptive audience in Italy. Through the traditional links between the women's movement and organized left-wing politics, Italian adaptations of Irigaray especially by Muraro<sup>27</sup> and Cavarero,<sup>28</sup> produced a highly politicized version of sexual difference in terms of a social and symbolic alliance of women.
4. The lesbian radicalism of Wittig<sup>29</sup> and her gender-bending followers.
5. The ethnic and colonial thinkers:<sup>30</sup> although in North American feminism the race issue was present from the start, it took a long time for ethnicity and race to be recognized as a central variable in the definition of feminist subjectivity. The whiteness of feminist theory then became the central target, overruling all other differences, including the previously polemical gap between "gender" and "sexual difference" theories. The pioneer work of Audre Lorde,<sup>31</sup> of black women writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison and of many other black theorists<sup>32</sup> was followed by more systematic methodological critiques of the whiteness and the ethnocentrism of feminist theories of gender and sexual difference, such as those of Gayatri Spivak,<sup>33</sup> Chandra Mohanty,<sup>34</sup> Barbara Smith,<sup>35</sup> Trinh Minh-ha,<sup>36</sup> and bell hooks.<sup>37</sup> This enormous output by women of color affected radically the thinking of feminist theorists such as Teresa de Lauretis, but also Donna Haraway<sup>38</sup> and, most recently, Sandra Harding.<sup>39</sup>

In a European context, the issue of feminism, race, and ethnicity has been more difficult to articulate, partly because national differences in brands and styles of feminist political cultures have always been so great that no one dominant feminist line or standpoint has ever emerged. Through the eighties, increasing awareness of the cultural specificity of certain feminist notions—such as gender—has led many

southern Europeans to raise the issue of the cultural and political hegemony of English-style feminism and to challenge it. One of the effects of this was to put on the agenda the issue of ethnicity and race and to reexamine its role in the making of feminist practice. Accordingly, Spelman<sup>40</sup> takes Beauvoir to task because of her color blindness and lack of sensitivity to the issue of ethnicity.

More recently, as a reaction to the multicultural nature of contemporary European societies, and also to widespread increase of racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and neocolonialism in the European Community, the focus on race issues has become sharper. Thus, in the inter-European exchange network for women's studies within the Erasmus scheme<sup>41</sup> in which my department has been involved with several European partners, we are working toward the development of a joint curriculum in women's studies from a European, multicultural perspective. While we draw inspiration from the American agenda on race, we are determined to give priority to the European aspects of this complex issue, especially the persistence of anti-Semitism, the persecution of gypsies and other nomads, the various forms of economic neocolonialism, and phenomena such as intra-European migration, especially from the Southern and Eastern European regions.

The new theorists emerging in the nineties are consequently working along the lines of a multiplicity of variables of definition of female subjectivity: race, class, age, sexual preference, and lifestyles count as major axes of identity. They therefore innovate on the established feminist ideas, in that they are bent on redefining female subjectivity in terms of a network of simultaneous power formations. I will argue next that a new trend seems to be emerging that emphasizes the situated, specific, embodied nature of the feminist subject, while rejecting biological or psychic essentialism. This is a new kind of female embodied materialism.

Central to this new feminist materialism, that entails a redefinition of the text as co-extensive with relations of knowledge and power, is the process of constitution of subjectivity as part of this network of power and knowledge. The issue can be summed up as follows: what if the patriarchal mode of representation, which can be named the "gender system" produced the very categories that it purports to deconstruct? Taking gender as a process, de Lauretis emphasizes a point that Foucault had already brought to our attention, namely that the process of



power and knowledge also produces the subject as a term in that particular process.

In other words, what lies at the heart of this redefinition of gender as the technology of the self is the notion of the politics of subjectivity, in the twofold sense of both the constitution of identities and the acquisition of subjectivity in terms of forms of empowerment, or entitlements to certain practices. The acquisition of subjectivity is therefore a process of material (institutional) and discursive (symbolic) practices, the aim of which is both positive—because the process allows for forms of empowerment—and regulative—because the forms of empowerment are the site of limitations and disciplining.

The key notion here is that of gender as a regulatory fiction, that is to say a normative activity that constructs certain categories, such as subject, object, masculine, feminine, heterosexual, and lesbian, as part of its very process. This idea of “gender” as a regulatory fiction must be read in the framework of the critique of the ethnocentric and univocal meaning of the term *gender*.

To sum up this change of perspective in feminist theory, I would like to emphasize the point I have made before, namely that in contemporary feminist practice, the paradox of “woman” has emerged as central. Feminism is based on the very notion of female identity, which it is historically bound to criticize. Feminist thought rests on a concept that calls for deconstruction and de-essentialization in all of its aspects. More specifically, I think that over the last ten years the central question in feminist theory has become: how to redefine female subjectivity after the decline of gender dualism, privileging notions of the self as process complexity, interrelatedness, postcolonial simultaneities of oppression, and the multilayered technology of the self? In other words, the social and symbolic fate of sexual polarizations is at stake here.

What I see as the central issue here is that of identity as a site of differences; feminist analyses of the gender system show that the subject occupies a variety of possible positions at different times, across a multiplicity of variables such as sex, race, class, age, lifestyles, and so on. The challenge for feminist theory today is how to invent new images of thought that can help us think about change and changing constructions of the self. Not the staticness of formulated truths or readily available counteridentities, but the living process of transformation of self and other. Sandra Harding defines it as the process of “reinventing oneself as other.”<sup>42</sup>

In other words, what emerges from these new developments in feminist theory is the need to recode or rename the female feminist subject not as yet another sovereign, hierarchical, and exclusionary subject but rather as a multiple, open-ended, interconnected entity. To think constructively about change and changing conditions in feminist thought today one needs to emphasize a vision of the thinking, knowing subject as not-one but rather as being split over and over again in a rainbow of yet uncoded and ever so beautiful possibilities.

Let me expand now on my own view of the structures of this new complex feminist subjectivity, which I see as the center of the project of feminist nomadism.

## Feminist Nomadic Thinking: A Working Scheme

The starting point, for my scheme of feminist nomadism, is that feminist theory is not only a movement of critical opposition of the false universality of the subject, it is also the positive affirmation of women's desire to affirm and enact different forms of subjectivity. This project involves both the critique of existing definitions and representations of women and also the creation of new images of female subjectivity. The starting point for this project (both critical and creative) is the need to have real-life women in positions of discursive subjectivity. The key terms here are embodiment and the bodily roots of subjectivity and the desire to reconnect theory to practice.

For the sake of clarity, I will divide the project of feminist nomadism into three phases, all of which will be linked to sexual difference. I want to stress the fact that these three different levels are not dialectically ordained phases but rather that they can coexist chronologically and that each and every one continues to be available as an option for political and theoretical practice. The distinction I will consequently draw between "difference between men and women," "differences among women," and "differences within each woman" is not to be taken as a categorical distinction but as an exercise in naming different facets of a single complex phenomenon.

Nor is this diagram a paradigmatic model: it is a map, a cartography that depicts the different layers of complexity involved in a nomadic epistemology from the perspective of sexual difference. These levels can be viewed spatially, as well as temporally; they spell out different structures of subjectivity but also different moments in the process of becoming-subject. Consequently, these levels are not meant to be

approached sequentially and dialectically. Following the nomadic approach that I am defending in this book, the cartography can be entered at *any level* and at *any moment*. I want to stress in fact that these layers occur simultaneously and that, in daily life, they coexist and cannot be easily distinguished. I would even argue that it is precisely the capacity to transit from one level to another, in a flow of experiences, time sequences, and layers of signification that is the key to that nomadic mode I am defending, not only intellectually but also as an art of existence.

TABLE 1  
Sexual Difference Level 1: Difference Between Men and Women

SUBJECTIVITY AS	VERSUS	WOMAN AS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•phallogocentric</li> <li>•universal notion of the subject</li> <li>•coinciding with consciousness</li> <li>•self-regulating</li> <li>•rational agency</li> <li>•entitled to rationality</li> <li>•capable of transcendence</li> <li>•denying corporal origins or objectifying the body</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•the lack/excess/"other-than"/subject</li> <li>•devalorized difference</li> <li>•non consciousness</li> <li>•uncontrolled</li> <li>•irrational</li> <li>•in excess of rationality</li> <li>•confined to immanence</li> <li>•Identified with the body—corporeality that is both exploited and reduced to silence</li> </ul>

The central issue at stake at this level of analysis is the critique of universalism as being male-identified and of masculinity as projecting itself as a pseudo-universal. This also accompanies the critique of the idea of otherness as devalorization. In a very Hegelian framework, Simone de Beauvoir formulated fifty years ago a path-breaking analysis of the universalism of the subject. Confronted with this scheme, she asserted as the theoretical and political option for women the struggle to attain transcendence and thereby acquire the same entitlement to subjectivity as men. As Judith Butler points out in her lucid analysis<sup>43</sup> of this Hegelian

moment of feminist theory, Beauvoir sees the difference that women embody as something that is as yet *unrepresented*. Beauvoir consequently concludes that this devalorized and misrepresented entity can and must be brought into representation, and that this is the main task of the women's movement.

In a poststructuralist perspective, however, contemporary theorists of difference, like Luce Irigaray, move beyond dialectics. Irigaray evaluates women's "otherness" not merely as that which is not yet represented but rather as that which remains *unrepresentable* within this scheme of representation. Woman as the other remains in excess of or outside the phallogocentric framework that conflates the masculine with the (false) universalist position. The relationship between subject and other, therefore, is not one of reversibility; on the contrary, the two poles of the opposition exist in an asymmetrical relationship. Under the heading of "the double syntax" Irigaray defends this irreducible and irreversible difference and proposes it as the foundation for a new phase of feminist politics. In other words, Luce Irigaray stresses the need to recognize as a factual and historical reality that there is no symmetry between the sexes and that this asymmetry has been organized hierarchically by the phallogocentric regime. Recognizing that difference has been turned into a mark of pejoration, the feminist project attempts to redefine it in terms of positivity.

The starting point for the project of sexual difference—level one—remains the political will to assert the specificity of the lived, female bodily experience; the refusal to disembody sexual difference into a new allegedly "postmodern" and "antiessentialist" subject, and the will to reconnect the whole debate on difference to the bodily existence and experience of women.

Politically, the project amounts to the rejection of emancipationism as leading to homologation, that is to say the assimilation of women into masculine modes of thought and practice and consequently sets of values. Recent socioeconomic developments in the status of women in Western, postindustrial societies have in fact shown—besides the persistence of classical forms of discrimination leading to the feminization of poverty—that female emancipation can easily turn into a one-way street into a man's world. This warning has been issued very strongly by feminists as different from each other as Luce Irigaray,<sup>44</sup> Antoinette Fouque,<sup>45</sup> and Marguerite Duras,<sup>46</sup>

who warn women against investing all of their time and energy in correcting the errors and mistakes of male culture. A better and politically more rewarding investment consists in trying to elaborate alternative forms of female subjectivity, in a process that is also described as asserting the positivity of sexual difference.

This shift in perspective turned out to be a far from easy moment in feminist practice. In fact, it led to a wave of polemics and, often, to conflicts among women, made all the more acute by the differences of generation.<sup>47</sup> The more lasting aspect of the polemic concerned an opposition between on the one hand the antiemancipationism of the sexual difference theorists and, on the other, the charges of "essentialism" made by the equality-minded thinkers against the sexual difference feminists. I deal with this debate on equality-versus-difference in chapter 15 ("Theories of Gender; or, Language is a Virus").

Far from separating the struggle for equality from the affirmation of difference, I see them as complementary and part of a continuous historical evolution. The women's movement is the space where sexual difference becomes operational, through the strategy of fighting for equality of the sexes in a cultural and economic order dominated by the masculine homosocial bond. What is at stake is the definition of woman as other-than a nonman.

One of the crucial questions of this project is how one can argue both for the loss of the classical paradigm of subjectivity and for the specificity of an alternative female subject. Given that the reaffirmation of sexual difference by feminists dates to the same moment in history as modernity itself, that is to say the moment of loss of the rationalist and naturalistic paradigm, feminists have the double task of stressing the need for a new vision of subjectivity at large, and of a sex-specific vision of female subjectivity in particular.

The analysis of the first level of sexual difference came to be challenged not only because of changing political and intellectual contexts but also because of evolutions internal in the feminist movement itself. On the one hand the existentialist ethics of solidarity was also challenged by psychoanalytic and poststructuralist claims about the coexistence of knowledge and power, which have changed the understanding of phenomena such as oppression and liberation.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, a new generation of feminists grew frustrated with Beauvoir's sweeping generalizations about "women" as the "second sex." The political and theoretical emphasis since the seventies has been shifting from the

TABLE 2  
Sexual Difference Level 2: Differences among women

WOMEN AS THE OTHER	VERSUS	REAL-LIFE WOMEN
<p>—as institution and representation</p> <p>(see level 1)</p>	<p>critical hiatus between them— feminist subjectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•positivity of sexual difference as political project</li> <li>•female feminist genealogies, or countermemory</li> <li>•politics of location and resistance</li> <li>•dissymmetry between the sexes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•experience</li> <li>•embodiment</li> <li>•situated knowledges</li> <li>•women-based knowledges</li> <li>•empowerment</li> <li>•multiplicity of differences (race, age, class, etc.) or diversity</li> </ul>

asymmetry between the sexes to the exploration of the sexual difference embodied and experienced by women.

The central issue at stake here is how to create, legitimate, and represent a multiplicity of alternative forms of feminist subjectivity without falling into relativism. The starting point is the recognition that *Woman* is a general umbrella term that brings together different kinds of women, different levels of experience and different identities.

The notion of *Woman* refers to a female, sexed subject that is constituted, as psychoanalysis convincingly argues, through a process of identification with culturally available positions organized in the dichotomy of gender. As the "second sex" of the patriarchal gender dichotomy, *Woman* is inscribed in what Kristeva calls the longer, linear time of history.<sup>49</sup> As the starting point for feminist consciousness, however, female identity pertains also and simultaneously to a different temporality: a deeper and more discontinuous sense of time that is the time of transformation, resistance, political genealogies, and becoming. Thus, we have on the one hand teleological time and on the other the time of consciousness-raising: history and the unconscious.

I call feminism the movement that struggles to change the values attributed to and the representations made of women in the longer historical time of patriarchal history (*Woman*) as well as in the deeper time of one's own identity. In other words, the feminist project encompasses both the level of subjectivity in the sense of historical agency, and political and social entitlement, and the level of identity that is linked to consciousness, desire, and the politics of the personal; it covers both the conscious and the unconscious levels.

The feminist subject is historical because it is involved in patriarchy by negation; but it is also linked to female identity, to the personal. In other words, the "woman" is to be situated in a structurally different position from the feminist because, being structured as the referent of otherness, it is opposed specularly to the masculine as referent of subjectivity. The second sex is in a dichotomous opposition to the male as representative of the universal. Consequently, feminism requires both an epistemological and a political distinction between *woman* and *feminist*. What is feminist is both the push toward the insertion of women into patriarchal history (the emancipatory moment, or, sexual difference level one) and the questioning of personal identity on the basis of power relations, which is the feminism of difference (sexual difference level two).

Let me repeat the same point from a different angle: critical distance from the institution and representation of "*Woman*" is the starting point for feminist consciousness; the women's movement rests on a consensus that all women partake of the condition of "the second sex." This can be seen as the sufficient condition for the elaboration of a feminist subject position; the recognition of a bond of commonality among women is the starting point for feminist consciousness in that it seals a pact among women. This moment is the foundation stone that allows for the feminist position or standpoint to be articulated.

But this recognition of a common condition of sisterhood in oppression cannot be the final aim; women may have common situations and experiences, but they are not, in any way, *the same*. In this respect, the idea of the politics of location is very important. This idea, developed into a theory of recognition of the multiple differences that exist among women, stresses the importance of rejecting global statements about all women and of attempting instead to be as aware as possible of the place from which one is speaking. Attention to the *situated* as opposed to the universalistic nature of statements is the key idea. In its political appli-

cations, the politics of location determines one's approach to time and history; the sense of location, for me, has to do with countermemory, or the development of alternative genealogies. It means that it does make a difference to have the historical memory of oppression or exclusion, as women, rather than being the empirical referent for a dominant group, like men.

Thus, we need to rephrase the point about the relation between *woman* and *feminist*. As Teresa De Lauretis argued, all women are implicated in the confrontation with a certain image of "*Woman*" that is the culturally dominant model for female identity. The elaboration of a political subjectivity as feminist, therefore, requires as its precondition the recognition of a distance between "*Woman*" and real women. Teresa De Lauretis has defined this moment as the recognition of an "essential difference" between woman as representation ("*Woman*" as cultural imago) and woman as experience (real women as agents of change).

In other words, with the help of semiotic and psychoanalytic theories, a foundational distinction is drawn between "*Woman*" as the signifier that is codified in a long history of binary oppositions and the signifier "*feminist*" as that which builds upon the recognition of the constructed nature of *Woman*. The recognition of the hiatus between *Woman* and women is crucial, as is the determination to seek for adequate representations of it, both politically and symbolically.

Before this development of the philosophy of sexual difference becomes at all possible, however, it is necessary to posit the distinction between *Woman* and women as the foundational gesture for feminist thought to exist at all. This initial step is the assertion of an essential and irreconcilable difference, which I call sexual difference level two, or, differences among women.

Thus, to return to my opening remarks on feminism and modernity: feminist theory as the philosophy of sexual difference identifies as a historical essence the notion of *Woman* at the exact period in history when this notion is deconstructed and challenged. The crisis of modernity makes available to feminists the essence of femininity as an historical construct that needs to be worked upon. *Woman* therefore ceases to be the culturally dominant and prescriptive model for female subjectivity and turns instead into an identifiable topos for analysis: as a construct (De Lauretis); a masquerade (Butler); a positive essence (Irigaray); or an ideological trap (Wittig)—to mention only a few.



It seems to me that a feminist nomadic position can allow for these different representations and modes of understanding of female subjectivity to coexist and to provide material for discussion. Unless a position of nomadic flexibility comes into being, these different definitions and understandings will have a divisive effect on feminist practice.

Another problem that emerges here is the importance of finding adequate forms of representation for these new figurations of the female subject. As I have argued elsewhere, alternative figurations are crucial at this point and great creativity is needed to move beyond established conceptual schemes. To achieve this, we need not only a transdisciplinary approach but also more effective exchanges between theorists and artists, academics and creative minds. But more on this later.

TABLE 3  
Sexual Difference Level 3: Differences  
Within Each Woman

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Each Real-Life Woman (n.b. *Not "Woman"*) or  
Female Feminist Subject is

- a multiplicity in herself: slit, fractured
- a network of Levels of experience (as outlined on levels 2 and 1)
- a living memory and embodied genealogy
- not one conscious subject, but also the subject of her unconscious: identity as identifications
- in an imaginary relationship to variables like class, race, age, sexual choices

This third level of analysis highlights the complexity of the embodied structure of the subject. The body refers to a layer of corporeal materiality, a substratum of living matter endowed with memory. Following Deleuze, I understand this as pure flows of energy, capable of multiple variations. The "self," meaning an entity endowed with identity, is anchored in this living matter, whose materiality is coded and rendered in language. The postpsychoanalytic vision of the corporeal subject that I propose here implies that the body cannot be fully apprehended or

represented: it exceeds representation. A difference within each entity is a way of expressing this condition. Identity for me is a play of multiple, fractured aspects of the self; it is relational, in that it requires a bond to the "other"; it is retrospective, in that it is fixed through memories and recollections, in a genealogical process. Last, but not least, identity is made of successive identifications, that is to say unconscious internalized images that escape rational control.

This fundamental noncoincidence of identity with consciousness implies also that one entertains an imaginary relationship to one's history, genealogy, and material conditions.

I stress this because far too often in feminist theory, the level of identity gets merrily confused with issues of political subjectivity. In my scheme of thought, identity bears a privileged bond to unconscious processes, whereas political subjectivity is a conscious and willful position. Unconscious desire and willful choice do not always coincide.

Paying attention to the level of identity as complexity and multiplicity would also encourage feminists to deal with their own internal contradictions and discontinuities—if possible with humor and lightness. As I suggest in the introduction to this book, I do think it important to leave room for contradictory moments, for confusions and uncertainties, and not to see them as defeats or lapses into "politically incorrect" behavior. In this respect, nothing could be more antithetical to the nomadism I am advocating than feminist moralism.

The central issue at stake here is how to avoid the repetition of exclusions in the process of legitimating an alternative feminist subject? How to avoid hegemonic recodification of the female subject, how to keep an open-ended view of subjectivity, while asserting the political and theoretical presence of another view of subjectivity?

According to this vision of a subject that is both historically anchored and split, or multiple, the power of synthesis of the "I" is a grammatical necessity, a theoretical fiction that holds together the collection of differing layers, the integrated fragments of the ever-receding horizon of one's identity. The idea of "differences within" each subject is tributary to psychoanalytic theory and practice in that it envisages the subject as the crossroads of different registers of speech, calling upon different layers of lived experience.

To translate this standpoint back into the debate on the politics of subjectivity within the feminist practice of sexual difference, I would ask

the following question: What is the technology of the self at work in the expression of sexual difference?

In this scheme of thought, following the distinction of levels I am proposing, it is also plausible to posit feminist subjectivity as an object of desire for women. A female feminist could consequently be seen as someone who longs for, tends toward, is driven to feminism. I would call this an "intensive" reading of the feminist position, which then comes to be understood not merely in terms of willful commitment to a set of values or political beliefs but also in terms of the passions or desires that sustain it and motivate it.<sup>50</sup> This "topology" of passion is an approach inspired by Nietzsche via Deleuze; it allows us to see volitional choices not as transparent, self-evident positions but rather as multilayered ones. A healthy dose of a hermeneutics of suspicion toward one's beliefs is no form of cynicism, or nihilism; on the contrary, it is a way of returning political beliefs to their fullness, their embodiedness, and consequently their partiality.

As Maaïke Meijer observes,<sup>51</sup> a psychoanalytic, "intensive" approach is seldom applied to the analysis of politics. If it ever is, as in the case of Nazism, it usually aims at explaining dark and terrifying motivating forces. It is as if reference to a topology of political passions could only carry negative connotations. In response to this, I would turn to Deleuze's idea of the positivity of passions—a notion that he explores with Nietzsche and Spinoza—in order to account for a "desire for feminism" as a joyful, affirmative passion. What feminism liberates in women is also their desire for freedom, lightness, justice, and self-accomplishment. These values are not only rational political beliefs, they are also objects of intense desire. This merry spirit was quite manifest in the earlier days of the women's movement, when it was clear that joy and laughter were profound political emotions and statements. Not much of this joyful beat survives in these days of postmodernist gloom, and yet we would do well to remember the subversive force of Dionysian laughter. I wish feminism would shed its saddening, dogmatic mode to rediscover the merrymaking of a movement that aims to change life.<sup>52</sup>

As Italo Calvino points out,<sup>53</sup> the key words to help us to move out of the postmodernist crisis are: lightness, quickness, and multiplicity. The third level of sexual difference alerts us to the importance of a certain lightness of touch to accompany the complexity of the political and epistemological structures of the feminist project.

## For Nomadism

If you translate these three levels of sexual difference on a temporal sequence, following Kristeva's scheme that I have already quoted, you can argue that levels one and two belong to the longer, linear time of history. Level three pertains to the inner, discontinuous time of genealogy. The problem, however, is how to think through the interconnect-edness between them, that is to say: how to account for a process of *becoming*, while empowering women's historical agency?

To sum up, I would say that speaking "as a feminist woman" does not refer to one dogmatic framework but rather to a knot of interrelated questions that play on different layers, registers, and levels of the self.

In my reading, the project of sexual difference argues the following: it is historically and politically urgent, in the *here and now* of the common world of women, to bring about and act upon sexual difference. This is also due to the historical context within which the affirmation of the position of difference is taking place, especially in Europe.

I see feminism as the strategy of working through the historical notion of "*Woman*," at a time in history when it has lost its substantial unity. As a political and theoretical practice, therefore, feminism can be described as unveiling and consuming the different layers of representation of "*Woman*." The myth of *Woman* as other is now a vacant lot where different women can play with their subjective becoming. The question for the feminist subject is how to intervene upon *Woman* in this historical context, so as to create new conditions for the becoming-subject of women here and now.

In dealing with the becoming-subjects of women, the starting point is the politics of location, which implies the critique of dominant identities and power-formations and a sense of accountability for the historical conditions in which we share. This implies not only the recognition of differences among women but also the practice of decoding—expressing and sharing in language the conditions of possibility of one's own political and theoretical choices. Accountability and positionality go together. In emphasizing the importance of accounting for one's own investments—especially to other women—I have also insisted throughout this book on the need to also take into account the level of unconscious desire and consequently of imaginary relation to the very material conditions that structure our existence. As Caren Kaplan puts it: "such accountability can begin to shift the ground of feminist practice from magisterial relativism . . . to the complex interpretive practices that

acknowledge the historical roles of mediation, betrayal, and alliance in the relationships between women in diverse locations.<sup>54</sup>

My answer to the question, where does change come from? that I have just asked, is that the new is created by revisiting and burning up the old. Like the totemic meal in Freud, one must assimilate the dead before one can move onto a new order. The quest for points of exit requires the mimetic repetition and consumption of the old; in turn, this influences how I see the points of exit from phallogocentric premises. The traditional choice within feminism seems to be on the one hand to overcome gender dualism toward a neutralization of differences, or on the other hand to push the difference to the extreme, oversexualizing it in a strategic manner. In my own version of sexual difference as a nomadic strategy, I have opted for the extreme affirmation of sexed identity as a way of reversing the attribution of differences in a hierarchical mode. This extreme affirmation of sexual difference may lead to repetition, but the crucial factor here is that it empowers women to act.

Starting from the premise that the female feminist subject is one of the terms in a process that should not and cannot be streamlined into a linear, teleological form of subjectivity; that it should be seen as the intersection of subjective desire with willful social transformation, I want to go on and argue that sexual difference allows for the affirmation of alternative forms of feminist political subjectivity: feminists are the post-*Woman* women.

In my reading, the feminist subject is nomadic because it is intensive, multiple, embodied, and therefore perfectly cultural. I think that this new figuration can be taken as an attempt to come to terms with what I have chosen to call the new nomadism of our historical condition. I have argued that the task of redefining female subjectivity requires as a preliminary method the working through of the stock of cumulated images, concepts, and representations of women, of female identity, such as they have been codified by the culture in which we live.

A perfect example of nomadic engagement with historical essences, aimed at displacing their normative charge, is offered by the American artist Cindy Sherman. In her *History Portraits*,<sup>55</sup> she enacts a series of metabolic consumptions of different historical figures, characters, and heroes, whom she impersonates with a stunning mixture of accuracy and irony. Through a set of parodic self-portraits in which she appears in different guises as many different "others," Sherman couples shifts of location with a powerful political statement about the importance of

locating agency precisely in shifts, transitions, and mimetic repetitions.<sup>56</sup> In other words, because of a history of domination and because of the way in which phallogocentric language structures our speaking positions as subjects, I think that before feminists relinquish the signifier *woman* we need to repossess it and to revisit its multifaceted complexities, because these complexities define the one identity we share—as female feminists.

By placing all the emphasis on nomadic shifts, I mean to stress the importance of not excluding any one of the levels that constitute the map of female feminist subjectivity. What matters is to be able to name and to represent areas of transit between them; all that counts is the going, the process, the passing. In putting the matter in these terms, I also situate myself in-between some of the major figurations of subjectivity that are operative in feminism today. For instance, Haraway's figure of the "cyborg" is a powerful intervention on the level of political subjectivity in that it proposes a realignment of differences of race, gender, class, age, and so on, and it promotes a multifaceted location for feminist agency. But I find that the cyborg also announces a world "beyond gender," stating that sexed identity is obsolete without showing the steps and the points of exit from the old, gender-polarized system.

According to my nomadic scheme, I need to be able to name the steps, the shifts, and the points of exit that would make it possible for women to move beyond the phallogocentric gender dualism. In other words, I need to pay attention to the level of identity, of unconscious identifications, and of desire and to conjugate those levels with willful political transformations. The cyborg is extremely helpful in understanding the latter, but on the question of identity, identification, and unconscious desires it does not get me very far.

Similarly, Irigaray's figurations for a new feminist humanity, with their emphasis on female mythology ("the two lips," "the mucous," "the divine") propose an unprecedented exploration of the in-depth structures of female identity. Irigaray defends her mimetic descent into this female phantasmagoria of the unconscious as the privileged strategy that aims at redefining both female identity and feminist subjectivity. By linking the two so closely together, however, Irigaray fails to account for multiplicity of differences among women, especially on the ground of culture and ethnic identity.

The nomadic subject I am proposing is a figuration that emphasizes the need for action both at the level of identity, of subjectivity, and of differences among women. These different requirements correspond to different moments, that is to say, different locations in space, that is to say, different practices. This multiplicity is contained in a multilayered temporal sequence, whereby discontinuities and even contradictions can find a place.

In order to sustain this process, a feminist must start from the recognition of herself as not-one; as a subject that is split time and time again, over multiple axes of differentiation. Paying attention to these multiple axes calls for suitably diversified forms of practice.

To put it more plainly: following Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Irigaray I do not believe that changes and transformations, such as the new symbolic system of women, can be created by sheer volition. The way to transform psychic reality is not by willful self-naming; at best that is an extreme form of narcissism, at worst it is the melancholic face of solipsism. Rather, transformation can only be achieved through de-essentialized embodiment or strategically re-essentialized embodiment: by *working through* the multilayered structures of one's embodied self.

Like the gradual peeling off of old skins, the achievement of change has to be earned by careful working through; it is the metabolic consumption of the old that can engender the new. Difference is not the effect of willpower, but the result of many, of endless repetitions. Until we have worked through the multiple layers of signification of *Woman*—phallic as it may be—I am not willing to relinquish the signifier.

The reason why I want to continue working through the very term—women as the female feminist subjects of sexual difference—that needs to be deconstructed, follows from the emphasis on the politics of desire. I think that there cannot be social change without the construction of new kinds of desiring subjects as molecular, nomadic, and multiple. One must start by leaving open spaces of experimentation, of search, of transition: becoming-nomads.

This is no call for easy pluralism, either—but rather a passionate plea for the recognition of the need to respect the multiplicity and to find forms of action that reflect the complexity—without drowning in it.

I also think that a great deal of conflict and polemic among feminists could be avoided, if we could start making more rigorous distinctions about the categories of thought that are in question, and the forms of

political practice that is at stake in them. Making ourselves accountable for both these categories and the practices is the first step in the process of developing a nomadic type of feminist theory, where discontinuities, transformations, shifts of levels and locations can be accounted for, exchanged, and talked about. So that our differences can engender embodied, situated forms of accountability, of story-telling, of map-reading. So that we can position ourselves as feminist intellectuals—as travelers through hostile landscapes, armed with maps of our own making, following paths that are often evident only to our own eyes, but which we can narrate, account for and exchange.

As Caren Kaplan eloquently puts it:

We must leave home, as it were, since our homes are often sites of racism, sexism and other damaging social practices. Where we come to locate ourselves in terms of our specific histories and differences must be a place with room for what can be salvaged from the past and what can be made new.<sup>57</sup>

*Nomadism*: sexual difference as providing shifting locations for multiple female feminist embodied voices.



# The Politics of Ontological Difference

## Genealogical Perspectives

A culture has the truths it deserves; it is therefore significant that the notion of "difference" has been on the Western theoretical agenda for over a century. As a sign of Western culture's will-to-know, the overriding importance granted to "difference" in the age of modernity marks a double shift, away from the belieflike notion that the subject coincides with this conscious, rational self but also away from the overwhelming masculinity of such notions as subjectivity and consciousness.

Psychoanalysis as theory and practice is highly representative of this historical double shift, which as I argue throughout this book, opens the age of modernity simultaneously onto the crisis of the classical vision of the subject and the proliferation of images of the "other" as sign of devalored "difference." The signifiers *woman* and *the feminine* are privileged metaphors for the crisis of rational and masculine values. Recent developments of continental, especially French, thought have added a new chapter to this ongoing metaphorization of woman/the feminine as signs of difference. From the "becoming-woman" of Derrida and Deleuze to Freudian-Marxist defenses of the feminization of values (Marcuse) the notion of "sexual difference" has been subjected to such an inflationary value that it has led to a paradoxical new uniformity of thought. "Postmodern" (Lyotard), "deconstructive" (Derrida), "microphysical" (Foucault), "critical" (Deleuze), and other kinds of philosophers have first sexualized as "feminine" the question of difference and, second, have turned it into a generalized philosophical item. As such it is clearly connected to the critique of classical dualism and of its binary oppositions, in the context of the dislocation of the subject. Yet it is not directly related to either the discursivity or the historical presence of real-life women.

It seems to me therefore that the specific orientations that mark the formulation of the question of sexual difference in feminist theory are being systematically blurred in mainstream postmodern or deconstructive thought about sexual difference. I have stated in chapter 7 ("Sexual Difference as a Nomadic Political Project") that the feminism of sexual difference is also the active affirmation of women's ontological desire, of our political determination as well as our subjective wish to posit ourselves as female subjects—that is to say, not as disembodied entities but rather as corporal and consequently sexed beings. The sexualization and the embodiment of the subject are the key notions in what I would call "feminist nomadic epistemology."

In order to make sexual difference operative within feminist theory, I want to argue that one should start politically with the assertion of the need for the presence of real-life women in positions of discursive subjecthood, and theoretically with the recognition of the primacy of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting both the traditional vision of the subject as universal, neutral, or gender-free and the binary logic that sustains it. In upholding such a view, I do not mean to make feminist theory sound more monolithic than it actually is. Whereas the rejection of the pseudo-universalist stance that takes the masculine as the norm is a point of consensus among feminist theoreticians, the positions on sexual difference are very wide-ranging. As Catharine Stimpson put it,<sup>1</sup> they range from the wild maximalists who believe in radical differences between the sexes to the wimpy minimalists who are prepared to negotiate around common margins of humaneness. Suffice it to say, however, that several major political issues in the feminist movement today—such as the prostitution debate; the various schools of feminist theology and their definition of the sacred; questions surrounding women's relationship of the state and women's reaction to totalitarian practices of all sorts; lesbian theories; the work of women from ethnic minorities and the developing world; the debate on the new reproductive technologies and artificial procreation—all bring out the significance as well as the complexity of the notion of sexual difference. In my understanding of the term, which I outline at some length in chapter 7 of this book, what distinguishes feminist theories of sexual difference is the need to recognize as a factual and historical reality that there is no symmetry between the sexes and that this symmetry has been organized hierarchically. Recognizing that difference has been turned into a mark of pejoration, the feminist project attempts to redefine it. The starting point however,

remains the political will to assert the specificity of the lived, female bodily experience, the refusal to disembodify sexual difference into a new, allegedly postmodern, antiessentialist subject, and the will to reconnect the whole debate on difference to the bodily existence and experience of women.

Politically, this project amounts to the rejection of the imitation of masculine modes of thought and practice. Recent experiences have in fact shown that female emancipation can easily turn into a one-way street into a man's world.

This awareness has also been brought about by the confrontation between women from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, which has made the issue of "difference among women" into a pressing demand.

Another important factor that has brought about this shift in feminist theory toward difference is the passing of time that has created age differences or generation gaps among the women of the movement. A generation is measured not chronologically but discursively: women like myself, aged forty and under, have grown up with and within feminism; we have inherited both benefits and disadvantages from the struggle for emancipation carried out by those whom in Europe we call "historical feminists." In stressing the significance of discursive generation gaps, I do not mean to flaunt the arrogant superiority of "youth" but rather to state my historical debt toward women who came before me and whose efforts have brought an enlarged and more equitable definition of what it means to be a woman. It is just that each generation must reckon with its own problematics and, in my perspective, the priority issue now seems to be how to struggle for the achievements of equality in the assertion of differences.

The theoretical edge of the debate between notions of difference in feminist as opposed to mainstream theory seems to me to be the following: how can "we feminists" affirm the positivity of female subjectivity at a time in history and in the philosophy of the West when our acquired perceptions of the subject are being radically questioned? How can we feminists reconcile the recognition of the problematic nature and process of the construction of the subject with the political necessity to posit woman as the subject of another history? In other words: how far can we feminists push the sexualization of the crisis of modernity and of the subject of discourse? For me, "being in the world"

means already "being sexed," so that if "I" am not sexed, "I" am not at all.

What is at stake conceptually is one of the most complex questions for both feminism and contemporary philosophy: how to go about rethinking the unity of the thinking being at a time in history when the rationalistic, naturalistic paradigm has been lost? Is a radically materialistic post-Marxist reading of the subject as discontinuous unity of body and mind possible? How can one argue both for the loss of the classical paradigm and the need to reintegrate the bodily unity of the subject? And, given that feminism is eminently modern as a theory and practice, in that the very conditions that make it possible as a discourse and as a social movement are structurally coextensive with modernity itself, how can we feminists uphold both the need to assert the sexual specificity of the female subject and the deconstruction of traditional notions of the subject, which are based on a phallogentric premise? If we feminists posit the contemporary subject as a collection of integrated fragments, what sense, place, and status can we feminists give to his/her sexed nature? What is her specificity as a conceptual, libidinal, and empirical subject? And, above all, what political stand can we develop that would respect the theoretical complexity of the view of the subject that we share with contemporary philosophy, while maintaining our commitment to the women's struggle? What are the politics of the female split subject?

Arguing that the question of sexual difference is one of the fundamental theoretical problems of our century,<sup>2</sup> and that it calls for the elaboration of a political stance, one of which I describe in this book as "nomadic feminism," I would like to try and spell out in this chapter the theoretical steps connecting the main points of reference of the feminist debate on sexual difference, namely: "thinking as a feminist," "being-a-woman," and "essentialism." More specifically, I am concerned about the argumentative lines and the polemical targets that have led the debate on sexual difference toward the murky depths where "essentialism" means fixed masculine and feminine essence. I am wondering why sexual difference became assimilated to essentialism and acquired such negative political implications. As Naomi Schor rightly put it: "Essentialism in modern-day feminism is anathema."<sup>3</sup> Teresa Brennan has argued that its original meaning has been lost. Essentialism used to refer to something beyond the reaches of historical change, something immutable and consequently outside the field of political intervention.

Often reduced to mere biological determinism, the term *essentialism* is more important as a negative critical pole than as anything else; what is being conveyed in the name of antiessentialism is, indeed, the key question.

Resisting the reduction of essentialism to determinism on to a historical essence, I will challenge the view that the feminist defense of "sexual difference" is necessarily apolitical or even potentially reactionary. On the contrary, I am in profound agreement with Gayatri Spivak that essentialism may be a necessary strategy. I will also assert that a feminist woman theoretician who is interested in thinking about sexual difference and the feminine today cannot afford *not* to be essentialist. My defense of essentialism rests on three basic premises. First, that in order to make sexual difference operative as a political option, feminist theoreticians should reconnect the feminine to the bodily sexed reality of the female, refusing the separation of the empirical from the symbolic, or of the material from the discursive, or of sex from gender. Second, that this project is important as both the epistemological basis for feminist theory and the grounds of political legitimation for feminist politics in the social economic, political, and theoretical context of the postmodern and postindustrial condition. Third, that in thinking about sexual difference one is led, by the very structure of the problem, to the metaphysical question of essence. Ontology being the branch of metaphysics that deals with the structure of that which essentially is, or that which is implied in the very definition of an entity, I will argue for the ontological basis of sexual difference. I will add that the project of going beyond metaphysics, that is to say, of redefining ontology, is an open-ended one that neither feminist nor contemporary philosophers have managed to solve as yet. Thus, unless we want to give in to the facile anti-intellectualism of those who see metaphysics as "woolly thinking" or to the easy way out of those who reduce it to an ideologically incorrect option, I think we should indeed take seriously the critique of discourse about essences as the historical task of modernity.

## "I," This Other

Although the notion of "sexual difference" presented so far refers primarily to differences between men and women, this heterosexist frame of reference is not exhaustive, as I have previously argued. "Difference" refers much more importantly to differences among women: differences

of class, race, and sexual preferences for which the signifier *woman* is inadequate as a blanket term. Furthermore, the problematic of "difference" points to another layer of related issues: the differences within each single woman, understood as the complex interplay of differing levels of experience, which defer indefinitely any fixed notion of identity.

This last point is especially important; my discursive strategy cannot be dissociated from the place of enunciation and the enunciative, textual game in which I am involved. The thinking/speaking "I" that signs this paper is neither the owner nor the queen of the complex network of meanings that constitute the text.<sup>4</sup>

To translate this standpoint back into the debate on the politics of subjectivity within the feminist practice of sexual difference, I would ask the following questions: how does the "woman-in-me" relate to the "feminist-in-me"? What are the links and the possible tensions between my "being-a-feminist" and "being-a-woman," between politics and self, between subjectivity and identity, between sexuality as an institution and also as one of the pillars for one's own sense of self? In other words, what are the devices that make sexual difference operational as a place of enunciation? What is the technology of the self at work in the expression of sexual difference?<sup>5</sup>

This question is political in both an explicit and an implicit way. Explicitly, the political implications are far-reaching in that they call into question the very grounds of legitimation of feminism as a political movement. The crucial question is: where does political belief come from? What founds the legitimacy of the feminist political subject? What gives it its validity? Where does political authenticity come from? From the refusal of oppression? As an act of solidarity with the fellow sufferers: "sisterhood is powerful"? As an act of pure, that is to say gratuitous, rebellion? Or does it spring from the wish to exorcise our worst paranoid nightmares, or alternatively our most secret power fantasies?

In a more implicit way, the question of sexual difference is political in that it focuses the debate on how to achieve transformation of self, other, and society. It thus emphasizes the ethical passions underlying feminist politics. Furthermore, by raising the paradox of the female condition not merely in terms of oppression but rather as both implication and exteriority vis-à-vis the patriarchal, phallogocentric system, it reformulates the complex issue of women's involvement—some would say complicity—with a system that actively discriminates against and dis-

qualifies us. It finally helps us to redefine the question: what does it mean to think and speak "as a feminist woman"?

Feminism as a speaking stance and consequently as a theory of the subject is less of an ideological than of an epistemological position. By providing the linkages between different "plateaus"<sup>6</sup> of experience, the feminist thinker connects, for instance, the institutions where knowledge is formalized and transmitted (universities and schools) to the spaces outside the official gaze, which act as generating and relay points for forms of knowledge as resistance (the women's movement).

The feminist woman thinker, however, has other types of linkages to worry about; what is significant about thinking "as a feminist woman," regardless of what one is actually thinking about, is the extreme proximity of the thinking process to existential reality and lived experience. Feminist theory is a mode of relating thought to life and to experience.<sup>7</sup> As such, it not only provides a critical standpoint from which to deconstruct established forms of knowledge, drawing feminism close to critical theory, it also established a new order of values within the thinking process itself, giving priority to the lived experience. First and foremost in the revaluation of experience, as I state earlier, is the notion of the bodily self: the personal is not only the political, it is also the theoretical. In redefining the self as an embodied entity, affectivity and sexuality play a dominant role, particularly in relation to what makes a subject want to think: the desire to know. The "epistemo-philic" tension that makes the deployment of the knowing process possible is the first premise in the redefinition of "thinking as a feminist woman."

Finally, the woman who thinks in the sense outlined above knows that thinking has something to do not only with the light of reason but also with shadowy regions of the mind where anger and rebellion about sociopolitical realities related to the status of women combine with the intense desire to achieve change. Thus, something in the feminist frame resists mainstream discourse, but something in the fact of "being-a-woman" is in excess of the feminist identity. The project of giving a structure, to this "excess," which (much to the delight of Lacanian psychoanalysts) is also constitutive of "feminine identity" in our—ever so phallogentric—culture, becomes, within feminist theory, a project aimed at redefining female subjectivity.

Hence a related set of questions: how does a collective movement reinvent the definition of the subjective self? Where does that sort of transformation come from? How does one invent new structures of

thought? Where does one find the words to express adequately that which cannot be said within the parameters of the phallogocentric discourse of which we are all part-time members, even the most radically feminist among us? I will argue later that what is needed is a notion of epistemological community<sup>8</sup> as a legitimating agent but that any notion of "community" must respect the multiplicity of differences among women. In order to avoid sweeping generalizations about women, the feminist must confront the complexity of the signifier *woman* and undo its ethnocentric assumptions.

Impressed as I may be by the argumentation of postmodern critics of the logic of phallogocentrism,<sup>9</sup> I am nevertheless convinced that the conceptual challenge of feminism is radically other than their project. It has to do with the epistemological and political dimension I have just mentioned: how to connect the "differences within" each woman to a political practice that requires meditation of the "differences among" women, so as to enact and implement sexual difference. Within feminism, the political epistemological question of achieving structural transformations of the subject cannot be dissociated from the need to effect changes in the sociomaterial frames of reference, which is one of the points of divergence between the feminist and the psychoanalytic "scenes."

## The Body, Encore

In lots of ways, the body is the dark continent of feminist thought;<sup>10</sup> early radical feminist theory inherited from Marxism a perfectly binary distinction between the "biological" and the "social," modeled along the lines of the distinction between "private" and "public."<sup>11</sup> The idea of the social construction of gender dominated the approach to questions related to biology, or the body, which were more often than not read as the sign and the site of oppression. Feminists called upon "history" and social conditioning to explain the representation and the images attached to the corporal reality of the female. The emphasis has been shifted, however, by the thought and the practice of sexual difference.

In this regard it is significant that one of the most common images in the feminist debate over difference is the one of "mothers and daughters." Its recurrence expresses the political urgency of thinking about the formalization and transmission of the feminist heritage; but over and above the elementary vicissitudes of the feminist generation gap, the



"mother-daughter" metaphor expresses the need to formulate what Irigaray aptly calls a "theoretical genealogy of women" or "a feminine symbolic system." This project rests on the notion of sexual difference as its working hypothesis; the sudden eruption of the Oedipal plot within feminist theory, however, also means that the thorny knots surrounding the maternal body as the site of origin have reinvested the women's movement, inevitably intersecting the winding roads of psychoanalytic theory. The "mother-daughter" debate is thus both a symptom and a privileged form of enactment of sexual difference within feminism.

One of the most accurate ways of measuring the progress accomplished by feminist thought on the female body is to take up this "mother" metaphor. Whereas in earlier feminist analyses the "mother" and the "maternal function" were seen as potentially conflicting with the interests of the "woman" in so far as compulsory heterosexuality had made them the social destiny of all women, more recent feminist readings of the maternal function<sup>12</sup> have stressed the double bind of the maternal issue. Motherhood is seen as both one of the pillars of patriarchal domination of women and one of the strongholds of female identity.

Accordingly, the "mother-daughter" image has changed considerably and, particularly in the work of Irigaray,<sup>13</sup> it has emerged as a new paradigm. It is an imaginary couple that enacts the politics of female subjectivity, the relationship to the other woman and consequently the structures of female homosexuality as well as the possibility of a woman-identified redefinition of the subject. In Irigaray's thought, this couple is endowed with symbolic significance in that it embodies a new vision of female intersubjectivity that is presented as a viable political option. In a phallogocentric system where the Name-of-the-Father provides the operative metaphor for the constitution of the subject, the idea of "a feminine symbolic function" amounts to the revindication of the structuring function for the mother. It attempts to invest the maternal site with affirmative, positive force.

As opposed to the early, dichotomized readings of the relationship between body and society, the hypothesis of sexual difference at the level of differences among women has broken down the polarized oppositions between the public and the private, society and the self, language and the materiality of the body. Over and beyond dualism, it puts forth as the ruling notion the inextricable unity of the subject as a biopsychic entity. There are obvious Nietzschean undertones in this project of reintegrating the constitutive elements of the human being.

As a consequence the body in the sense of the bodily roots of subjectivity becomes a problematic notion, not a prescriptive or predefined one. The "body" in question is the threshold of subjectivity; it is to be thought of as the point of intersection, as the interface between the biological and the social—that is to say, between the sociopolitical field of the microphysics of power and the subjective dimension. This vision implies that the subject is subjected to her/his unconscious; the driving notion of "desire" is precisely that which relays the self to the many "others" that constitute her/his "external" reality.

The problem of the articulation of the empirical with the symbolic, the material with the spiritual and the libidinal, the political with the subjective, is common to both feminist theory and practice and to psychoanalysis. They both posit as a central axiom the noncoincidence of anatomical differences with the psychic representations of sexual difference. In other words, there is a fundamental qualitative distinction to be made between anatomy and sexuality as such; sexuality is deneutralized by psychoanalysis through the hypothesis of the unconscious, to which feminism adds the political insight of the sociohistorical construction of sexual identities.

In the feminist perspective, patriarchy defined as the actualization of the masculine homosocial bond can be seen as a monumental denial of the axiom expressed above, insofar as it has been haunted by the political necessity to make biology coincide with subjectivity, the anatomical with the psychosexual, and therefore reproduction with sexuality. This forced unification of nature with culture has been played out mostly on woman's body, upon which patriarchal discourse and practice has built one of its most powerful institutions: the family. A related aspect of this strategy in its structure, is the enforcement of the myth of the complementarity of the sexes, which is socially coded as the practice of heterosexism, or compulsory heterosexuality.

Both feminism and psychoanalysis provide an in-depth critique of the perversion that animates patriarchy and its masculine homosexual symbolic; they both stress the toll that each subject pays for belonging to such a system and, by splitting open the false symmetries and fake coincidences, they assert the highly fictional and constructed nature of human sexuality, denouncing the imposture of identity. But although psychoanalytic theory has done a great deal to improve our understanding of sexual difference, it has done little or nothing to change the concrete conditions of sex relations and of gender-stratification. The

later is precisely the target of feminist practice; feminism is neither about feminine sexuality nor about desire—it has to do with change. This is the single most important difference between the psychoanalytic and the feminist movements: the definition of change and how to go about achieving it. Psychoanalysis and feminism seem to tackle the issue of political transformation from radically different and ultimately incompatible angles.

Furthermore, this divergence on the political issue may well be due to a very different perception of the ethics of intersubjectivity. Another vital insight that feminism shares with psychoanalysis, in fact, is in recognizing the importance of the relation to the other. Both practices are about relating to and learning from and within the relationship to the other, asserting that at some vital level “I” rest on the presence of another.<sup>14</sup> The assertion of the primacy of the bond, the relation, however, leads the two practices to draw different conclusions.

The psychoanalytic situation brings out, among other things, the fundamental dissymmetry between self and other that is constitutive of the subject; this is related to the noninterchangeability of positions between analyst and patient, to the irrevocable anteriority of the former, that is to say, ultimately, to time. Time, the great master, calling upon each individual to take her/his place in the game of generations, is the inevitable, the inescapable horizon. One of the ethical aims of the psychoanalytic situation is to lead the subject to accept this inscription into time, the passing of generations and the dissymmetries it entails, so as to accept the radical otherness of the self.

Feminist practice, on the other hand, having stressed from the start the lack of symmetry between the sexes, posits the necessity of the relation to the other woman<sup>15</sup> as the privileged interlocutor, the witness, the legitimator of the self. The feminist subject, as Adrienne Rich put it, fastens on to the presence of the other woman, of the other as woman. It even posits the recognition of the otherness of the other woman as the first step toward redefining our common sameness, our “being-a-woman.”

In pointing out that the sexualization of the other, and of the subject, is a point on which psychoanalysis and feminism seem to part, I do not wish to suggest any incompatibilities between them. In the experience of many feminist women the feminist and the psychoanalytic patient/practitioner coexist successfully, although the political revindications of an-other feminine identity and the expressions of

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the unconscious have to get adjusted to each other. The game of modulations or of variations on a tune is very important: recognizing the different registers, layers, and levels of experience and speech is in my opinion the most ethical way of reconciling the divergences between the feminist and the psychoanalytic situations. Any attempt at a synthesis between the two can only lead to the ideological or sociological distortion of the latter and to a loss of political focus for the former.

One central point remains, however, as the stumbling block for this whole debate: how to rethink the body in terms that are neither biological nor sociological. How to reformulate the bodily roots of subjectivity in such a way as to incorporate the insight of the body as libidinal surface, field of forces, threshold of transcendence.<sup>16</sup> As a notion the body is related to the ontotheological debate about the overcoming of metaphysics and the quest for a new definition of the human as an integrated unity of material and symbolic elements. Stressing the metaphysical dimension of the question of the body is a way of shifting the debate away from the false dichotomy of the biological versus the political. And if we do situate the problematic of the bodily roots of subjectivity back in to the structure of metaphysical thought where it belongs, the whole question of essences becomes both crucial and inevitable.

It is precisely this notion of the body that is at work, with varying degrees of coherence, in Luce Irigaray's texts. In her deconstruction of sexual polarization in the discourse of classical ontology, Irigaray mimes perfectly the conceptual operation of essentialist logic as the key of phallogocentric discourse. In other words, Irigaray takes quite literally the position to which "the feminine" or *Woman* has been assigned by centuries of patriarchal thought—as the eternal other of the system. Irigaray's strategy consists in refusing to separate the symbolic, discursive dimension from the empirical, material, or historical one. She refuses to dissociate questions of the feminine from the presence of real-life women, and in so doing she may appear to repeat the binary perversion of phallogocentrism, by equating the feminine with women and the masculine with men. But the apparent mimesis is tactical, it aims at producing difference; Irigaray argues that there is no symmetry between the sexes, and that therefore attributing to women the right—and the political imperative—of voicing their "feminine" amounts to deconstructing any naturalistic notion of a female "nature." Encouraging women to

think, say, and write the feminine is a gesture of self-legitimation that breaks away from the centuries of phallogocentric thought that had silenced women.

Classical, ontological visions of the subject are indeed essentialist in that they deal with the complex problem of the unity of the human in terms of binary oppositions. They distribute the basic elements (fire, earth, air, water), the fundamental principles (active/passive, attraction/repulsion, and so on), and the passions along dualistic lines that postulate one of the poles of opposition as the norm and the other as a deviation. Essentialism meant as the substantive opposition of related contraries is a constant not only in classical thought but also, by negation, in contemporary attempts to deconstruct the edifice of metaphysics. With a few notable exceptions<sup>17</sup> little feminist criticism has been devoted to the essentialization of the feminine as a sign of becoming in the work of such masters of deconstruction as Derrida. On the other hand, Irigaray's essentialist side has been the object of intense criticism.<sup>18</sup>

It is important<sup>19</sup> to make a distinction between the inevitability of essentialism in the critique of metaphysics and the mimetic strategy that feminist theoreticians such as Irigaray adopt in order to work out and on sexual difference. This point is not only methodological but also ethical; unless we feminists are happy to go on giving political answers to theoretical questions, in fact, we need to face up to the theoretical complexities that we have helped to create. The problem of "essence" is one such problem, and in order to deal with it properly we feminists cannot do without the in-depth analysis of the very conceptual structures that have governed the production of the theoretical schemes in which, even today, the representation of women is caught. Feminists have an ethical obligation to think rigorously about the historical and discursive conditions of our enunciation; we must work through the knot of inter-related questions about sexual difference. And in arguing for difference to be embodied by female bodily subjects we simply cannot avoid the essentialist edge of the structure of human subjectivity. Taking a priori an antiessentialist stand may be politically right; nevertheless, it remains conceptually short-sighted. The real question is strategic, namely: where is this long journey through essentialist, differential logic going to take us? What is the philosophy of sexual difference moving toward? What is the politics of it?

## Essentialism with a Difference

In my reading, as stated earlier, the thought of sexual difference argues the following:<sup>20</sup> it is historically and politically urgent to bring about and act upon sexual difference. "We" women, acting as members of the feminist community, as a political movement, act upon the enunciation of a common epistemological and ethical bond among us: a new feminist subjectivity. "We" women, the movement of liberation of the "I" of each and every women, assert the following: " 'I,' woman, think and therefore I say that I, woman, am." I am sexed female, my subjectivity is sexed female. As that *what* my "self" or my "I" actually is, that is a whole new question, dealing with identity. The affirmation of my subjectivity need not give a propositional content to my sense of identity: I do not have to define the signifier *woman* in order to assert it as the speaking subject of my discourse. The speaking "I" is not neutral or gender-free, but sexed.

It is on this point that a political and epistemological consensus can be reached among women: the affirmation of the differences *within* joins up with the assertion of a collective recognition of the differences *between* all of us and the male subjects. The recognition of the sameness of our gender, all other differences taken into account, is a sufficient and necessary condition to make explicit a bond *among* women that is more than the ethics of solidarity and altogether other than the sharing of common interests.<sup>21</sup> Once this bond is established and the epistemological common grounds of the feminist community are recognized, the basis is set for the elaboration of other values, of different representations of our common difference.

There is nothing deterministic about the assertion of a feminist subject as a sexed subject of enunciation ("I," woman, think and therefore I say that I, woman, am). Being-a-woman is not the predication of a prescriptive essence, it is not a causal proposition capable of predetermining the outcome of the becoming of each individual identity. It pertains rather to the facticity of my being, it is a fact, it is like that: "I" am sexed. "I" have been a woman—socially and anatomically—for as long as "I" have existed, that is to say, in the limited scale of my temporality, forever. "I," woman am the female sexed subject who is mortal and endowed with language. My "being-a-woman," just like my "being-in-language" and "being-mortal" is one of the constitutive elements of my subjectivity. Sexual difference is ontological, not accidental, peripheral, or contingent upon socioeconomic conditions; that one be socially



constructed as a female is evident, that the recognition of the fact may take place in language is clear, but that the process of construction of femininity fastens and builds upon anatomical realities is equally true. One is both born and constructed as a *Woman*/"woman"; the fact of being a woman is neither merely biological nor solely historical, and the polemical edge of the debate should not, in my opinion, go on being polarized in either of these ways. Sexual difference is a fact, it is also a sign of a long history that conceptualized difference as pejection or lack. What is at stake in the debate is not the causality, the chicken-and-the-egg argument, but rather the positive project of turning difference into a strength, of affirming its positivity.

"Being-a-woman," as the result of a construction of femininity in history and language ("*Woman*"), is to be taken as the starting point for the assertion of the female as subject. We feminists can therefore adopt the strategy of defining as "woman" the stock of cumulated knowledge, the theories and representations of the female subject. Woman is both representation and experience. This is no gratuitous appropriation, for "I, woman" am the direct empirical referent of all that has been theorized about femininity, the female subject and the feminine. "I, woman" am affected directly and in my everyday life by what has been made of the subject of "*Woman*"; I have paid in my very body for all the metaphors and images that our culture has deemed fit to produce of "*Woman*." The metaphorization feeds upon my bodily self, in a process of "metaphysical cannibalism"<sup>22</sup> that feminist theory helps to explain.

This is why "I, woman" shall not relinquish easily the game of representation of woman, not shall I loosen the tie between the symbolic or discursive and the bodily or material. I take it upon myself to recognize the totality of definitions that have been made of women as being my historical essence. On the basis of the responsibility I thus take for my gender, I can start changing the rules of the game by making the discursive order accountable for them. The factual element that founds the project of sexual difference, and that is also a sign, is not biological, it is biocultural, historical. Its importance lies in the fact that it allows me, and many like me in the sameness of our gender—all differences taken into account—to state that "we" women find these representations and images of "*Woman*" highly insufficient and inadequate to express our experience as women. Before any such assertion is being made, however, the consensus point needs to be cleared, that "being-a-woman" is always already there as the ontological precondition for my existential

becoming as a subject.<sup>23</sup> The same could and indeed should be said about "being-a-man," but the male subject has historically chosen to conjugate his being in the universalistic logocentric mode. Even that may change, though.

As a consequence, there is no need to justify or legitimate the definition and representation of woman by appealing to a history of oppression or, even worse, of alienation. Let us take, the fact of being a woman as the essential, that is, original, premise for the redefinition of the female subject. The starting point is the recognition of both the sameness and the otherness of the other woman, her symbolic function as agent of change. In other words, the affirmation of sexual difference becomes a political strategy that assigns to women as a collective movement the right and the competence to define our vision, perception, and assessment of ourselves. Thus, the "feminine," to take up Irigaray's problematic again, would cease to be the effect of male fantasies—of myths and representations created by men as "*Woman*"; it would not be reducible to the mere impact of socioeconomic conditions either. The "feminine" is that which "women" invent, enact, and empower in "our" speech, our practice, our collective quest for a redefinition of the status of all women. It is up to us, gathered in the feminist movement, to redefine this signifier in terms of how "I, woman" fasten on the presence of other female subjects. So long as other women are here and now sustaining this discursive power game, so long as a political bond legitimates it, a politically redefined collective subject—a female symbolic system—can indeed empower the subjective becoming of each one of us.

This does not aim at glorifying an archaic definition of female "power,"<sup>24</sup> nor does it wish to recover a lost origin—it is rather a tactic that legitimates our demand for the recognition of ways of knowing, modes of thinking, forms of representation that would take sexual difference (in the second level, that of differences among women) as the starting point. It is an act of self-legitimation that asserts as the collective will-to-be the ontological desire of being-a-woman. It is also a clear discursive strategy that turns feminism into a critical speaking stance, a very privileged angle through which to change the reality of theoretical practice. Far from being prescriptive in an essentialist-deterministic way, it opens up a field of possible "becoming," providing the foundation for a new alliance among women, a symbolic bond among woman qua female sexed beings. This political and theoretical bond among

women can only be posited in the recognition of mutual differences, that is to say, in a non-ethnocentric mode. In this respect, it contains a slightly utopian touch—it is a project, a political hypothesis, and the expression of an ethical desire for alliances across the boundaries of race, age, and sexual preferences.

In this sense, and in this sense only, do I think, as I have already quoted Gayatri Spivak as saying, that “a feminist woman theoretician who is interested in thinking about sexual difference and the feminine today cannot afford *not* to be essentialist.” Let me add, however, that I would not want this double negative to amount to a self-assertive imperative: “thou shalt be essentialist.” A double negative need not add up to a single meaning; I would like us to respect the double shift of the statement—“cannot afford *not* to be” and to resist the temptation to reach an essentialist synthesis. Not only because, as Naomi Schor points out: “essentialism is not one,”<sup>25</sup> but also because the shift must be accompanied by an enunciative nuance. I would like us to adopt a special mode of thinking, trying to leave behind the centuries-old habit that consists of thinking in terms of identity and oppositions, thesis and antithesis. Let us think differently about this, in a mode that I would call, following Irigaray, the conditional present.

If one thinks back to the early feminist theory of the 1960s and 1970s, one could say that it is written in the simple future tense, expressing a deep sense of determination, of certainty about the course of history and the irresistible emancipation of women. The future is the mode of expressing an open-ended game of possibilities: half prophecy and half utopia and, above all, blueprint for action. The conditional present mode, however, goes beyond the logic of ideology and of teleological progress. More akin to dream time, it is the tense of open potentiality and consequently of desire in the sense of a web of interconnected conditions of possibility. The conditional present posits the continuity of desire as the only unifying agent between self and other, subject and history. Desire determines the ontological plane on which the subject defines her-/him-self. Therefore the conditional is the mode of inscription of desire in the present, in the here and now of our speaking stance. It is also the poetic time of fiction, in keeping with the visionary epistemology I have defended in this book.<sup>26</sup>

In this respect, feminist theory rests on another double negative: it proceeds as if it were possible to negate a history of negation, to reserve through collective practice a centuries-old history of disqualification

and exclusion of women. To deny a centuries-old denigration so as to move onto the thresholds of a redefinition of woman is the discursive leap forward of feminism as a movement of thought and action. The project of redefining "being-a-woman alongside other women in the world," so as to disengage the female "I" from the trappings of a "feminine" defined as the dark continent, or of "femininity" as the eternal masquerade, is the fundamental ethico-political question of our century. In arguing that "I, woman" involved in this process cannot afford not to be essentialist I am also expressing my wanting feminism to matter because it carries ethical and theoretical values that cannot be reduced to yet another ideology or doxa. Feminism is the conscious revindication of representations of the feminine and women by and of women themselves. To make any sense at all, it requires a political practice and has to be acted out, collectively.

Theoretically, the paradox of implication and exteriority that feminist women embody reveals a profound truth about the structures of human subjectivity. Truth is of this world and so are women: beings of flesh and bones, we are condemned to the spiraling staircase of ordinary language; beings of language (Lacan's "parlêtre"), like all beings, women are both the effect and the manipulators of linguistic signs. There is no outside, no easy way out of the social and symbolic system for which the male sex has provided the basic parameters of reference; no real "ideological purity" as such. As women we are firmly attached to a culture and to a logic of discourse that has historically defined *Woman/woman*, woman and the *feminine*, in a pejorative sense. The conscious political realization of our being already present, however, in a system that has turned a blind eye/I to the fact of what we are and that we are, instead of becoming a statement of defeat, could pave the way for a new ethical and political project aimed at affirming the positivity of the difference we embody. Beyond the fantasy of feminine power and the illusion of a pure female species, the project of sexual difference and the ethical passion that sustains it may well be the last utopia of our dying century.

# On the Female Feminist

Subject; or, from

“She-Self” to “She-Other”

Whoever has known de-personalisation will recognize the other under any disguise: the first step towards the other is to find within oneself the man of all men. *Every woman is the woman of all women*, every man is the man of all men and each one of them could answer for the human, whenever s/he is called upon to do so.

—Clarice Lispector, *La passion selon G. H.*

## Approaching Lispector

The story takes place at the top of a tall building in one of the many metropolises that pollute our planet. The event itself occurs in the furthestmost room of this spacious apartment, which, being the maid's quarters, is also the humblest. The spatial metaphor is all-pervading in the text. The character sees her dwelling as her bodily self, defining the maid's room as “the womb of my building.”<sup>1</sup> This space is compared to the top of a mountain, or the tip of a minaret: it is a microcosm endowed with a heightened level of intensity, of depth.

The experience that G. H., protagonist of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector's *Passion According to G.H.*, undergoes at the top of that building is her encounter with dimensions of experience and levels of being that are other than herself and other than human.

The otherness begins in her interaction with the absent maid: by entering her quarters, G. H. transpasses the boundaries of both class and ethnicity, the maid being of a different ethnic origin from the comfortable urban, middle-class G. H. There is also a dislocation of both space and time: the shape of the room seems to defy description according to Euclidian geometry, it has the dry hostile appeal of the desert, it is more akin to raw matter than to urban dwellings. It is an empty, anorexic space of suspension.

In this environment, G. H. will experience total depersonalization, or the failure of her socialized identity; this process of dissolution of the boundaries of the self (*dépouillement*) is an experience both of expansion and of limitation of her subjectivity. It is described with both great intensity and precision. The event that triggers off the most intense sense of desubjectification is her relationship to a hideous insect, a cockroach, that inhabits the undescrivable space of this room. The insect as nonhuman is totally other; it also a borderline being, between the animal and the mineral: as ancient as the crust of the earth and gifted with astonishing powers of survival, it is a configuration of eternity. It is also, by definition, an abject being, object of disgust and rejection.

G. H.'s experience will consist in realizing first the proximity and then the commonality of being between herself and the living matter, half animal, half stone, the matter that lives independently of the gaze of the human beholder. Through the other and the abject, G. H. encounters primordial being in its incomprehensibly and blindly living form. The realization of the noncentrality of the human to life and to living matter leads G. H. to undertake the dehumanization of herself. This experience puts her in touch with the most remote and yet existentially most alive parts of her being. This process becomes for her a form of admiration and, finally, adoration of the life that, in her, does not carry her name; of the forces that, in her, do not belong to her own self. She enters the perfectly alive, that is to say, the inexpressive, the prediscursive, the presymbolic layers of the being. Almost like a zombie, seduced by a force that she cannot name because it inhabits her so deeply, she consumes the intercourse with the other by the totemic assimilation of the cockroach: a gesture that transgresses a number of boundaries and taboos (human/nonhuman; fit to eat/unfit to eat; cooked/raw, and so on).

The ecstasy that follows from this encounter is one of utter dissolution of her own boundaries, and it is at that moment when she is both

pre-human and all too human, that she discovers the femaleness of her being: that, in her, which is prior to socialization is already sexed female. The woman in her, like the woman in all women, is the being whose relation to living matter is one of concomitance and adoration. It is in a pose of careful and receptive "being-one-with-the-world" that the story is concluded, though there is no ending as such.

This story has been amply commented by sexual difference theorists. The Italian philosopher Luisa Muraro<sup>2</sup> sees a religious significance in the topography of the room and in the "verticality" of the entire building. Resting on Luce Irigaray's notion of the "divinity of women,"<sup>3</sup> she compares the location of the story to the Cross on Golgotha and reads the events as a moment of intense *passio*, resulting in the transcendence toward the superhuman. In Muraro's understanding, the passion of G. H. is of the religious kind; the religion in question, however, is not patriarchal: what G. H. celebrates on the top of her sacred mountain is the divinity of her gender, the mystery and grace of sexual difference defined as a specifically female experience of transcending the boundaries of the human.

Luisa Muraro is careful to separate the transcendence in question and the sense of being that G. H. perceives from the dominion of the phallus, that is to say of phallogocentric language. In other words: in order to gain access to the universal, Lispector knows she has to abandon human subjectivity altogether, but in that moment of asceticism what she does find is the overriding significance of her gender, of her being the woman of all women. Her being-sexed is part of her innermost essence.

In a more laic and less mystical reading, Adriana Cavarero<sup>4</sup> sees instead the affirmation of a feminist materialism in the passion of G. H. The life that in one does not bear one's own name, is a force that connects one to all other living matter. Cavarero reads this insight as the woman's attempt to disconnect her sense of being from the patriarchal logos; in so doing she proposes the dislocation of one of the central premises of Western thinking: that being and language are one.

Following the insight of Irigaray, Cavarero criticizes the assimilation of the universal to the masculine and defends the idea of a female-specific notion of being. That the living matter may not require the thinking "I" in order to exist results in the placing of more emphasis on the centrality of the sexed nature of the "she-I": her being sexed is primordial and inextricable from her being, in a way that is unrepresented by the grammatical structure of language, that is to say by her "I." Sexual dif-

ference is definitional of the woman and not contingent: it is always already there.

In a very different reading of the same text, the French writer Hélène Cixous<sup>5</sup> reads the event as a parable for women's writing, *écriture féminine*, understood as a process of constitution of an alternative female symbolic system. G. H.'s passion is for life without mastery, power, or domination; her sense of adoration is compared to a capacity for a giving kind of receptivity, not for Christian martyrdom. Cixous connects this faculty to the ability to both give and receive the gift, that is to say to receive the other in all of his/her astounding difference.

In her ethical defense of the politics of subjectivity, Cixous speaks of the ability to receive otherness as a new science, a new discourse based on the idea of respectful affinity between self and other. The passion is about belonging to a common matter: life, in its total depersonalized manner. The term *approach* defines for Cixous the basis of her ethical system: it is the way in which self and other can be connected in her new worldview where all living matter is a sensitive web of mutually receptive entities. The other-than-human at stake here is that which, by definition, escapes the domination of the anthropocentric subject and requires that he/she accepts his/her limitations. More specifically, the divine in all humans is the capacity to see interconnectedness as the way of being. For Cixous this heightened sense of being is the feminine, it is the woman as creative force: poet and writer. The divine is the feminine as creativity.

## Feminism and Postmodernity

G. H. is a tale about women's "becoming": it is about new female subjectivity. The first and foremost element for women's becoming, in both a political and existential sense, is time; in *Passion According to G.H.* Clarice Lispector tells her readers all about the time, the rituals, the repetition, the symbolic transactions and blank spaces of that continuum that is commonly called time. In the choice of language and situations, Lispector echoes the century-old tradition of mystical ascesis, but also moves clearly out of it. G. H. symbolizes a new postmodern kind of materialism: one that stresses the materiality of all living matter in a common plane of coexistence, without postulating a central point of reference or of organization for it. Lispector's point is not only that all that lives are holy—it is not even that. She strikes me rather as saying that on the scale of being there are forces at work that bypass principles



of rational form and organization: there is raw living matter, as there is pure time, regardless of the form they may actually take. The emphasis is on the forces, the passions, and not on specific forms of life. In other words, I think *Lispector* is better read with Spinoza and Nietzsche than as a Christian mystic.<sup>6</sup>

*Lispector's* text seems to me an excellent exemplification of one of the central issues in the debate between feminism and postmodern discourse.<sup>7</sup> What is at stake in this debate is the "deconstruction of metadiscourses," as Jean-François Lyotard argues<sup>8</sup> and therefore also the assessment of the vision of subjectivity embedded in the tradition of the Enlightenment. Several analysts of feminist theory have pointed out<sup>9</sup> the shift away from the mere critique of sexist or androcentric biases and the construction of alternative theories based on the experience of women, toward the elaboration of more general epistemological frameworks. These concern both the pursuit of scientific knowledge, as Sandra Harding<sup>10</sup> puts it, and the revision of the very foundations of abstract scientific reasoning, as both Evelyn Fox Keller<sup>11</sup> and Genevieve Lloyd<sup>12</sup> have argued.

The specific angle of debate that interests me here is the extent to which the feminist critiques of theoretical reason as a regulative principle, by paving the way for the deconstruction of the dualistic oppositions on which the classical notion of the subject is founded, have resulted in approaching the notion of sexual difference as laying the foundations for an alternative model of female subjectivity. The question then becomes: What is the image of theoretical reason at work in feminist thought? What images and representations do feminists propose for their specific approach to theoretical practice?

As Jane Flax argues,<sup>13</sup> this is a metadiscursive approach, related to the simultaneous occurrence of the crisis of Western values<sup>14</sup> and the emergence of a variety of "minority" discourses, as Gayatri Spivak,<sup>15</sup> Chandra Mohanty,<sup>16</sup> and Trinh T. Minh-ha,<sup>17</sup> have pointed out. This historical circumstance makes it urgent to think through the status of thinking in general and of the specific activity of theory in particular. For feminists, it is especially urgent to work toward a balanced and constructive assessment of the mutual interdependence of equality and the practice of differences.

By raising the question of whether the links between reason and exclusion/domination are implicit and therefore inevitable, feminists have challenged the equation between being and logocentric language.

In other words, feminist theory in the nomadic mode I am defending is the critique of the power in/as discourse and the active endeavor to create other ways of thinking: it is the engagement in the process to learn to think differently. Feminism as critical thought is therefore a self-reflexive mode of analysis, aimed at articulating the critique of power in discourse with the affirmation of an alternative vision of the female feminist subject.

I would then ask: what does it mean to think as a female feminist? What sort of a subject is the subject defined by the political and theoretical project of "sexual difference"?

I see as the central aim of this project the articulation of questions of individual gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity. The interaction of identity with subjectivity also spells out the categorical distinction between dimensions of experience that are marked by desire—and therefore the unconscious—and others that are rather subjected to willful self-regulation. I have argued previously that although both levels are the site of political agency, there is not one dominant form of political action that can encompass them both. The key to feminist nomadic politics is situatedness, accountability, and localized or partial perspectives.

## Another Image of Thought

In other words, feminist theory, as I argue in the previous chapter, expresses women's structural need to posit themselves as female subjects, that is to say not as disembodied entities but rather as situated beings.

Identity and subjectivity are different but interrelated moments in the process of defining a subject position. This idea of the subject as process means that he/she can no longer be seen to coincide with his/her consciousness but must be thought of as a complex and multiple identity, as the site of the dynamic interaction of desire with the will, of subjectivity with the unconscious. Not just libidinal desire, but rather ontological desire, the desire to be, the tendency of the subject to be, the predisposition of the subject toward being. Jean-François Lyotard describes this notion of the subject as a clear break from the modernist project; the latter is understood not only in terms of the Enlightenment legacy of the complicity of reason, truth, progress with domination, but also as the marriage of the individual will with the general will of capital. According to Lyotard modernism marked the triumph of the will-to-

have, to own, to possess, within each individual; this in turn entailed the correlative objectification of many minority subjects.

By contrast, postmodernism marks the emergence of the desire to be at the very heart of the question of subjectivity. It is the triumph of the ethical vision of the subject as a discontinuous and yet unified bodily entity. The distinction between will and desire is useful in that it separates different qualitative levels of experience. It can also help us rescue postmodern thought from the charge that is often made against it: of being merely nihilistic. That postmodern thought, including the feminist strand, may be a reaction to a state of crisis does not make it necessarily negative; on the contrary, I see it as offering many positive openings.

The crisis of modernity is marked, as Foucault points out,<sup>18</sup> by the emphasis placed on both the unconscious and on desire by psychoanalysis, taken as the exemplary modern discourse. The hypothesis of the unconscious can be seen as inflicting a terrible wound to the transcendental narcissism of the classical vision of the subject. The unconscious as an epistemological assumption marks the noncoincidence of the subject with his/her consciousness; it is the grain of sand in the machine that prevents the enunciation of yet another monolithic, self-present subject.

The fundamental epistemological insight of psychoanalysis is that the thinking process as a whole plunges its roots in pre-rational matter. As G. H. exemplifies, thinking is just a form of sensibilization of matter, it is the specific form of intelligence of embodied entities. Thinking is a bodily not a mental process. Thinking precedes rational thought.

The crisis of rational thought is nothing more than the forced realization, brought about by historical circumstances, that this highly phallogocentric mode of thought rests on a set of unspoken premises about thinking that are themselves nonrational. In other words, the logocentric posture, the enunciation of a philosophical stance rests on a prephilosophical moment, namely the human being's capacity for, disposition, receptivity, and desire for thinking. The disposition of the subject toward thinking, that is, representing him/herself in language is the nonphilosophical basis of philosophy that Deleuze defends; it is a pre-discursive element, as Patrizia Violi points out,<sup>19</sup> which is excess of and nevertheless indispensable to the act of thinking as such. It is an ontological tendency, a predisposition that is neither thinking nor conscious and that inscribes the subject into the web of discursivity, language, and power.

This predisposition or receptivity of the subject toward "making sense" frees our vision of subjectivity from what Gilles Deleuze<sup>20</sup> aptly calls the imperialism of rational thought, which appears in this perspective inadequate as a vision of the self. Thinking thus becomes the attempt to create other ways of thinking, other forms of thought: thinking is about how to think differently.

The vision of the subject as an interface of will with desire is therefore the first step in the process of rethinking the foundations of subjectivity. It amounts to saying that what sustains the entire process of becoming-subject is a prediscursive foundation. As I have argued previously, desire is that which, being the a priori condition for thinking, is in excess of the thinking process itself.

This is why I want to argue here that the task of thinking about new forms of female subjectivity, through the project of sexual difference understood as the expression of women's ontological desire, implies the transformation of the very structures and images of thought, not just the content of the thoughts. In other words: sexual difference opens out toward the redefinition of general structures of thought, not only female-specific ones.

## Embodiment and Difference

The concept of the body in the specific inception given to it by the philosophy of modernity and the theories of sexual difference<sup>21</sup> refers to the multifunctional and complex structure of subjectivity, the specifically human capacity for transcending any given variable—class, race, sex, nationality, culture, and so on—while remaining situated within them. The body in question is best understood as a surface of signification, situated at the intersection of the alleged facticity of anatomy<sup>22</sup> with the symbolic dimension of language. As such, the body is a multifaceted sort of notion, covering a broad spectrum of levels of experience and frames of enunciation.

In a move that characterizes it among all others, however, Western culture has set very high priority on the production of the sexed body, situating the variable *sexuality* on top of the list. The embodied sexed subject thus defined is situated in a web of complex power relations that, as Foucault points out,<sup>23</sup> inscribe the subject in a discursive and material structure of normativity. Sexuality is the dominant discourse of power in the West. In this respect the feminist redefinition of the subject as equally though discontinually subjected to the normative effect of

many, complex and overlapping variables both perpetuates the Western habit of giving sexuality a high priority and also challenges it as one of the dominant traits of Western discursive power.

Sexuality as power, that is as institution, is also a semiotic code that organizes our perception of morphological differences between the sexes. It is obviously the inscription into language that makes the embodied subject into a speaking "I", that is to say a functional, socialized gendered entity. In my understanding, there can be no subjectivity outside sexuality or language; that is to say, the subject is always gendered: it is a "she-I" or a "he-I." That the "I" thus engendered is not a nominal essence but merely a convenient fiction, a grammatical necessity holding together a multiplicity of levels of experience that structure the embodied subject, as poststructuralist thought convincingly argues,<sup>24</sup> does not alter the fact that it is genderized, that is to say, sexually differentiated.

The view I am putting forth is that the starting ground for feminist redefinitions of female subjectivity is a new form of materialism that places emphasis on the embodied and therefore sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject. The variable of sexuality has high priority in the bodily materialism thus advocated. In feminist theory one *speaks as* a woman, although the subject "woman," as I have argued earlier, is not an essence defined once and for all but rather the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experience. "Speaking as" refers to Adrienne Rich's "politics of location," that is to say, to embodiment as positionality. As a consequence, the female feminist subject, to whom I will refer to as: "she-self" or "I, woman," is to be redefined through the collective quest for a political reexamination of sexuality as a social and symbolic system.

One of the points of tension of this project is how to reconcile the feminist critiques of the priority traditionally granted to the variable *sexuality* in the Western discourse about the subject with the feminist proposition of redefining the embodied subject in a network of interrelated variables of which sexuality is but one, set alongside other powerful axes of subjectification, such as race, culture, nationality, class, life-choice preferences, and so on. This double-edged project of both relying on genderized or sex-specific notions in order to redefine the female feminist subject and on deconstructing them at the same time has led to some strong feminist rejections of sexed female identity and to the critique of the signifier *woman* as a meaningful political term.

For my part, however, I do not experience this tension as anything more than a historical contradiction: that the signifier *woman* is both the concept around which feminists have gathered, in a movement where the politics of identity are central, and that it is also the very concept that needs to be analyzed critically—is a perfect description of our historical situation in late capitalism.

As I have argued in this book, the best way out of the dichotomous logic in which Western culture has captured sexed identities is to *work them through*. In this respect, I find Luce Irigaray's notion of "mimesis"<sup>25</sup> highly effective, in that it allows women to revisit and repossess the discursive and material sites where "woman" was essentialized, disqualified, or quite simply excluded. *Working through* is a nomadic notion that has already given proof of both its strengths and its limitations.<sup>26</sup> Working through the networks of discursive definitions of "woman" is useful not only in what it produces as a process of deconstruction of female subjectivity but also *as process*, which allows for the constitution and the legitimation of a gendered female feminist community.

In other words, the "she-self" fastens upon the presence of the female embodied self, the woman, but it does so only as long as other women sustain, *hic et nunc*, the project of redefining female subjectivity. It is a sort of ontological leap forward by which a politically enforced collective subject, the "we women" of the women's movement, can empower the subjective becoming of each one of us "I, woman." This leap is forward, not backward, toward the glorification of an archaic, feminine power or of a well-hidden "true" essence. It does not aim at recovering a lost origin or a forgotten land, but aims rather at bringing about here and now a mode of representation that would take the fact of being a woman as a positive, self-affirming political force. It is an act of self-legitimation whereby the "she-self" blends her ontological desire to be, with the conscious willful becoming of a collective political movement. As I said earlier, the distinction between identity and subjectivity is to be related to that between will and desire.

That is to say, between "she-self" and "she-other" there is a bond that Adrienne Rich describes as the "continuum" of women's experience. This continuum draws the boundaries within which the conditions of possibility of a redefinition of the female subjects can be made operative. The notion of the community is therefore central; what is at play among us today, in the interaction between the writer and her readers,

is our common engagement in the recognition of the political implications of a theoretical project: the redefinition of female subjectivity.

Several attempts have been made by feminists to theorize the community of women, some in pedagogical terms:<sup>27</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller takes Kuhn's notion of scientific community; Teresa de Lauretis uses the Foucauldian model of a micropolitics of resistance; several others, such as Jane Flax and Jessica Benjamin,<sup>28</sup> turn to Winnicott's object relations theory as a model. Jessica Benjamin argues that self and other are inextricably linked and that it is in being with the other that I experience the most profound sense of self; Jane Flax argues along similar lines that it is the capacity for mutual, reciprocal intersubjective connections that allows for the constitution of subjectivity.

As a feminist theoretician, psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin takes Flax's argument even further, arguing that female desire must be conceptualized as the in-between space, connecting inside to outside, in a constant flow of self into other that cannot and should not be disrupted by falsely dichotomous distinctions. Emphasizing the genderedness of embodiment, Benjamin collapses the inside/outside distinction of the body, stressing the in-between spaces. She thus attempts to replace the mediation by the phallus with the capacity for interconnectedness and agency, so that desire need not be conceptualized according to the murderous logic of dialectical oppositions.

The "transitional space" that Benjamin defends must be understood as an interface, marking both the distance and the proximity between the spatial surface of bodies. "Something that both forms a boundary and opens up into endless possibility";<sup>29</sup> it is a space not only of reception of the other but also of receptivity as the very condition for otherness to be perceived as such. Something in the ontological structure of the subject is related to the presence of the other.

My question is, what sort of discursive space can feminists construct and share together? The multiple levels of nomadic interconnections that form subjectivity affect also the enunciation of feminist statements. These are consequently not immune from discontinuities and shifts. Feminism is not a dogmatic countertruth, but the willful choice of non-closure as an intellectual and ethical style.

In other words, it is in language, not in anatomy, that my gendered subjectivity finds a voice, becomes a corpus, is engendered. It is in language as power, that is to say, in the politics of location, that I as "she-self" make myself accountable to my speaking partners, you, the "she-

other" fellow feminists who are caught in the web of discursive enunciation that I am spinning as I write. You, the "she-you" who like me, the "she-I", are politically engaged in the project of redefining the gender that we are. The language cracks under the strain of this excessive genderization, the personal pronouns cannot sustain the interpersonal charge required by the feminist project. Something in the structure of the language resists; how can one express adequately that which is lacking from or in excess of existing parameters? How does one invent new ways of thinking?

Accountability makes the feminist project into a critical and at the same time ethical theory, insofar as it stresses the primacy of the bond, the presence of the other, the community as a vital step in the redefinition of the self.

In *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis argues that this is, however, fundamentally an epistemological project. In her understanding of the term, epistemology is the process of comprehending and of formalizing subjectivity as a process, as a network of complex interplay between different axes of subjectification.<sup>30</sup>

The question is how to determine the angle through which we can gain access to a nonlogocentric mode of representation of the female subject. To determine that, we need to think anew about power: not power only as a site of visible forces, where it is the most identifiable because that is where it displays itself (parliament, churches, universities, and so on), but power also as an invisible web of interrelated effects, a persistent and all-pervading circulation of effects. The importance of this point is not only epistemological and methodological, it is also political: it will in fact determine the kind of alliance or social pact that we women are likely to undertake with each other.

## Toward a Genderized Symbolic

Thinking about thinking, in the metadiscursive mode I have been defending is not just thinking for its own sake; rather, it marks the feminist intellectual's responsibility for and toward the act of thinking, lingering in the conceptual complexities that we have ourselves created, giving ourselves the time to think through and work through these complexities so as not to short-circuit the process of our own becoming. As Lispector pointed out, we are nurturing the beginning of the new; the depersonalized female subject lays the foundations for the symbolization of women's ontological desire.



This implies the redefinition of the relationship of power to knowledge within feminism: as women of ideas devoted to the elaboration of the theory and practice of sexual difference we are responsible for the very notions that we enact and empower. Thinking justly—of just-ness and not only of justice—is a top item in our agenda. This ethical dimension is for me as important as the political imperative. Feminist thinking cannot be purely strategic—that is, be the expression of a political will—it must rather attempt to be adequate as a representation of experience. Feminist theorizing must be adequate conceptually, as well as being suitable politically; one's relationship to thinking is the prototype of a different relationship to alterity altogether. If we lose sight of this ethical, relational foundation of thinking, that is to say the bond that certain discourses create among us, we are indeed in danger of homologation and therefore of purely strategic or instrumental kinds of thought. There can be no justice without justness, no political truth without equation of our words, our ideas, and consequently our thought to the project of redefining female subjectivity in a nonlogocentric mode.

As a consequence, the first priority for me today is to redefine the subject as a gendered unity inextricably connected to the other.

For feminism, in the beginning there is alterity, the non-one, a multiplicity. The founding agent is the common corpus of female subjects who posit themselves theoretically and politically as a collective subject. This communal bond comes first, and then—and only then—there arises the question of what political line to enforce. It is the ethical that defines the political and not vice versa; hence the importance of positing the feminist audience as the receptive, active participant in a discursive exchange that aims at changing the very rules of the game. This is the feminist community to which the "she-I" makes herself accountable.

The paradox of the ontological basis of desire is that not only it is intersubjective but also it transcends the subject. Desire also functions as the threshold for a redefinition of a new common plane of experience: "each woman is the woman of all women . . ." The recognition of a common ground of experience as women mutually engaged in a political task of resistance to "*Woman*"—the dominant view of female subjectivity—lays the foundation for new images and symbolization of the feminist subject. If we take as our starting point sexual difference as the positive affirmation of my facticity as a woman, *working through* the layers of complexity of the signifier *I, woman*, we end up opening a win-

dow onto a new genderized bond among different women. As I have stated earlier, the point is to radicalize the universal, not to get rid of it.

By genderized collective subjectivity I mean a symbolic dimension proper to women in the recognition of the nonreducibility of the feminine to the masculine and yet, at the same time, of the indestructible unity of the human as an embodied self structurally linked to the other. It is the complex intersecting of never-ending levels of differing of self from other and self from self. As Adriana Cavarero<sup>31</sup> put it: what is at stake in this is the representability of a feminine subject as a self-representing entity. It is less a question of founding the subject than of elucidating the categories by which the female feminist subject can be adequately represented.

This is an important political gesture because thinking through the fullness of one's complexity, in the force of one's transcendence, is something women have never historically been able to afford. What seems to be at stake in the project of sexual difference is, through the extreme sexualization of the subject, a Nietzschean transmutation of the very value we give to the human and to a universal notion of commonness, of common belonging.

I want to argue that the aim of this transmutation of values is to be able to bring to the fore the multilayered structure of the subject. As Lispector points out: "the life in me does not have my name"; "I" is not the owner of the portion of being that constitutes his/her being. To the extent that "she-I" accepts this, can "she-I" become the woman of all women and be accountable for her humanness. Only this highly defined notion of singularity can allow us to posit a new general sense of being; only situated perspectives can legitimate new general standpoints. In this sense, the experience of utter singularity that G. H. undergoes in her microcosm remains emblematic of the process of women becoming other than the "*Woman*" they have been expected and socialized into being. G. H. shows us paths of transcendence specific to our gender and to women's own, discontinuous time of becoming.

# Women's Studies and the Politics of Difference

The theoretical emphasis on sexual difference as a nomadic political and epistemological project also necessitates an extra critical effort to translate the theoretical schemes into practical, for instance pedagogical, action. Women's studies as an institutional reality is, as I point out in my introduction to this book, for me one of the grounds where the relevance of sexual difference as a project can be tested out by feminist activists. In this respect, women's studies as practiced from within the perspective of sexual difference is a sort of reality test for this theory. The ways in which this "reality principle" approach work are multiple.

First, the realities and requirements of any institutional practice, and especially the university's, are such that they test to the fullest a feminist's commitment to and flair for power relations. Power, for me, is not only a negative notion (the power some exercise over others, as an exclusive and oppressive property) but, as I have stated on several occasions in this volume, it refers to a complex set of interrelations between the production of knowledge, the constitution of identity, and material social conditions. Power as a process also produces positive effects, in that it allows for both resistance to the repetition of established schemes and creative adoption of otherwise set power relations. The whole process of institutionalizing a radical epistemology such as women's studies, therefore, opens up possibilities of confronting the issue of power, subjectivity, and knowledge in all its complexity. I believe this process is a sobering and necessary reality test for feminist theorists.

Second, any process of "institutionalization" necessarily results in a confrontation between theoretical expectations and their concrete realization. In turn, this process of implementation of theories into practice

needs to take into consideration the sociopolitical context in which the institutionalization of feminist ideas takes place. This can and should result in a renewed spirit of self-criticism and of reconsideration of the main terms of feminist theory. In other words, the process of institutionalizing feminist knowledge implies a feedback mechanism that results in the readjustment of theory in the light of experience.

Third, the process of institutionalization can be seen, perhaps in a slightly optimistic vein, as the "price of success"; in spite of all the remaining—and in some cases increasing—social problems, such as unemployment and the feminization of poverty; sexual violence and the new forms of pornography; the impact of the new (bio)technologies on reproduction and female sexuality but also on the environment and especially in the developing world—the success of the feminist cause is undeniable. There has been a widespread propagation of feminist ideas right across the world, and this has contributed to a change of attitude on the part of both women and men. This relative acceptance also means, however, that feminist ideas and texts have become intellectual objects of exchange in a market economy and, as such, are subjected to mechanisms of currency and exchange, inflation and surplus value. This fact alone should explode any remaining notion of the innocent exteriority of women vis-à-vis the social and economic system. It also implies, however, that a critical feminist needs to question the very material conditions that allow for the implementation and even the success of feminist ideas. The seemingly paradoxical conclusion to be drawn from this is that feminist practice renews and strengthens the need for critical intellectual analysis. This is particularly true for countries such as the Netherlands, where feminism has enjoyed sustained state support that has resulted in a high level of institutionalization.<sup>1</sup>

Because of these factors, I do think that the process of institutionalization of feminist knowledge, through women's studies, is both politically and epistemologically important. The question that needs to be asked from a sexual difference perspective is: to what extent can women in the institutions *make a difference* to the ways in which knowledge is codified, transmitted and recognized? What are the mechanisms of canonization and transmission specific to feminist practice? Is there a direct interrelation between institutionalization and loss of radical vision? What is the rate of attrition, or "burn out" that institutions inflict upon the feminists who have been bold or desperate enough to undertake the "long march" through them?

First and foremost among my political concerns vis-à-vis the institutionalization process is the impact it is likely to have on the relationship between women. This question is particularly acute for a sexual difference theorist such as myself, who has put a very heavy stake on the subversive, or transformative potential of female feminist bonding in postindustrial patriarchy. No one—in these postmodern days—can be so naive as to avoid the issue that institutional power brings out unexpected, if not unsuspected, levels of rivalry and competition among women, as well as between women and men. Although the problem is beginning to be analyzed,<sup>2</sup> this still remains a sort of “dark continent” in feminist thinking.

In such a political context, the practice of sexual difference in my nomadic sense offers a few concrete strategic suggestions as a technique, and as a political device, aimed at diffusing or exorcizing the problem of rivalry amongst women. Sexual difference is a political alliance of women, in the recognition of their respective differences. It posits as the starting ground the disidentification of women from phallogocentric modes of thinking and teaching, and it replaces them with the sort of nomadic intersection of differences that I have been defending throughout this book. Central to this project is the notion of feminist genealogies, that is, the process of thinking backwards through the work of other women. Genealogies are politically informed counter-memories, which keep us connected to the experiences and the speaking voices of some of the women whose resistance is for us a source of support and inspiration.

In this respect, a feminist genealogy is a discursive and political exercise in cross-generational female bonding,<sup>3</sup> which also highlights the aesthetic dimension of the thinking process, that is the fact that ideas are actually “beautiful events,” capable of moving us across space and time.

In defending this notion of feminist genealogy, I am collapsing the distinction between creative texts and academic or theoretical ones. It seems to me that the strength of many feminist texts lies precisely in their ability to combine and mix the genres, so as to produce unexpected, destabilizing effects. I would like to propose that we read feminist texts written by others—women of other places and other times—as open-ended paths that are still available to us, still calling out to us. What I love in feminist texts—over and above their political content, their intellectual rigor, their ethical desire for justice—is the passionate

voice that animates them. There is a nomadic quality, or rather a degree of intensity in many feminist texts, which affects me very deeply and at times almost independently of the content.

I would describe this quality as a radical ethical passion, that is, a demand for justice and fairness, which is also a radical form of nonbelonging, or of separateness. As Christa Wolf puts it so forcefully in *Cassandra*,<sup>4</sup> the voice, the vision, the intellectual passion of women, historically silenced by century-old mechanisms of repression, have a way of echoing in the mind of the feminist writer and intellectual. Echoes of silenced insights, of unspoken truths, of untold accounts reverberate in the inner chambers of a feminist's mind—forcing upon her the realization that something, in feminist discourse, resists direct translation into the language made available by academic propriety. Something of the feminist countermemory is in excess of convention, it is transgressive of canonical knowledge—something in feminist writings calls for new ways of listening.

It follows from this emphasis on sexual difference as nomadic attachment to the project of making a difference through feminist bonding with other women, that feminism, for me, is also a "genre"—with its own specific textual and methodological requirements. I would go so far as to pose the radical incommensurability of the feminist genre with accepted modes of academic thought. This genre calls for specific styles of expression, of reception, of interpretation to do justice to it. Feminist ideas are trajectories of thought, they are lines of flight across improbable horizons; they attempt to reconnect levels of experience that patriarchal power has kept apart. Feminist ideas are constructions that call into being new, alternative ways of constructing the female subject. I have spoken elsewhere in this collection about the double feminist structure of time—which Kristeva interprets in terms of different feminist generations. I would like to suggest now that this double time-structure also engenders different feminist styles. From the politics to the poetics of the feminist voice<sup>5</sup>—new spaces of enunciation are opened to us—new, different, and differing ways of speaking.

In this framework, different generations of women mark not only chronological steps but also thresholds out of which we can build cross-generational dialogues.

Women's studies as the practice of this politics of difference emphasizes consequently the practice of feminist genealogies as the response to the difficult question of how to ensure a feminist transmission of

knowledge, or a feminist symbolic filiation as the antidote to the rivalry and competition that the institutional practice triggers among women.

Feminist genealogies is a multiple, open-ended project that aims at undoing the Oedipal rivalry among women in an institutional context dominated by masculine parameters.

In this respect, I would like to emphasize once again a point I have made earlier, about the transdisciplinary nature of feminist work. It seems to me, in fact, that one of the communication problems we have at the moment is due to the implicit or explicit disciplinary assumptions that make our discourse possible. In this respect one of the tasks facing feminist intellectuals is the creation of a class of transdisciplinary translators who can transpose the assumptions and methodologies of one discipline into those of another. In so far as no translation can ever be perfect duplication, but rather a collection of approximations, deletions, and omissions, these conceptual translators could be seen as the core of a feminist intellectual class.

This way of approaching the task of feminist intellectuals challenges the idea of the feminist as a sort of philosopher-queen, whose task it is to legislate upon forms of knowledge and order them in a descending hierarchy of legitimacy. I state this with an evident edge of irony because in my discipline since Beauvoir, the philosophical thinker has somehow represented the type of the feminist intellectual and therefore played a *de facto* role of intellectual leadership. The prestige of the philosopher as an image of the feminist woman of ideas has also functioned in a major way in building up the extraordinary aura of "French feminism," especially the work of feminist philosophers such as Luce Irigaray and nonfeminist critics, such as Julia Kristeva. The phenomenon of the prestige, that is to say the discursive power, granted to women philosophers is very striking in Italy, where Adriana Cavarero and Louisa Muraro, through groups such as the women's bookshop in Milan and the Diotima collective in Verona, exercise a sort of intellectual monopoly over Italian feminist thought.<sup>6</sup>

In a nomadic perspective based on sexual difference, it is clear that I am concerned by an image of thought and a figuration of the feminist intellectual as sovereign legislator of knowledge. The radical subversion of phallogocentrism, which I see as the radical project of feminism, cannot, in my opinion, result in the revalorization of the discourse of "high theory" and especially of philosophy. This would be only another way to reassert the mastery of the very discourse that feminism claims to

deconstruct. The emphasis on the validity of the theoretical or philosophical form of knowledge is such that it prevents a critical analysis of the structure of the philosophical posture.

As I have argued elsewhere in this volume, a great deal of contemporary feminist philosophy displays the same attitude, which I would describe as blind faith in the actual value of the discipline. This consists in amalgamating philosophy with the act of thinking as a whole, as if it were the expression of the essence of the thinking being. It seems to me that this position ends up supporting and strengthening one of the most ancient mental habits of patriarchy: the overinvestment of the theoretical mode, as exemplified by philosophy, with the consequent glorification of the figure of the philosopher.

I think women's studies should resist this image of thought and this fascination with high theory. The political consensus about the importance of feminist forms of knowledge must not prevent feminist thinkers from questioning the false universalisms of the theoretical mode and open up instead to nomadic questioning. It is important that we go one step further than the sheer assertion of women's ability to postulate philosophical truths. This sort of empowerment is limited as a political goal.

In other words, we cannot avoid the question that poststructuralism puts on our agenda, concerning the crisis of metaphysics. Since Nietzsche, philosophy has been concentrating on the analysis of the premises implicit in its own condition of enunciation, thus unraveling the premises implicit in its own practice. This has completely shaken the image of thought that is embodied in classical philosophy. A distinction is therefore made between thinking and philosophy, in a profoundly anti-Cartesian mode.

The question of the crisis of philosophy is obviously a complex one; to sum up the aspects that are most relevant for the practice of sexual difference within women's studies, I would say that what marks the age of modernity is the emergence of a discourse about what it means to elaborate a discourse. This metatheoretical level means that the faculty of thinking has emancipated itself from the imperialism of the philosophical *logos*; the rationalist aggression has exhausted its historical function. Thinking thus becomes its own object of thought, in a circularity that is in excess of the Cartesian grid that had for centuries contained and interpreted it.



The Freudian hypothesis of the unconscious is one of the clearest attacks on the founding illusion of the Cartesian subject: the coincidence between the subject and his thinking consciousness. All post-Nietzschean philosophy takes as its starting point the decline of the bond between will and desire, consciousness and subjectivity, thinking and rationality. What I call post-Nietzschean philosophy is aware that philosophy is a very specific practice or style of thinking, which neither exhausts nor stresses what is most vital about thinking. The great limitation of philosophy, its phallogocentric perversion, is due to the fact that it can not think conceptually about its own origins, its foundations. Philosophy cannot think about what sustains it as a form of thought. This incapacity is endemic in so far as the thinking process that precedes the philosophical gesture also necessarily escapes it. The philosophical moment, as I have argued before, rests on a desire to think that is prephilosophical: a receptivity and availability toward the act of giving meaning, which in itself is neither conscious nor thoughtful. It is a predisposition, one that makes the human being receptive to the play of the signifier and the game of signification. This substratum of desire is also the potential source of the affirmative force of ideas.

In my perspective, the thought of sexual difference as the expression of the ontological desire of the female feminist is a project that implies the transformation of the very act of thinking, of its structural frame and not only of its images or content. This practice of sexual difference reelaborates the foundations for the alliance between thinking in the theoretical mode and the constitution of subjectivity. In other words, one of the first targets of the feminist practice of difference should be, in my opinion, to question the very gesture or stance of high theory and especially of philosophy as being representative of the power of/in discourse that we are trying to critique. High theory or philosophy in its traditional inception is nothing more than the power of/in discourse; consequently the feminist practitioner must act specifically (not organically, not universally) so as to unveil the power games implicit in her own practice.

What is needed in women's studies as a practice of sexual difference in the nomadic mode is a critique of the implicit system of values conveyed by high theory in its support of a conventional image of thought and of the thinker as sovereign in its text. The practice of sexual difference redefined in this critical mode lays the foundations of an epistemological and a pedagogical pact or bond between the speaking "I"

and the "you" that receives the message. The network of enunciation that women are producing in the institutions where knowledge is produced is already impregnated by what is called "power," insofar as it involves the desire to know, the formalization and transmission of knowledge, an emotional and political link, as well as the collective will to transform the conditions of women. Among the members of the feminist cognitive community there is already power in so far as discourse is involved.

In other words, women's studies from this sort of perspective clarifies the fact that power is founded where it is the least visible: in the infinitely multiplying web of discourse; in the social and material relations it engenders; in the symbolic relations it mediates. Power is the name given to a strategic complex situation in which relations of production and of knowledge are simultaneously organized. Power is language, it is a discursive link; it is conjugated with the verb *to be* and not with the verb *to have*.

Because of this, I want to argue that, in order to develop a non-mimetic practice of sexual difference we must change the rules of the game of discourse, undoing the sacred knot formalized since Plato as the interconnection of the true, the good, and the beautiful. Theoretical thought today must be the creative elaboration of other ways of being; this implies the revalorization of the affective, emotional foundations of the discipline, not only of its rationalistic structure; it implies that we can say farewell to the rationalist illusion.

What seems to be at stake in this project is the female symbolic system that Irigaray has attempted to theorize. This means that, as women of ideas, aiming to validate a practice of sexual difference, we have a certain responsibility toward our own and other women's thought. We must therefore take the time to think through the different steps of our own theoretical becoming. Women's studies is the laboratory of ideas where this experiment can be run.

# Ethics Revisited: Women and/in Philosophy

This chapter deals more specifically with the normative power of reason within Western philosophy. One of the premises on which it rests is that philosophy, like all the so-called "human sciences," stands for an instrumental approach to language that opposes it to the nomadic style I am defending here.

The main issue I shall raise in the first section involves the status of philosophy as a discipline, that is to say as a discursive model. My aim is to point out and to question the normative style of enunciation as the dominant mode of philosophical discourse, particularly insofar as it affects the binary opposition of masculine and feminine values. Feminist theory and practice will provide the critical stand necessary to sustain my questioning of this philosophical opposition. In the second section I shall try to define the different strategies undertaken by women in philosophy and to develop an overview of the specific brand of activity known as "feminist theory." In the third section I shall turn to some contemporary European philosophers' reaction to the presence of and the discursive impact made by women in philosophy. In this respect I will ask whether feminism can lend itself to the formulation of nonhegemonic types of theoretical discourse.

The beginning, like all beginnings, can only be formless and empty. It is not toward the hallowed moments of the history of philosophy that I intend to draw my readers' attention, but rather toward the least philosophical of all subject matter: women, as they are depicted in the novel *Kinflicks* by Lisa Alther.<sup>1</sup>

It is the story of a simple girl from a middle-class background who ends up in an Ivy League college in the United States of America. Strug-

gling with the intellectual requirements of this institution, she becomes particularly interested in philosophy, which is embodied in her favorite teacher, Miss Head. The rigorous intellectual discipline of philosophy stands for order, self-control, harmony—qualities young Ginny of *Kin-flicks* sadly lacks. It is almost as a consequence of this lack that she develops an intense case of fascination for the great overachievers who have written the history of philosophy.

Taking their example much too literally, Ginny becomes a caricature of the very ideas she so passionately believes in: she talks like a Cartesian textbook, imitates the Spinozist subject, and by concentrating all her energies on this game of projection, leads a life of emotional sterility.

Her passionate quest for knowledge is thus directly proportional to her feeling of fundamental intellectual and emotional inadequacy. Ginny feels she ought not to have been let into the institution of higher learning—she is a sort of impostor. And yet this feeling of illegitimacy feeds into her desire to learn; after all, she does want to become Miss Head's favorite pupil, and the desire to be a dutiful daughter spurs her on to bigger and better things.

Then, one day, Ginny meets the leftist campus radical, Eddie, but refuses to get involved with her, saying: "You see, I'm apolitical. I agree with Descartes when he says that his aim is 'to try always to conquer himself rather than fortune, and to alter his desires rather than change the order of the world, and generally accustom himself to believe that there is nothing entirely within his power, but his own thoughts.'" <sup>2</sup>

This fails to impress Eddie, whose reply is quick, clear and to the point: "Descartes? . . . If my eyes were rotting in my skull from disuse I wouldn't read Descartes, that fascist son of a bitch!" <sup>3</sup> Unperturbed, Ginny strikes back: "Politics . . . is nothing but personal opinion . . . I am not interested in opinions, I'm interested in truth." Staring at her violently, weighing every word with soul-shattering hatred, Eddie utters the inevitable: "And Descartes is truth? Have you read Nietzsche yet?"

This is the point of no return. Ginny rushes to read Nietzsche, particularly his demystification of rationality, and a few days later she resumes the conversation with Eddie: "Something very definitely is wrong . . . I've just read what that bastard Nietzsche says about Descartes . . . I think it sucks." Eddie positively beams: "It sucks, uh? Do you know what that means—to suck?" Ginny is disconcerted and cannot see what sucking has to do with Descartes. Eddie declares tri-

umphantly: "Absolutely nothing . . . that's my whole point: I suck therefore I am, what do you think of that?"

This is the beginning of a great friendship between the two women, which will grow into a full love affair. Under Eddie's influence Ginny becomes the rebellious daughter; turning her back on Miss Head's set of values, which she now decries as "moral paralysis," she decides to drop out of college altogether. The pursuit of excellence is replaced by intense experimentation in the woman's movement and eventually out of it—to become a "new," mother in her own right.

It seems to me that this rather schematized portrait of "women in philosophy" is very useful in raising a few key issues concerning women's involvement with philosophy as a theoretical practice. The question is: what sort of "structures" are at work in the case of women involved in philosophical theory? By *structures* I mean first of all the psychosexual drives and the sort of human interaction they are likely to give rise to. Second, I mean social relations, mediated by money and authority; and finally, I mean linguistic structures as sites of communication.

## Women in Philosophy

Philosophy seems to provide Ginny with an ideal outlet for her basic insecurity; she thus projects onto theoretical achievements her need for mastery and self-fulfillment. These feelings are clearly related to the fact that Ginny is a woman—but is this fact really as "simple" as it looks? Ginny needs above all to be rescued from the confusing mess that is the female body, from female sexuality, and from the web of social contradictions that is marked upon and carried by the idea of "femininity."

Becoming a good, that is to say a rational, philosopher is for Ginny a way to escape from the female condition. Miss Head—cold, cerebral, and life-denying—is the ideal model to represent this desire for self-control. Ginny's libidinal economy consists in swapping her sexual/bodily existence for an idealized self-image as a masterful being. By becoming her own idealized image of herself she is, at long last, her own man!

This young woman has swallowed the misogyny of a cultural system where masculine values dominate, and she reproduces it unconsciously in her attempt to be better than she is, better than a woman, that is to say—a man!

This process of identification with phallogocentric values raises several conceptual and ideological questions: how can sexual difference be inscribed as one of the key values in our culture? Are there any "femi-

nine" values, and what is their "nature"? Second, what price do women have to pay—intellectually, sexually, and materially—in order to gain access to higher cultural and intellectual achievements, be it in theory, art, or science? How does the total "price" women pay for their drive toward self-fulfillment compare with the price men are asked to pay? Is there not a fundamental lack of symmetry in the libidinal as well as the material economy of the two sexes?

The fact that Ginny gains some peace of mind in the ultimate flight from womanhood can be explained with some help from psychoanalytic theories. Some obviously relevant areas of Freudian thought are: the nature of the female superego;<sup>4</sup> women's relationship to the cultural and artistic activities that represent the great achievement of "mankind";<sup>5</sup> the question of female "masochism."<sup>6</sup>

It is not my purpose here to deal with this complex problematic but rather to stress that what binds Ginny to the lords and masters of higher learning is something akin to intense desire. Unless one is prepared to argue that women's desire is implicitly self-destructive, one should reexamine the drive for knowledge in terms of the heterosexual bond.

One of the crucial issues in the debate about women in philosophy is that our culture has established a very firm dichotomy between the feminine and the notion of "rationality." In other words, the fact of being a woman has traditionally been assessed as a terrible handicap for a human being who aspires to higher cultural and theoretical achievements. It can be demonstrated today (Irigaray, 1974) that the feminine from Plato to Freud has been perceived in terms of matter, physis, the passions, the emotions, the irrational. The actual terms of the discussion as to female "nature" evolved, with time, from the initial question of whether women had a soul—and could consequently be considered as part of the human species—to the problem of their ability to behave ethically.

What was at stake in the question of women and ethics was their status as citizens, that is to say, their eligibility for political and civil rights, which would grant them first-class membership in the private club of mankind.

Until the end of the nineteenth century the binary opposition of women and rationality persisted as one of the most venerable mental habits of Western political and moral thought.<sup>7</sup> It seems to me that dualism cannot be dissociated from the question of power and its corollaries—domination and exclusion. I would argue consequently that it is

not because they are rational that men are the masters, but rather that, being the masters, they have appropriated rationality as their own prerogative. The denigration and exclusion of the feminine in philosophy, in other words, is just a pretext for the great textual continuity of masculine self-glorification: the mysterious absent entity that grants full grounds for existence to the masculine knowing subject. In a very interesting paper, Genevieve Lloyd<sup>6</sup> demonstrates quite convincingly that the idealization of rationality is coextensive with masculinity and that it usually turns into a list of grievances against the feminine. The feminine is reduced to that which is "other-than" and whose difference can only be perceived in terms of pejoration and inferiority.

Although it would be possible to read the history of Western philosophy as a variation on the age-long theme of female oppression, against which feminists have taken a stand, I would rather not spell out all the discursive atrocities philosophers have committed against the feminine and against women. That would be a depressing task indeed. I prefer to concentrate on the binary logic itself—the dualism implicit in our respective and mutual perceptions of the feminine and the masculine, as they have been structured within our culture. In doing so, I am not releasing the philosophers from their historical responsibility as agents of repression. On the contrary, following Italian feminist Carla Lonzi in her highly provocative essay, entitled "Let's spit on Hegel!,"<sup>9</sup> I would demand of them an explanation. The question is what sort of explanation, if any, women are prepared to settle for.

After all—the mental habit that consists in turning the feminine into a set of metaphors for "the other" is not just a small omission that can be remedied by good will and some quick repair work. No amount of inclusion of women into theory, politics, and society could palliate the effects of and compensate for the centuries of exclusion—moreover, compensation is not the feminists' primary goal.

From a feminist standpoint, the inadequacy of the theoretical model of classical rationality is that it is oblivious to sexual difference in that it mistakes the masculine bias for a universal mode of enunciation. The sexual neutrality it professes conceals a fundamental and unspoken phallogentrism, as I have argued in the previous chapter. To condemn this mode of thinking on the ideological level—as being sexist—does not suffice as a conceptual analysis. The fact is that, as a consequence of its phallogentric assumptions, this binary logic produces faulty and

incomplete notions, untruths, scientific misjudgements—it is just not good enough as a system of thought.

One of the most instructive things about *Kinflicks* is that, although most of the action in the novel takes place among women, the context within which their exchange occurs is totally masculine. The essential problematic of the novel is thought out in terms of the women's relationship to male, white, middle-class theoreticians who are actually absent. They act as the silent, invisible, all-pervading masters of the game of discourse.

If we take the three main characters in Alther's novel and see how they experience and organize their desire to learn, we can classify them according to the sort of relationship they establish with philosophy as a discursive institution.

Miss Head wishes to be let into the Hall of Fame and be allowed to rest alongside the great thinkers. She crystallizes some of the worst dangers awaiting women who dare enter the sacred grounds of high culture. Her energy and creativity are wasted in sterile imitation of patterns of conceptual behavior that have been institutionalized by men, for themselves. Like a sleepwalker acting out someone else's script, she is caught in a perfectly mimetic structure of repetition. The relationship between Miss Head and Ginny is in some ways a replay of the darker side of the female Oedipal configuration: the older woman is both the object of sterile love and the subject capable of exercising a normative, prescriptive function—a small-time leader who does not set the rules but knows how to apply them. Like the "bad" mother of Freudian psychoanalysis, she is the one through whom the Law of the Father is applied and enforced upon the descendants, against their will if necessary. One of the marks of patriarchal culture is precisely the fact that the original bond between the mother and the child must give way to their joint acceptance of a common master: the husband, the father, the man.

Ginny is motivated by the desire to make philosophy the best of all possible disciplines. She believes in it with all the intensity of the neophyte, and were philosophy ever to fail her she would dedicate herself to the mission of reforming it, so as to make it live up to her own expectations. Had she not met Eddie, she would probably have become a moral philosopher, and she might have adapted classical philosophical concepts to the analysis of some feminist topic. I can imagine her writing, for instance, a paper about "the moral and philosophical issues raised by abortion." Although Ginny is representative of the prefeminist



state of mind, it would be a mistake to dismiss her attitude as merely naive. The reformist work accomplished by women like Ginny is a reality that cannot be ignored today. In many subtle ways this type of promotion of women within the status quo is changing the structure of our society and its discursive practices. This phenomenon often makes me think that women as a political movement are not nearly dangerous enough to the sociopolitical system. At other times it just leads me to believe that, insofar as they are part and parcel of this very system, women are condemned to being signifying agents within it. In other words, women are doomed not only to speak but also to have something to say; if they are to be producers of signs, however, it is their responsibility to choose the ways and means of their discursive production. It is up to women to make their "difference" work in new and powerful ways wherever it chooses to express itself.

The third position, represented by Eddie, is radical feminism. It is, of course, no coincidence (is it ever?) that Ginny's break from the maternal bond coincides with her meeting this Nietzschean separatist. In a very direct way, she deconstructs all of Miss Head's attempts at systematizing reality into a neat, exhaustive, conceptual framework. The radical feminist attacks the phallogentric bias inherent in our culture, which manifests itself particularly in the tendency to leap from the particular to the universal and to associate the latter with the masculine. Eddie refuses the notion of universal truths. She posits the deconstruction of metadiscourse<sup>10</sup> and asserts the priority of multiplicity over linear and monolithic discourse. For instance, insofar as the preoccupation with "women as other" is all-pervading in Western thought, it can be used as the paradigm to illustrate the interaction of rationality with norms of regulation, domination, and exclusion.

In the radical feminist perspective, therefore, "woman as other" is the prototype of all that is excluded from ruling modes of thought. Accordingly, it can be argued that the dominant order of discourse in modern thought—that of scientific rationality—is a normative model for all the sciences. "Rationality," according to the scheme sketched out in chapter 7, has been thought out in a binary set of oppositions, which works by assigning to the negative pole all that is different, or "other-than." A connection is to be made, therefore, between the normative power of reason to masculine power and to the age-long war it has waged against "women as other" and against the "feminine."

It seems to me that the radical critique of philosophy unveils the power structures implicit in the theoretical processes and that it does so from a sexualized standpoint. In other words, all philosophical claims to universality are deconstructed by pointing out the complicity between the masculine and the rational. This implies that philosophical discourse, far from being universal, suffers from the most partial oneness: a sexual and conceptual bias in favor of the masculine.

The feminist analysis of rationality in terms of normative power assumes that patriarchy has set up the categories of thought it most needed in order to legitimate itself, passing off as a "nature"—that is to say the "other" of cultural order—a good half of humanity. To sexualize a discourse is therefore a practice of disclosure of vested interests: like the little girl who declares that the emperor is naked, Eddie sees through the power games involved in the theoretical process. The feminine "dark continent" that puzzled Freud is thus read as the flip side of masculine self-legitimation in discourse.

The question then becomes: can rationality be freed from its hegemonic connotations? It is possible to take the theoretical and political standpoint of feminism to bring about another regime of truth?

In order to explore the implications of these complex questions, I will spell out three different sets of distinct, though related, problems: first, what are the specific aspects of the feminist practice of philosophy? Second, what are the repercussions for feminism of the practice of this discipline and how has the presence of feminism affected male philosophers? Third, I shall stress the importance of ethical questions as a point of junction between feminism and philosophy.

## Double Binds and New Bonds: Women and Philosophy

On the empirical level the changes brought about by feminism in the field of higher culture and education are obvious: some fifty years after Virginia Woolf's inspiring words<sup>11</sup> women have gained access to the institutions of learning and are now a presence in most branches of knowledge. The effective presence of female scholars has caused basic alterations in the practice as well as the discourse of the sciences.

As far as philosophy is concerned, the contribution of someone such as Simone de Beauvoir can no longer be ignored by professional philosophers, no matter how hard they try to resist. This new theoretic-

cal genealogy of women means not only that academic courses about women in philosophy are possible today but also that the question of women's relationship to learning, and the individual women's handling of her desire to learn, is being structured differently. The presence of real-life women in positions of authority and knowledge is opening up new possibilities for self-image and identification in women. Thus, if young Ginny went to university today, she would probably have at her disposal some new models of women as fully fledged theoreticians in their own right. The novelty of the pedagogical relationship in which women play the leading roles deserves close scrutiny as the experimental grounds for new ways of thinking about and dealing with philosophy as an intellectual discipline.

It seems to me that feminists need to think more carefully about the transmission of the feminist insight as a critical stance, as well as a thematic or a content that can be formalized. In other words, feminism has the potential to provide thinking women with some critical distance vis-à-vis the structures of power and knowledge in which they are caught. For instance, the interplay of conflicts and desire at work in the pedagogical relationship between women often functions as both the catalyst for, and the re-enactment of, specifically female patterns of behavior: Oedipal and other dramas that tend to defy expected norms. This double interaction—on the one hand between women and masculine institutions of discourse and, on the other, between each woman involved in the process—stresses the complexity of the issues relating to both feminine and feminist identity.

Here psychoanalytic theory can, once again, provide some useful insight into the political implications of the process of construction of human sexual identity in general and of the feminine one in particular. If we view the discourse about the "otherness" of femininity as one of the transhistorical and cross-cultural constants of patriarchal culture, then we can take the Freudian scheme as a fairly accurate description of the mechanisms of masculine authority—an analysis of the subjective grounding of patriarchal power.

For instance, in her article about the fantasies of erotic domination Jessica Benjamin<sup>12</sup> analyses the mixture of violence and desire that marks the process of identification and of differentiation of the child from his/her parents. Unless the mutual recognition of each other's subjectivity occurs, the need to achieve separation and individuality is doomed to take a violent turn.

Benjamin stresses also the lack of symmetry between the two sexes, particularly when it comes to the notion of "separation": the male child seems more prone to deny his dependence on the mother and, through the denial of this bond, he also fails to acknowledge the other as a subject in her own right. In this paradoxical knot of violence and love lies the groundwork for the fantasy of erotic domination, which can come to fruition in the adult sadomasochistic relationship. In a very interesting and quite daring argument, Benjamin suggests that the matrix of the desire to dominate and humiliate the (m)other, in other words the knot that ties together desire and violence, is related to the original failure to recognize the mother's subjectivity.

This vaguely Hegelian scheme applies perfectly well to our heroine Ginny, who is caught in the double bind of mother love: loving and hating, life-giving and yet murderous, the maternal space is the threshold of the most fundamental psychic conflicts in one's life. The dialectical struggle for mutual recognition carries on until, in the Oedipal triangle, the third party comes to break it. In *Kin flicks* the tragedy is highlighted by the fact that Miss Head refuses to come to life in her own right. Ginny would be more than willing to recognize her, but the teacher recedes into her strictly functional dimension, and, once her transitive task is over, she fades out of existence. Her self-denial not only prevents Ginny's recognition of her as a subject, it also slows down the development of her own individuality. The young woman builds around Miss Head a conflicting web of adoration and aberration, which finally escalates into a full-scale war between the mother figure and her daughter. It is as if one cannot grow without the other. Or else, to use one of Irigaray's more poetic images, one cannot stir without the other.<sup>13</sup> The primacy of the erotic bond with the mother leads to a vicious circle, and the child's original attachment results in a structural ambivalence that is particularly violent for the baby girl.

This fundamental ambivalence gives a specific feminine inflection to the questions of interpersonal relationships: how do we explain the "excessive" nature of women's love? How do we explain that the stuff love is made of is also what hatred is made of? How can we account for the coextensivity of power and desire?

I think that the question of the mother-daughter relationship has been latent in feminist thinking ever since the early days of the movement, when ideas such as "sisterhood is powerful" seemed self-explanatory. It has, however, become more prominent of late, in a large number of

publications, which is in itself quite significant. Like a boomerang, the return of the complex problem of the maternal signifies clearly that something had been missed.

Recent attempts at assessing the evolution of feminist thought on the mother-child relationship have spelled out the different stages of the feminist case for the politics of sexuality.<sup>14</sup> The transition from the very early consciousness-raising groups, which praised the politics of experience and spoke out against female oppression, to the return of the debate on the double bind of femininity occurred through the lesbian separatist phenomenon.

Notions such as "woman-identified woman"<sup>15</sup> became the focus of a heated debate about the symbolic homosexuality represented by and built into the women's movement. Thus the insight that the "personal is the political" acquired a sharper edge of controversy over the choice of erotic objects. The distinction and yet also the connection between personal sexual liberation and the politics of sexuality remains a crucial question for many feminists today. The complexity of the problematic has led, in the highly charged context of the socioeconomic recession and the conservative backlash of the eighties, to questioning of the very notion of feminine identity in relation to the mother's body. It was at a rather critical point in time that the analysis of the mother-child relationship emerged as a powerful site of feminist thought, supported by the psychoanalytic insight into the construction of human subjectivity in terms of symbolic structures. The very formulation of the problem is a symptom of some deep discontent within feminist thought and practice.

When it comes to the question of the mother-child relation, I feel quite resistant to two extreme though opposite solutions: one that consists in concealing the molecular complexity of the problem behind a sociological type of analysis,<sup>16</sup> the other being the mystifying idealization of the woman-identified bond as a "politically pure" identity, which reduces the mother-daughter problematic to an elaborate analogy for lesbianism.<sup>17</sup>

It seems to me that a way out of this false alternative is a political analysis of sexuality as an interrelated set of power, knowledge, and desire structures that are centered on the body—along the lines suggested by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*. In Foucault's view the interplay of body, discourse, and power is positive, that is, it is not to be understood in terms of repression but rather as active production

of forms of knowledge about the bodily subject. Foucault focuses on the historical forces that shape the production of discourse, but at the same time he stresses the idea that "historical contingency forms a substantial part of the sexual life."<sup>18</sup>

The attention thus paid to the complexity of the interplay of history and human subjectivity allows Foucault to go further than the traditional analyses of oppression. Within feminist thought, for instance, there exists a militant line<sup>19</sup> that resolves the most problematic aspects of female sexuality—for instance the issues related to sadomasochism, power, and domination—by reading them as marks of patriarchal oppression that women have turned inward. In Foucault's perspective, on the other hand, the question becomes: what does it mean to turn something like this "inward"—into what? And out of what?

Foucault's work can be particularly useful to refute the tendency, displayed by some current trends of feminist thought,<sup>20</sup> to define women as completely excluded from (dominant) culture and, as such, innocent of and uncontaminated by its values and signifying practices. This view has led, in its most radical separatist form, to the assertion of an authentically female sexuality that could and should be retrieved by women. The liberation of this sort of sexuality is then presented as the principle of legitimation for separatist feminist politics: feminism is the question, lesbianism is the practice.

It seems to me that the conjunction of sexual identity with the question of the politics of desire calls for a more complex discussion. As far as the question of sexual identity is concerned, I feel very strongly that, although heterosexuality is the dominant "lie" about women today<sup>21</sup>—and one that is perpetuated and enforced by an entire social system—it is not the only one. The homosexual separatist alternative is in no way qualitatively or politically "better." I do not believe that any purity is possible in a system as coded as ours, where categories such as "sex," "race," and "class" carry normative connotations. There is no "outside" in the material and discursive system that structures our subjectivity; all a political movement can aspire to is a strong sense of strategy in the Foucauldian sense—as the constant, multiple, and dispersed quest for critical standpoints and points of resistance.

The suspension of belief in fixed identities of the sexual, cultural, and political kind seems to me an essential step toward a critique of rationality as a normative notion. All identity is just a game of masks that conceals and yet at the same time also conveys the representations of

our conscious thoughts and our unconscious thinking. Furthermore, the suggestion that identity is partial and fragmentary may help the feminist movement to avoid the pitfalls of dogmatism and prescription, from which it is not immune.

The stakes are high: the issue of sexual identity questions the legitimacy of the women's movement as a political force and as a critical stance. How can clear-thinking feminists justify and authenticate their political beliefs today? What evaluation should be made of recent feminist analysis and experiments with identity? Where should we draw the line between personal fantasies, the politics of solidarity, and political utopias? These questions are a two-way mirror that reflects both on feminist theory and practice and on contemporary philosophical investigations of human subjectivity. The question I would like to raise here is: what happens to theoretical discourse when women refuse to play nature to their culture?<sup>22</sup> What changes are brought about in an intellectual discipline when some of its main figureheads are women? What happens to the notion of rationality as a guiding principle if women are at last perceived as masterful minds? As H  l  ne Cixous puts it,<sup>23</sup> what will happen to their church when the stone on which they built it suddenly collapses?

In turn, how does contemporary philosophy contribute to feminist thought? What are the points of contact and of divergence?

## Philosophy and Woman: The Missing Link

There is as yet no unified problematic about women and philosophy; the fragile conjunction *and*, which links the two terms of reference, does not fulfill a conjunctive role—rather it performs a disjunctive act, marks a categorical, qualitative leap between two discourses and two referents: philosophy/women.

An additional difficulty involved in formulating the problematic is also due to a remarkable coincidence, the emergence and the merging, in the last thirty years, of two phenomena: on the one hand the revival of the women's movement throughout the Western world, which led to new analyses of the role, the life conditions, and the discursivity of women; on the other, something quite internal to the theoretical field and to philosophy itself—the crisis of rationality. Although it was announced at the turn of the century by the apocalyptic trinity of critical thinkers—Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche—this crisis acquired greater relevance and gathered momentum after World War II, and particularly in

Continental philosophy. I do not think this is a simple historical coincidence but rather an extraordinary concurrence of effects: the new feminism and the philosophical urgency to question the epistemological groundwork of philosophical discourse. The movement to bring philosophy back to its specific historical context was very strong in France. Michel Foucault summed up this shift of philosophical orientation as follows:

I would say, then, that what has emerged in the course of the last ten or fifteen years is a sense of the increasing vulnerability to criticism of things, institutions, practices, discourses. A certain fragility has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence, even and perhaps above all in those aspects of it that are most familiar, most solid and most intimately related to our bodies and to our everyday behavior. But together with this sense of instability and this amazing efficacy of discontinuous, particular and local criticism, one in fact also discovers something that perhaps was not initially foreseen—something one might describe as precisely the inhibiting effect of global, totalitarian theories.<sup>24</sup>

The structural fragility of discursive practices has led Foucault to reconsider critically the function of philosophy today. His main concern has thus become the questioning of power:<sup>25</sup> power as it operates within theoretical discourse, as a political economy that allows certain ideas to emerge as true and others to be excluded as false, in a regime of truth that works through socioeconomic and symbolic institutions alike; the specific power exercised by the idea of rationality in its claim to universal validity as the dominant mode in Western philosophy; power as a concept particularly relevant to political philosophy and more particularly to the idea of governmentality (a word used by Foucault to indicate the process of constant regulations and surveillance); how does the ideal of rationality relate to notions such as revolution and liberation?; power as coextensive with the body defined as a field of interacting social and libidinal forces—the body has emerged, in Foucault's thought, as a cognitive field, an object for theoretical and political analysis.

Through these questions Foucault expresses the idea that we cannot go on thinking adequately about our historical existence within the categories of thought we have inherited from the past. In the light of the feminist strategies in philosophy that I have pointed out earlier, Foucault's work on the body and power represents a clear point of contact between women and philosophy. His microphysics of power casts



some new light on the dialectical opposition of the feminine to rationality and stresses the paradigmatic nature of dualistic thinking for Western philosophy.

Although I cannot develop here the detail of Foucault's analysis of the "feminine," I do wish to stress the significance of their point of intersection between philosophical inquiry and the theoretical issues raised by feminists. Let me illustrate this point of contact by a series of other statements made by contemporary thinkers, about the role and function of rationality in philosophical work. The first is taken from Foucault:

These questionings are those which must be addressed to a rationality that makes universal claims while developing in contingency, which asserts its unity and yet proceeds only by means of partial modification, when not by general recastings, which authenticates itself through its own sovereignty, but which in its history is perhaps not dissociated from inertias, weights which coerce it, subjugate it. In the history of science in France, as in German critical theory, what we are to examine essentially is a reason whose autonomy of structures carries with itself the history of dogmatism and despotism—a reason which, consequently, has the effect of emancipation only on the condition that it succeeds in freeing itself of itself.<sup>26</sup>

The next extract comes from Paul Feyerabend:

We must invent a new conceptual system that suspends or clashes with the most carefully established observational results, confounds the most plausible theoretical principles and introduces perceptions that cannot form part of the existing perceptual world.<sup>27</sup>

The following is taken from Gregory Bateson:

If I am right, the whole way of thinking about what and who we are and what other people are has got to be restructured. This is not funny and I don't know how long we have to do it in. If we continue to operate on the premises that were fashionable in the pre-cybernetic era . . . we may have twenty or thirty years before the logical *reductio ad absurdum* of our old positions destroys us . . . The most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in the new way. Let me say that I don't know how to think that way yet.<sup>28</sup>

The final quotation comes from Adrienne Rich:

I am convinced that there are ways of thinking that we don't yet know about. I take those words to mean that many women are even now think-

ing in ways which traditional intellection denies, decries or is unable to grasp. Thinking is an active, fluid, expanding process; intellection, "knowing" are recapitulations of past processes. In arguing that we have by no means yet explored our biological grounding, the miracle paradox of the female body and its spiritual and political meanings, I am asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to think through the body, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized.<sup>29</sup>

Reading these passages one after the other, one is struck by their similarity, as well as some fundamental differences. The philosophers seem to come to a consensus on the urgency to rethink the very foundations of theoretical discourse; their cry of alarm is addressed specifically to the tradition of philosophical thought as an established institution. In other words, their interlocutor is the history of philosophy itself, and they all situate themselves within this tradition as speaking subjects. The fact that the tradition that legitimates their position is going through a radical crisis is reflected in their own concern for their place of enunciation. They seem to experience the crisis of modernity as a problem of representation and self-legitimation.<sup>30</sup> In different ways and to varying degrees they see themselves as carrying the heavy historical burden of "freeing reason of itself" (Foucault); of suspending and confounding established scientific dogma (Feyerabend); of saving what is left of rationality before it's too late (Bateson)—Cassandra's voices echoing within the city walls.

Maybe there is no alternative left to philosophers in times of crisis than questioning the legitimacy of their discursive practice. How else can a male deconstruct his own identification with phallic masculinity, than to expose it?

And yet the philosophers' concern can also be read as a sort of envy-in-disguise, as I suggest in chapter 6: were they oppressed, they could participate in the ferment of ideas of their culture; if they could join in the great work of critical deconstruction of some cultural and theoretical assumptions, they might relinquish the guilt and the anguish that come from having been forced to realize the historical role men have played in perpetuating the oppression of women and others.

If one argues, from the feminist standpoint, that philosophy has been until yesterday a masculine prerogative that was passed down from the "fathers" to the "sons" as one of the intellectual attributes of masculinity, and that as such it excluded women and others as signifying agents, and if then we go on to assume that a specific historical context of cri-

sis has brought feminism and philosophy together, we can only conclude that the discourse of modernist philosophy does not necessarily have the same implications for feminists as for the philosophers. Much as I appreciate the conscious efforts of some male thinkers to develop a more critical outlook on their own cultural tradition and to deconstruct dominant modes of conceptualization, I also maintain that this is not quite the women's story.

It seems to me that a double symmetry has emerged within critical thought between feminist thought and philosophical investigations of the status of philosophy in general and of its "feminine" in particular. Feminism has evolved beyond the stage of a critique of the patriarchal oppression of women—toward a more active critique of the theoretical models imposed by their culture: the very status of discursivity, rationality, and consciousness have been called into question. Feminist practice consists precisely in keeping the flow of interaction between concrete political concerns and the more theoretical concerns of academic research. The strength of feminism consists in its moving back and forth between intellectual critique and resistance against daily forms of oppression. I would say that, insofar as women are still fighting for basic rights, they have tended to sexualize discourse, to point out its complicity with masculine power.

On the other hand, avant-garde philosophers, confronted by the need to renew their discipline, tend to argue for the dissolution of all models and discursive practices based on phallogocentric premises.

They stand before the void of the contemporary crisis of rationality calling for structural transformations in terms of what J. F. Lyotard recognizes as one of the things at stake in feminism, namely the deconstruction of metadiscourse.

Some "postmodern" thinkers display also the tendency to think about feminism and philosophy as a "lucky coincidence"; a good example of this sort of mystification is an article by Craig Owens.<sup>31</sup>

It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged—not in order to transcend representation but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting, or invalidating others. Among those prohibited from Western representation and denied all legitimacy, are women . . .

Here, we arrive at an apparent crossing of the feminist critique of patriarchy and the postmodern critique of representation. In this passage, the intersection of women and philosophy is understood in the

light of the problem of representation, of truth and its legitimation. The specificity of the female problematic is implicitly denied by being melted into a sign—a symptom?—of masculine preoccupations.

The feminist stand that I have been pointing out leads me to think that one cannot subscribe easily to the endless “theories of representation” that our culture has produced and perpetuated about women. I will therefore contest this new metaphorization of women as the unrepresentable of the process of representation; this position as a sign of unrepresentability is not structurally different from all the other signs to which the feminine was confined in the classical mode (the irrational, the emotional, and so forth). Women are still perceived as the “blind spot” of the theoretical and signifying process, the “dark continent”—and the basic dualistic logic of the signification process itself remains unchanged. The danger implicit in this position is precisely that it does not call into question the hegemonic model that sustains its mental habits; as such, it carries on with the agelong metaphorization of women by the masculine subject of enunciation.

I should rather think that feminism and philosophical modernity can be understood in dialectical terms, that is to say in terms of power and strategy. Thus, I believe that the urgency male contemporary philosophers feel to criticize their own discursive premises betrays their increasing awareness of the discursive presence and power of women and of feminist thought. They seem to have displaced their problematics accordingly.

The question I would very much like to be able to answer is: why is it that as soon as feminists began thinking out loud for themselves, male thinkers took up the “feminine” as their own cause? What made them want to embark on this sudden “feminization” of their own modes of thinking? What is involved in this dramatic change in their place of enunciation? What is being exorcized by it? Why does the subversion or deconstruction of the subject of rationality seem to imply the transition via the “feminine”?

The most important difference between the feminist stand and contemporary critical philosophy in the Continental tradition lies in their respective awareness of their place of enunciation. It is as if the feminist thinkers were actively involved in the process of bringing about—both in theory and in practice—some radically different notion of subjectivity taken as the conditions of possibility for some other history, some new mode of thought. It seems to me that this difference in inflection

has profound ethical implications. Feminism thus defined stands as the mark of desire for a new way to conduct human affairs, to think about the human being as an entity, as well as being the expression of a political will to achieve justice for women. As such, it calls for a redefinition of the status of difference in our system of theoretical, moral, and socioeconomic values and for new theoretical representations to support this effort.

If we assert that feminism can bring about an open-ended quest for difference in the sense of a multiplicity of differences, it follows that what is at stake in feminist theory today is not female sexuality as much as the complex interplays of truth and power and the politics of desire in terms of the discursive and material institutions that shape it.

As our century draws to its end, several intellectual paths seem to converge on the questioning of the "other" and the need to establish new possibilities for truth. If we are to believe the critique of power in/and discourse as a possible political position, then feminism can be seen as playing a major role in laying the foundations of postmodern ethics and for specific forums of knowledge that cannot be adequately represented within existing academic discourses.

## The Subject in Feminism

It would be historically false and intellectually pretentious to think that I am the first woman to have the privilege of climbing these steps and addressing the community of academics, citizens, and friends gathered here today. Some came before me; many more will follow. Nevertheless, it is with a certain hesitation that I stand here in front of you about to discuss the problem of female subjectivity as if this had not been done before by one of my gender. Some images come to my mind, images that I want to share with you in the way of introduction.

First image: Cambridge University in the 1920s. A talented woman is standing in front of the mighty walls of the colleges wondering about the poor educational opportunities for women. She has not herself been allowed to learn Greek, Latin, rhetoric, and philosophy; she introduced herself to most of the branches of learning. As a writer she will campaign for the rights of women—for women to be entitled to become subjects of knowledge—and she will also struggle for women's right to vote, for women to become political subjects. Her name: Virginia Woolf. The texts: *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*.

Second image: Paris in the 1930s. A talented young woman realizes that she is not allowed to enroll in the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*—the most prestigious institution in the field of the humanities in her country—because it is still reserved for men. She will not get the individual attention and tutorship from the greatest teachers of her age, and though allowed to attend classes at the nearby state university—the Sorbonne—she will always feel deprived of adequate supervision and training. Brilliant and strong-willed, she will nevertheless become a writer and a

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This chapter is the text of the inaugural address that I delivered, following the Dutch academic tradition, in the central hall of Utrecht University, on May 16, 1990

philosopher; she will also campaign for the rights of women to become subjects of knowledge and active participants in the intellectual debates of their time, as well as in political life, considering that they had just gained the right to vote in France. She will devote most of her writings to unraveling the crucial question: how can women, the oppressed, become subjects in their own rights? Her name: Simone de Beauvoir. The texts: *The Second Sex* and *Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Third and last image: Utrecht in the early 1990s. Two young women standing in front of the women's studies building discuss their professional prospects. The first one asks, "And what will *you* do afterwards [meaning, after graduation]"? The other replies: "Oh the usual things a girl can do: teacher, doctor, professor, diplomat, museum director, manager, head of personnel, director of cabinet, journalist. I'll just see!" The first girl, however, who has studied "General Humanities" and has read about the poor employment opportunities for graduates from the humanities, has a different line: "All things considered," says she, "I think I'll learn how to play the stock market so I can retire at the age of forty to write my best-sellers!"

## The Genealogy of Feminist Theory

Speaking in and of Utrecht at the beginning of the last decade of this century and of this millennium I can only welcome wholeheartedly the improvements in self-image and sense of worth that educational opportunities have brought about in the women of today. I rejoice in the buoyant confidence displayed by younger women; I admire their determination and self-reliance.

In the case of these specific young women here today, I admire it all the more, as I know that they have been working on this topic in their women's studies classes. They have learned a fundamental existential lesson from their reading of Virginia Woolf's greatness and misery,<sup>1</sup> from Beauvoir's genius and frustrations.<sup>2</sup> The study of their gender has given these undergraduate women a powerful tool for self-analysis and evaluation. Their knowledge of women's cultural traditions, of literature, of the history of the struggles for feminist ideas, has added an extra dimension to their university training: it has given them a critical intellectual awareness that functions as a grip on reality. Women's studies is a vantage point from which they can look out more lucidly onto contemporary culture as the intersection of language with social realities.<sup>3</sup> They know where their gender comes from, and so they also know there

is no way for them to go but up. Feminist consciousness translated into a scholarly dimension is one of the sources for their awareness and self-determination but also for their professionalization.

The awareness shared by many women of today about an historical heritage that is profoundly negative for the female sex, coupled with the new sense of pride in the knowledge that women's struggles in the context of modernization and modernity have achieved major transformations in the status of women, has been extensively analyzed and theorized within women's studies as the problem of female subjectivity.

The field of enquiry broadly known as women's studies has been developing both quantitatively and qualitatively over the last fifteen years as the intellectual and theoretical offspring of the ideas generated by the women's movement.<sup>4</sup> Analysts of women's studies, such as Catherine Stimpson and Hester Eisenstein, have singled out three stages in the development of this field of study. The earliest one was centered on the critique of sexism as a social and theoretical practice that creates differences and distributes them in a scale of power values. The second stage aimed at reconstructing knowledge on the basis of women's experiences and the ways of knowing and representing ideas developed within women's cultural traditions. The third stage focuses on the formulation of new general values applicable to the community as a whole.

Obviously these three stages are intrinsically connected and the process of developing them goes on simultaneously; they do make clear, however, that the ideas and the insight developed within women's studies do not concern women alone but rather involve the transformation of general values and systems of representation. Thus the question of the female subject is not only a problem for women. Let me develop this point.

Both Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir as individual women were in many respects quite privileged. They were certainly more privileged than most other members of their sex. The sort of issues to which they gave voice, however, the problem area they identified as being the feminist issue, transcended the particular life stories and circumstances of each individual woman. Thus Woolf stated that for *any* woman to be able to turn her interest in the arts and especially in literature into a source of income, some general and very concrete sociopolitical preconditions would have to be fulfilled. This is true for any woman—that is to say, for all women—not only the few privileged ones.



In other words, the category *Woman*, despite all the differences that actually exist among individual women, is very clearly identifiable as suffering from common, culturally enforced assumptions. However different women may be from each other in other respects, all women are excluded from higher education. And why is that? Because this culture has a certain preset idea of *Woman* that results in the exclusion of all women from educational rights. This is the traditional representation of *Woman* as being irrational, oversensitive, destined to be a wife and mother. *Woman* as body, sex, and sin. *Woman* as "other-than" *Man*.

This representation of *Woman* is the denial of the subjectivity of women; it results in their exclusion from political and intellectual life. Even in the sphere called "private life" *Woman* does not enjoy the same freedom of emotional and sexual choice as *Man* does; she is expected to nurture and uphold the male ego and desires; her ego is not an issue. Virginia Woolf devoted some memorable pages to the analysis of women's mirror function, arguing that this ego-boosting activity requires that the female appear as weaker, more incompetent, less perfectible than the male. In this respect some of the traditional grievances against women's alleged intellectual and moral incompetence can be seen merely as a rhetorical technique that aims at constructing and upholding *Man* as the ideal model. Misogyny is not an irrational act of woman-hating but rather a structural necessity: it is a logical step in the process of constructing male identity in opposition to—that is to say, rejection of—*Woman*. Consequently *Woman* is connected to the patriarchy by negation.

The paradox of being defined *by* others is that women end up being defined *as* others; they are represented as different-from *Man* and this difference is given a negative value. Difference is a mark of inferiority.

The classical misogynist argument—a very persistent trend in our culture—passes off this difference (in the sense of inferiority) as a natural trait. For the misogynist, biology or anatomy is destiny, and the female, considered unique in her reproductive capacity, is seen as inferior to men in all other respects.

The feminist position ever since the eighteenth century has consisted in attacking the naturalistic assumptions about the mental inferiority of women, shifting the grounds of the debate toward the social and cultural construction of women as being different. In so doing feminists have stressed the demand for educational equality as a factor that could

decrease the differences between the sexes, these differences being the source of social inequality. In *Three Guineas* Woolf writes:

It would seem to follow as an indisputable fact that "we"—meaning by "we" a whole made up of body, brain and spirit, influenced by memory and tradition—must still differ in some essential respects from "you" whose body, brain and spirit have been so differently trained and are so differently influenced by memory and tradition. Though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes. Any help we can give you must be different from that you can give yourselves and perhaps the value of that help may lie in the fact of that difference.<sup>5</sup>

Ten years later Simone de Beauvoir goes even further in the argumentation against the dualistic—that is to say, oppositional—way of presenting the differences between the sexes. She argues that women are represented and constructed as different by a society that needs to have them excluded from crucial areas of civic life: not only the university and organized politics but also management, the church, the army, competitive sports, and so on. The difference, or "otherness" that women embody is necessary to uphold the prestige of the "one" of the male sex as the sole possessor of subjectivity meant as the *entitlement* to active participation in all these fields. In other words, the disqualification of the female subject is assessed by Beauvoir as a structural necessity of a system that constructs differences as oppositions, the better to affirm the norms, the normal standard: the masculine.

By analyzing the position of women as being men's Woman, Beauvoir singles out, if only to condemn it, the idea of rationality or theoretical reasoning being the instrument of masculine domination par excellence. She thus discloses the knot that for centuries has held together the use of reason with the exercise of power. In the feminist perspective thus defined, there is a bond between rationality, violence, and masculinity.

This assumption leads to a questioning of the very foundations and the alleged neutrality of rational discourse. Feminist theory thus criticizes the myths and mystifications surrounding Woman, understood as the construct of the male imagination, inaugurating a tradition that aims at subverting the systematic disqualification and denigration of the female subject. Feminism argues that men have appropriated de jure the faculty of reason, de facto confining women to compulsory irrationality, unreasonableness, immanence, and passivity.

This intellectual angle of approach to the women's question marks one of the most significant moments in the history of feminist ideas. The

founding moment of feminist theory is the affirmation of a bond among all women, a relation among them insofar as they share the same category of difference in the negative sense. In stating that she could not think adequately about her own individual existence without taking into account the general condition of women as well as the category of Woman as a patriarchal construction, Beauvoir lays the foundations for a new kind of female subject: a political and theoretical category "subject to change," as Nancy Miller put it,<sup>6</sup> or, to quote Teresa de Lauretis, a "female feminist subject."<sup>7</sup>

The female feminist takes the experience of women and the category of Woman as her object of study, not only in order to comprehend the mechanisms of disqualification of her gender but also and especially so as to disengage the notion of Woman from the web of half-truths and prejudices in which patriarchy has confined it. Ever since Beauvoir some feminists have been working to reach a more adequate definition of the category *Woman*. They have analyzed female oppression in terms of simultaneous symbolic disqualification by discourse and concrete exploitation in patriarchal society. They have defended a double-edged vision: criticizing the construction of femininity in the oppressive and disqualifying mode, while turning women's cultural traditions and ways of knowing into a source of positive affirmation of other values.

In so doing, feminist theorists have situated the question of subjectivity in the framework of questions about entitlement—that is to say, power. A connection is thus drawn between epistemology and politics: they are seen as terms in a process that also constructs the subject as a material and semiotic agent.<sup>8</sup>

In my opinion, feminism is the question—the empowerment of female subjectivity in the political, epistemological, and experiential sense is the answer. By empowerment, I mean both positive affirmation (theoretical) and concrete enactment (social, juridical, political).

The central notion on which this project rests is that of experience; the lived experience of real-life women that Adrienne Rich expresses so powerfully in the notion of "the politics of location." The politics of location means that the thinking, the theoretical process, is not abstract, universalized, objective, and detached, but rather that it is situated in the contingency of one's experience, and as such it is a necessarily *partial* exercise. In other words, one's intellectual vision is not a disembodied mental activity; rather, it is closely connected to one's place of enunciation, that is, where one is actually speaking from.<sup>9</sup>

This is no relativism but rather a topological approach to discourse where positionality is crucial. The feminist defense of "situated knowledges," to quote Donna Haraway,<sup>10</sup> clashes with the abstract generality of the classical patriarchal subject. What is at stake is not the specific as opposed to the universal, but rather two radically different ways of conceiving the possibility of legitimating theoretical remarks. For feminist theory the only consistent way of making general theoretical points is to be aware that one is actually located somewhere specific.

In the feminist framework, the primary site of location is the body. The subject is not an abstract entity, but rather a material embodied one. The body is not a natural thing; on the contrary, it is a culturally coded socialized entity. Far from being an essentialistic notion, it is the site of intersection between the biological, the social, and the linguistic, that is, of language as the fundamental symbolic system of a culture.<sup>11</sup> Feminist theories of sexual difference have assimilated the insight of mainstream theories of subjectivity to develop a new form of "corporeal materialism" that defines the body as an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting forces where multiple codes are inscribed. As Gayatri Spivak points out,<sup>12</sup> the embodied subject is neither an essence nor a biological destiny, but rather one's primary location in the world, one's situation in reality. The emphasis on embodiment, that is, the situated nature of subjectivity, allows feminists to elaborate strategies of subversion of cultural codes. It also leads to reconsidering the very conceptual structures of biological science, challenging the elements of both physical and psychic determinism of scientific discourse,<sup>13</sup> and also refuting the idea of the neutrality of science by pointing to the importance played by language in the elaboration of systems of knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

The feminist analysis sees patriarchal culture as a system that has seen fit to code embodied subjects in sexual-specific terms according to the oldest of all dichotomies: male/female. These subjects are therefore primarily differentiated along sexual lines, though they are also structured by other, equally powerful variables; most important among those variables are race and ethnicity. The sexual dichotomy that marks our culture has systematically situated women in the pole of difference in the sense of *inferiority* to men.

The female feminist question then becomes how to affirm sexual difference not as "the other," the other pole of a binary opposition conveniently arranged so as to uphold a power system, but rather as the active

process of empowering the difference that women *make* to culture and to society. Woman is no longer *different from* but *different so as to bring about alternative values*.

The rehabilitation of sexual difference opens the way for all other differences to be reconsidered: differences of race or ethnicity, of class, of lifestyle, of sexual preference, and so forth. Sexual difference stands for the positivity of multiple differences, as opposed to the traditional idea of difference as pejoration.

## Modernity

This point about sexual difference is best appreciated if read in the context of what is conventionally called modernity. I will not go into the economic aspects of the problem, except to remark that the transformations taking place in our structures of production require highly trained professional women as well as the female work force as a whole to enter the labor force. That in such a context so many women, especially young women, should still be unemployed, and that the top of the professional scale even and especially in institutions such as universities should still be so male-dominated is, of course, a flagrant contradiction. The professional success and well-being of the women of today depends to a great extent on their endurance and determination in an environment whose attitude to career women is contradictory, to say the least. The economic contradictions concerning the female labor force point toward more theoretical problems and cultural representations of women in the age of modernity. I would sum them up as the simultaneous need for women to become more active and present in society, but also the continuing need for their exploitation.

By *modernity* I mean a chronologically undated but intellectually undeniable chapter of Western thought in which the classical system of representation of the subject entered a state of crisis. I read this moment as the crisis of masculine identity in a historical period when the gender system is being challenged and restructured. Following the analysis proposed by French philosophers such as Irigaray, Foucault, and Lyotard, as opposed to the vision proposed by the German critical school,<sup>15</sup> I see modernity as the moment of decline of classical rationality, as the failure of the traditional definition of the subject as an entity that is expected to coincide with his/her conscious rational self. As if a new fragility

had been discovered in the very bedrock of existence, century-old, stone-hard beliefs in the priority and desirability of rationality have come to be challenged within the fields of the humanities and social sciences.<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact, the very idea of the subject of the human became problematized as a consequence of the loss of metaphysically based certainties. Nietzsche, Darwin, Freud, Marx stand as the guardian angels of the postmetaphysical world. There is no going back: the state of crisis is the way of being of modernity.

I am no cynic. Nor am I nihilistic enough to believe that a crisis necessarily leads to loss, decline, or the downfall of values. On the contrary, I see the crisis as the opening-up of new possibilities, new potentialities; thus the center of the theoretical agenda is occupied today by a crucial question: What does it mean to be a human subject, that is to say a socialized, civilized, member of a community in a postmetaphysical world? The link among identity, power, and community needs to be rethought. This challenge is a great chance for those who, like women, who have historically been deprived of the right to self-determination; for them the crisis of the masculine rational subject can be a constructive positive moment.

In *Three Guineas* Virginia Woolf, on the eve of a world war, encouraged women to take the time to think for themselves what it meant to be part of a system dominated by masculine values at a time when those values were crumbling under the impact of changing historical circumstances:

Think we must. Let us think in offices; in omnibuses; while we are standing in the crowd watching Coronations and Lord Mayor's Shows; let us think as we pass the Cenotaph; and in Whitehall; in the gallery of the House of Commons; in the Law Courts; let us think at baptisms; and marriages and funerals. Let us never cease from thinking—what is this "civilization" in which we find ourselves? What are these ceremonies and why do we take part in them? What are these professions and why should we make money out of them? Where in short is it leading us, this procession of the sons of educated men?<sup>17</sup>

Women do think, and think they did from time immemorial; since the advent of feminism, however, they not only think more but also they think about what they think—that is to say they have acquired a metatheoretical level that allows them to classify and canonize their own ideas.

In stressing the extent to which what is at stake in feminism is a complete redefinition of what it means to be part of civilization, of what it

means to think, Woolf points out the profound ethical passion that sustains the feminist project. It is a discursive and a practical ethics based on the politics of location and the importance of partial perspectives. Let me develop this further.

One of the offshoots of the crisis of modernity is that it criticizes the very foundations of classical universalism. In my frame of reference universalism refers to the habit that consists in taking the masculine as the representative of the human. By challenging this inadequate representation of the subject, modern critical thought gives a voice and an entitlement to speak to the subjects of symbolic minorities, those that have been defined as "different." First and foremost among these differences are sex and race.

As Alice Jardine convincingly argues, the Woman question lies at the heart of the turmoil of ideas in modernity; one cannot ask the question of the modern without the issue of sexual difference rising also. The two contain each other: the female feminist subjects of the postmetaphysical era are those for whom the question of sexual difference is historically urgent. It seems to follow, then, that—if women stop being confined to the eternal "other" and, like other minorities, finally gain the right to speak, to theorize, to vote, to go to university—then it is only a question of time before the old image of Woman, which was created without consulting the experience of real-life women, will have to be replaced by a more adequate one.

The symbolic changes and the transformations in the system of representation of women are linked to concrete social realities: modernity needs women. They are needed as a labor-force reservoir, as untapped potentialities in a culture that for centuries disqualified them. In our times modernization and emancipation walk hand in hand.

This much the two young Utrecht women I mentioned in the beginning know—they know that the road toward participation, even integration, is now open. They know that after centuries of male separatism modern society is rather more heterosexual in that it claims to welcome women among the active agents of social life. Women of today have gained the right to a room—that is to say a salary—of their own. The question now becomes, what to do with it? What values will women oppose to the old system? What theories and representations of themselves will women juxtapose to the classical ones?

If emancipation means adapting to the standards, the measures, the values of a society that for centuries has been male-dominated, accept-

ing unquestioningly the same material and symbolic values as the dominant group, then emancipation is not enough. We must be rid of the simplistic idea that we can remedy centuries of exclusion and disqualification of women by their sudden state-sponsored integration into the labor force and into symbolic institutions and systems of representation. Putting women in, allowing them a few odd seats in the previously segregated clubs is not enough. What is needed is for the newcomers to be able and to be *entitled* to redefine the rules of the game so as to *make a difference* and make that difference felt concretely.

I see the project of the empowerment of sexual difference as a very important one in that it aims to avoid the repetition of old models in the hands of new social actors, to prevent new authors from simply repeating old texts and canons, and to allow for the elaboration of new cultural representations and values. Unless the acceptance of difference becomes the new code of behavior, women—the eternal servants at the banquet of life—will have to satisfy themselves with the crumbs of modernity. At best they will be the “crisis managers” of the modern project, the rescue team bringing fresh oxygen to a world in crisis, restoring it to some postmodern or postindustrial health. They will, however, leave fundamentally untouched the in-depth structures of the disease. Modernity is women’s historical chance, and feminism is one of the possible positions—in my eyes the best possible position—women can take so as to cope with a world in crisis that needs them.

The notion of sexual difference as I see it is a social project aiming at setting up the conditions—both material and intellectual—that would allow women to produce alternative values to express other ways of knowledge. This project requires time, money, and care. The assumption that sustains my vision of women’s studies is that the social field is a system of semiotic and material forces and representations that construct gender as a term in a process of normativity and normalization. The role of the feminist intellectual in such a system is to keep open areas of critical enquiry, of criticism, and of resistance.

In this respect feminism is critical theory in that it reconnects the theoretical to the personal—the question of identity—and both to the collective—the question of the community—and it brings all of them to bear on the issue of entitlement, that is to say of power. Confident of the fact that, as Adrienne Rich put it, “there are ways of thinking that we don’t yet know about,”<sup>18</sup> I see women’s studies as the laboratory of ideas where research can be conducted in a heterogeneous yet system-



atic manner about the forms and contents of the project of empowering the difference that women make.

This is how I understand the mandate of my position, and let me assure you that I will do my best to develop the potential carried by the project of women's studies. What is ultimately at stake in this project is not only the status of women. What is at stake is a choice of civilization founded on the rejection of sexism and racism and the acceptance of differences, not only in terms of formal legal norms, but also on the deeper level of the recognition that only multiplicity, complexity, and diversity can provide us with the strength and inspiration needed to face up to the challenges of our world.

To formulate a new feminine essence through a series of new equations relating cause and effect, attribute and substance, surface and depth, alterity and negativity is neither sufficient nor necessary as a premise to the task of empowering women. Rather, sexual difference as a sign for multiple differences would require an open-ended definition of the subject. As Teresa de Lauretis puts it,

What is emerging in feminist writing is . . . the concept of a multiple shifting and often self-contradictory identity, a subject that is not divided in, but rather at odds with, language; an identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race, and class and often indeed across languages and cultures; an identity that one decides to reclaim from a history of multiple assimilations and that one insists on as a strategy.<sup>19</sup>

In this sense the project of redefining female subjectivity in terms of sexual difference amounts to emphasizing and enacting the lack of symmetry between the sexes, that is to say their radical difference. It raises the feminist project to an epistemological but also an ethical dimension by focusing on the alternative values women can bring about. By defending female feminist specificity in terms of a new, situated, and therefore relational mode of thought, feminism is seeking reconnection while accepting noncomplementarity and multiplicity. It also emphasizes positively the importance of embodiment and the lived experience.

This project is presented neither as a utopia nor as an essentialist feminine ideal; rather, it is a project that is asking to be put to the test to prove the constructive nature of its epistemological and ethical passions. As Teresa Brennan points out in her recent study of psychoanaly-

sis, the positivity of sexual difference is a project that needs to be constructed and enacted.<sup>20</sup>

My special wish for women is for social integration with a difference; I hope they can become first-class members of the social, political, and intellectual community and still keep alive the historical memory of what it cost them, what it cost us to get where we are.<sup>21</sup> I would like women, as first-class citizens in the age of modernity, to live up to the challenge of their historical context: being up to the present is both a moral and an intellectual imperative.

More especially I want women to take the leap to the next century carrying the sometimes heavy burden of their historical memory and determined that never again shall women's voices be silenced, women's intelligence denied, women's values disregarded.

In the postmodernist era of dissolving identities and crumbling certainties I hope that we, the female feminist subjects, manage to assert the positivity of the difference that feminism makes while we recognize the fragility of what is commonly called civilization: a network of multiply differentiated, interacting subjects, functioning on a consensual basis.

I hope we, as women from the humanities, can confront the changes and the challenges that modernity has thrown open and still be able to reconcile them with our historical memory of both oppression and resistance. Only by preserving alive our cultural traditions shall we find our way to the new.

I hope women can negotiate the transition to the next millennium open-eyed, with dignity, with passion and with rigor. In this process, I wish to thank the women from the feminist movement in all the countries where I have had the privilege of meeting them. I wish to acknowledge every woman who even once in her life had the courage to say no to injustice, no to exploitation, no to mediocrity, believing—as I do—that there is a better way to conduct human affairs. I want to thank the feminists today and tell you that your struggle is also mine.

United States of Europe  
or United Colors of  
Benetton? Some  
Feminist Thoughts on  
the New Common  
European Community

At the precise point in time when the unification of the German state, symbolized by the collapse of the iron curtain in general and the Berlin wall in particular, sets the stage for the 1993 unification of Europe into a common economic and political community, a feminist intellectual cannot but stop and think. Not unlike Virginia Woolf on the eve of one of Europe's many "community-based" wars,<sup>1</sup> one must take the time to think through some of the forms taken by the project of unification, to try and analyze the language used to express it, and to assess its consequences for the feminist project and for the institution of women's studies.

For those of us, who are involved in teaching women's studies programs in Europe at this particular point in time, terms such as *community*, *integration*, *European consciousness* are part of our daily institu-

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This Chapter was originally written in cooperation with Christien Franken.

tional existence. We are strongly urged, from the governing instances, to move our thinking, our teaching, and our budgetary investments in the general direction of our united European community.

At times, a sort of euphoric rhetoric accompanies this push for a new European spirit: "The winds of freedom are blowing again, after the end of the cold war, and the continent of Europe stands up again, united at last, ready to face the challenges of its American and Japanese competitors . . . "

One does not even have to read between the lines to detect, in this kind of rhetoric, the influence of economic interests and the vicious circle of the market economy. In this respect, the colossal success—at least here in Europe—of Benetton's advertising campaign seems to sum up the semiotic code of the European unification project: all united in our respective differences, provided that our currency is the same, our living standards comparable, and our designer clothes, of course, made in (off-shore production)<sup>2</sup> Italy, with capital held transcontinentally.

We do not wish to be unnecessarily cynical about the new European community; in all the activities of our women's studies department, we try to maintain a strong "international" profile, and we support actively the attempts to set up networks with women's groups right across our beloved continent. Nevertheless, some questions do spring to our mind, and we wish to inject a dose of healthy suspicion into the language of the united-Europe project.

What can one, in fact, plead in favor of European consciousness? The words are Christa Wolf's:

The fact that it was Europeans who, by subjugating and exploiting other people and continents, learned—or confirmed—that consciousness of mastery and race which determined the direction of technological development (including weapon technology), as well as the structures of the economy and of nations? The fact that we ourselves brought into the world the forces which threaten us?<sup>3</sup>

The feminist intellectual, especially if involved in the institutional realities of women's studies, must provide food for thought about the international perspectives that are being opened in Europe by the impending deadline of the unified market of 1992 and more generally by the standardization of the means of communication and mass culture. Without even beginning to plunge into the historical roots of the many differences that constitute the intricate mosaic that is Europe, the ques-

tions we want to ask about such perspectives are both intellectual and ethical; we wonder about the content of the ideas, the pedagogical and cultural practices that are about to be "circulated." We wonder about the basis for a common language, a common content, a joint program. We wonder how the notion of "community" is being used in this context.

## The University-based Vision of the European Community

In this period of postmodern disorder<sup>4</sup> the distinction between "high" and "low" culture has become somewhat obsolete. Those of us who have chosen to enter the new experimental areas of university research, such as women's studies, know that the distinction between high, that is, "serious," disciplines and the general field known as "interdisciplinarity" is more often than not used in a normative manner. Moreover, we also know that what characterizes our age is the decline of classical disciplinary distinctions and the emergence of many, multiple discourses.<sup>5</sup> What makes our age "modern" is the technical capacity to reproduce, distribute, and market cultural and intellectual products as "mental goods" subjected to the laws of exchanges and to the high-technology communication techniques of the market economy. One—maybe the only one—advantage of this is that there is therefore no antinomy between technology and the life of the mind, but rather an ever-increasing interconnection of the two.

Historically, what we today call "high" culture has developed its own forms of international perspectives and exchanges. Scholarly and scientific networks have always existed in the university world and writers as well as philosophers did not wait for the age of satellite communication to set up effective forms of international communication. International networks have been operational for as long as institutions of learning have existed.

A community of scholars capable of validating and recognizing what then became known as "science"<sup>6</sup> is the driving force behind the setting up of such international webs. The university as the guardian of higher culture is the institution that both developed and canonized the modes of interaction of this community of scholars. The university, as the perfect embodiment of the nineteenth-century worldview, upholds these standards of "high" culture, while being increasingly subjected to the

requirements of the market economy. The paradox of the university as institution today is that it continues to be a bastion of resistance against "low" culture, while being increasingly committed to pursuing the aims of the lowest possible common denominator of cultural achievement: marketable profits. For Europe, this is a new situation.

It is precisely this vision of the university as the guardian of "high" culture, that allows notorious critics of feminism, such as French philosopher Jacques Derrida,<sup>7</sup> to accuse the women's studies practitioners of being "contaminated" by the spirit of normative guardianship.

His much-commented attack on the role and function of women's studies in the university structure has the one merit of highlighting the need for a critical reappraisal, not only of all forms of "low" culture, including popular culture, media, and cultural studies, but also of the role of feminism as critique of the institutions, at a time when the very symbolic structure of the "power" of such institutions is shifting rapidly, under the joint impact of transnational economic interests and planetary means of communication.<sup>8</sup>

In this respect the recently funded NOISE (Network of Interdisciplinary Women's Studies in Europe)/ERASMUS project of inter-university exchanges of staff and students is the last (to date) chapter in a long history that has tried to see the university as a community of scholars. ERASMUS is basically a student exchange scheme, open to all members of the European community and to foreign students enrolled in a European university. It provides scholarships for study abroad and some funds for joint curriculum development and translation of teaching material; it also allows the coordinators of the project to meet once a year to discuss further developments and to work especially on a system of integrated academic recognition. The network is funded by compulsory subscriptions from the member states; it is coordinated by a special bureau set up in and staffed by the European community headquarters in Brussels. Although it tends to be dominated by the hard sciences, we believe that women's studies scholars can play an important role in this new scheme. In this respect, it may be important to point out that there exist several Erasmus networks for women's studies, besides the one coordinated by the university of Utrecht;<sup>9</sup> the others are run by the universities of Hull and Bradford, in England.<sup>10</sup>

In response to and as an extension of the ERASMUS network, the Council of Europe, which is located in Strasbourg and is seen by many as the "rival" of the Brussels-based initiative, has also launched a Euro-

pean Network for Women's Studies (ENWS) that was formally established in June 1989. Its purpose is the stimulation of research in women's studies, the incorporation of research into postgraduate training (which is quite a novelty in the European higher education system!), and the application of research results to policy making in relation to women but also to other sectors of society. The ENWS organizes seminars and workshops on themes of interest to women's studies; it tends to concentrate on stimulating new areas of thought and research, and thus work alongside the universities so as to provide complementary information. The network is subsidized by the Council of Europe, on the basis of donations from the Council's nineteen member states; it is run by a board of directors, with a scientific council and a group of national contact people.

The central coordination for this network is in the hands of the Dutch government, under the Ministry of Education and Science; the ENWS publishes a biannual newsletter that contains short articles, bibliographies of recent publications, and announcements of forthcoming activities.

In the framework of already existing institutions, special mention should be made of the women's studies activities within the European University Institute in Florence. This institute has existed since the 1970s, with the explicit aim of developing inter-European cooperation in the field of academic research. It offers visiting fellowships for eminent scholars, graduate teaching programs for students working in a European frame, and excellent conferences. In recent years, mostly thanks to the efforts of the women's studies scholars who visited the institute, a strong women's studies program has been built up. The fellowships and the program of its conferences also reflect a more feminist approach.

## WISE, WEP, and the Women in America

Not satisfied with all these initiatives taken at the formal institutional levels, the abstract entity known as "the women of Europe" has also organized other, slightly more "alternative," networks.

Women's International Studies Europe (WISE) was set up in 1988 by women from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the former Federal Republic of Germany; the inspiration came from the Nairobi conference to celebrate the end of the United Nations Decade for the advancement of women. The network now also includes Greece, Spain,

Denmark, and Italy. The aims of this group are to promote excellence in women's studies teaching in the European community, to initiate students' and teachers' exchanges between member associations, to develop new courses in women's studies, and to work toward the development of joint curricula and degrees. The group also aims at expanding women's studies into countries where the discipline does not yet exist. The network is run by the contributions of its members, though it was also able to get some financial support from the ERASMUS office in Brussels; it is centrally coordinated in the Netherlands and has one contact person in each member country. So far it has been able to organize contact-seeking seminars and workshops on topics as diverse as: "Women and the Labor Market," "Women Refugees and Immigration," "Reproduction, Sexuality, and Violence Against Women," "Science and Technology," and "Language, Literature, and Communication."

This group is now in the process of establishing a formal European women's studies association and developing a full network of subscribing members. The project of setting up a European women's studies journal has also been financed by the Dutch government, and a contract has been signed with the publisher Sage. An intra-European board of editors has been set up, to prepare the first issues.

The Women's Exchange Program International (WEP), on the other hand, was set up in 1983 and officially established in February 1989. It is a foundation that acts as an intermediary and offers services such as advice, fund-raising, and training and organization of international cross-cultural exchange programs to women's groups, companies, networks and governments, in order to stimulate regional and international women's studies networking. WEP publishes a biannual news bulletin and special mailings on specific projects; the former gives a survey of international exchanges between different women's groups and organizations.

Another extremely interesting initiative with a European orientation is that of the International Archives for the Women's Movement, which have existed in Amsterdam since the 1920s. The archives collect not only historical material but also an impressive amount of recent journals and publications in the field of women's studies and feminist research. The archives are an association, run by a team of volunteers and by some paid archivists. They publish regular bibliographical sources and function as a general data bank for feminist research in Europe.



On the question of a European data bank for researchers in women's studies, however, the archives do not have the monopoly, though they do have a head start. Alternative projects for data banks are being sponsored at the European Institute in Florence and also in Brussels, through the journal *Les Cahiers du Grif*, which runs the data-bank project coded as Grace.

Despite the explicit Eurocenteredness of these exchange programs, the influence and the active presence of the United States of America is not too far off: women there are implicitly connected to this intense networking. For one thing, the organizational structures and the methods of the networking are definitely "Anglo-American" in their orientation. Similarly, the extent to which all these networking initiative tend to be located in Northern Europe, an area where women's studies is most advanced, is striking. The many "junior year abroad" programs of various American universities, which regularly establish contacts with European institutions, are significant in this respect. It just so happens that Northern Europe is the geopolitical area that is the most closely related to the American style of feminist studies.<sup>11</sup> It is also important to stress the intercontinental networking accomplished by American women, often with the assistance of official American organizations and with the Consulate of the United States.

As far as the American connections are concerned, exchanges continue through the usual channels: the Fulbright programs and the I.S.E.P. system, and also through more specialized networks, such as the International federation of University Women, the US National Women's Studies Association, and the Antioch program of study abroad especially devoted to women's studies.

## The Coca-Cola-based Vision of the Community; or, MTV as Pan-Europeanism

To come back to the distinction between "high" and "low" culture, I would like to go one step further and argue that what distinguishes our era and the period of history we are going through is that "low" culture has also become very internationalized and consequently more standardized. Because of the telecommunication revolution popular culture has become virtually a planetary phenomenon. According to the notion of the "global village"<sup>12</sup> the whole planet is irradiated by the same cultural forms: from Bangkok to Dordrecht we can consume on our televi-

sion screens the same type of cultural myths and representations. Michael Jackson, Pepsi-Cola and Larry King—or Saturday Night—Live—it's a worldwide invasion.

We shall not be nostalgic for nostalgia's stake; nor shall we pose as Matthew Arnold, in a Victorian (im)posture of rejection of populist vulgarity. We love our MTV, and telecommunication technology is something that we live with and benefit from in many other respects. Our question would rather be: why not market in a more convincing manner the products of "high" culture? Why not use these technological tools to make "high" culture into a worldwide phenomenon? Why cannot the university standards of knowledge be used as guidelines for the future? Why should Madonna (the contemporary version thereof) be the heroine of our times, why not Simone de Beauvoir, Alexandra Kollontai, Rosa Luxembourg?

One of the most disconcerting aspects of the present state of Europe is that European television is struggling to conquer the general space of the "community." On the one hand one finds the alliance of the pan-European Berlusconi/Hersant, who plan to flood our skies with European media mediocrity; on the other hand one finds the "Anglo-shabby"<sup>13</sup> alliance of Murdoch, who plans to flood our skies with American media mediocrity.

European intellectuals being traditionally shy about media performance, they are slow at reacting to this new situation, and even slower at adapting to it.

The questions for us should be: how are women going to market the fruits of our intelligence? How do we intend to make high culture attractive to the new barbarians in our increasingly Macdonaldized world? Do we think that "tradition" is the antithesis of international popular culture, or can the two go together, and how? What sort of agents of international exchange are the young students of today planning to be? What values will they defend? What is our vision? What is the "pursuit of excellence" worth for us? As the last to join in the world of "high" culture, what is the vision of the university that we intend to approach in an international perspective?

By calling upon the women of today to make themselves accountable for their own intellectual and ethical value systems in an age of increasing standardization, we intend to emphasize the point about the "community." Women have never had the opportunity to set up their own learned societies and international exchanges. Women have not

been first-class citizens in the city of letters; rather, we have been servants at the philosophical banquet. Newcomers into the university world, we often assimilate established values without submitting them to adequate criticism.

**“As a Woman I Have No Country;  
As a Woman My Country Is the  
Whole World” (Virginia Woolf)**

The question of community ties carries further implications for women; a large variety of social commentators, ranging from the feminists to the more acute political scientists, have been complaining about women’s low sense of citizenship and low participation in political life. It is as if women did not take representative politics seriously enough; the right to vote is not in itself enough to guarantee full citizenship. What is needed, among other things, is a sense of accountability, responsibility and, ultimately, belonging. Virginia Woolf’s striking remark about the interrelation of gender and internationalism should make us think. Being a citizen of the world may appear attractive at first, till one thinks more carefully about the historical exclusion of women from the rights of citizenship. It is precisely in their being all equally excluded from sociopolitical rights that all women are alike. What they have in common, according to my reading of Woolf, is that they have no country to call their own.

Equally home-less.

Before we let ourselves joyfully celebrate our internationalism, therefore, let us ask ourselves: are we sufficiently present as citizens in our country to start thinking seriously about being citizens of the world? Unless we reflect seriously upon our own belonging to, involvement in, and implication with our culture, we are in danger of postulating internationalization as yet another version of women’s exile. In order to make sense of an international perspective, we must first think through the issues related to our own social, political, economic, and intellectual citizenship.

The advantage of this state of affairs is that, as newcomers to the world of willful legal rights we also have a fair-minded approach to the issue of national involvement. As Woolf points out, we have enough distance from the present system to stop and wonder whether in fact its ways are the best or most suitable. We can act as moral and political agents at a time of turmoil and confusion in our culture. In this sense it

seems to me urgent that the young women of today reflect upon their own political subjectivity, upon their own sense of being citizens.

The question of nationality and citizenship is all the more urgent at a time of increasing racism and xenophobia, and yet it is not only possible but necessary to discuss the notion of the nation-state without falling into the trap of ethnocentric nationalism. In our opinion feminist scholarship has been most successful in developing nonracist reflections about citizenship, the leading question being that of one's involvement in a national community. No international perspective is really complete unless it is based on a clear understanding of one's own national identity.

The question remains: what values do we intend to rely on, in order to be citizens of the world in an effective manner and to avoid becoming planetary exiles?

## Woman as Nomad, Woman as Migrant

The image of female exile can be complemented by that of the nomad and of the migrant. I shall take the nomad as the prototype of the "woman of ideas":<sup>14</sup> in the history of women's struggle the international dimension is implicit from the start. Not only is feminism as such an international movement, like most other major social movements of this century but at the intellectual level also the very conceptual structure of women's studies is the result of intense international networking. As an example: the single most important feminist book of this century, *The Second Sex*, by Simone de Beauvoir, appeared in France in 1949, and although it raised a few eyebrows and many nasty comments, it did not trigger a revolution. We had to wait till the 1960s and the American second wave of the women's struggle for Beauvoir's book to become recognized as the earth-shaking analysis it is. It was not until Kate Millett, Ti-Grace Atkinson, and Shulamith Firestone dedicated their works to Beauvoir that *The Second Sex* produced what we would today call women's studies. A transatlantic connection was needed for a book published in 1949 in Paris to be greeted in Europe, via the United States, as a revolutionary work.<sup>15</sup> Had the Americans not done so, the book's subversive potential might have remained latent. This is only one of the many discontinuities one can find in the history of feminist ideas: internationalization is, for women, a way of preserving their fragile heritage.

This point is obviously not restricted to women's studies or to femi-

nist thought. The history of ideas as a whole is made of such disconnection, of transatlantic loops and gaps; once again one may think here of the international dimension as a variation on the theme of the "archive," that is to say of stocking, preserving, and reproducing a symbolic capital. Internationalization can also be a resistance tactic; it can allow for certain ideas to survive despite the accidents of history, it can create continuity out of disruptions. The nomadic nature of ideas is their safest safeguard. For example, the fate of the central European Jews after the rise of Nazism: a whole wave of exiles from Germany and neighboring countries emptied the European intelligentsia of its most brilliant subjects. Most of these exported to the English-speaking world such notions as Marxism, psychoanalysis, phenomenology—not to speak of the hard or exact sciences, which simply made American culture the leader of the western world. The history of ideas is always a nomadic story; the physical displacement is just a way of preserving in time certain ideas, so that they do not get lost. Ideas are as mortal as human beings and as subjected as we are to the crazy twists and turns of history.

Next to this, the other image we want to evoke is that of the migrant. Contrary to the nomad, the migrant has a clear destination: it goes from one point in space to another for a very clear purpose. The question of migration is important in that it has concretely created in every European culture a series of foreign subcultures of which women tend to be the loyal guardians and perpetuators.

Migrant women constitute the bulk of what we would call the "domestic foreigners" in our postindustrial metropolis. These people who speak a language and embody cultural values so different from the dominant ones tend to be forgotten in all the debates about international perspectives. When will we accept that internationalization begins at home? How close are we, the "white" intellectual women, to the migrant women who have even fewer citizen rights than we have? How sensitive are we to the intellectual potential of the foreigners that we have right here, in our own backyard? We would ask those of my readers who plan to have an international career and become professional jet-setters: how much do you know about the foreignness of these people? For internationalization to become a serious practice, we must work through this paradox of proximity, indifference, and cultural differences between the nomadic intellectual and the migrant women.

## Mobility

So far we have been presenting a series of images to stimulate thinking about the international perspective: the international cultural operator, the agent of intellectual exchanges, the nomad, the exile, the migrant. These represent different facets of a very complex problem that boils down to the question of subjectivity in both a political and a theoretical sense. What is at stake in this as in many other ongoing activities by women is the reappropriation and the redefinition of our identity, our values, our ideas. The process of redefining subjectivity also entails the ongoing reappropriation by women of our identity, our sexuality, our intellectual power. From Aristotle to Freud woman has been described as immobile, that is to say passive, or quite inactive. The injunction of passivity has weighed heavily upon women, overdetermining their social position as dependents. Historically, immense restrictions have been imposed on the physical, spiritual, and intellectual freedom of women.

Mobility is one of the aspects of freedom, and as such it is something new and exciting for women: being free to move around, to go where one wants to is a right that women have only just started to gain. Think of how the question of mobility has been taken up by the women's movement, particularly in the issue of "take back the night," that is to say the campaign against sexual violence. Earning the right to go where one wants to without being punished physically or psychically for being there; becoming entitled to mobility is a superb achievement for women.

The physical dimension is only one aspect; mobility also refers to the intellectual space of creativity, that is to say the freedom to invent new ways of conducting our lives, new schemes of representation of ourselves. Freedom of the mind as the counterpart of physical mobility; taking back the night just like women's studies specialists are taking back the "dark continent" from the distorting representations that have been made of it. Mobility as the means of achieving a more adequate representation of ourselves.

Maybe women are historically nomadic, in that they are not yet first-class citizens. And yet the challenge to which the women of today must face up is to conjugate the positive aspects of this nomadic condition with something that we would call responsibility for and accountability to our gender. In other words, the acknowledgment of the complexities of "internationalism" implies a confrontation of the many differences

that separate and distinguish women among themselves, instead of providing yet another falsely reassuring blanket term for global sisterhood.

No planetary exiles, women today are better thought of as being locally situated and therefore differently and multiply located. Is the mixture of rebellion and vision, which for me characterizes the feminist project, a transcultural, translatable position? Is the term *feminist* sufficiently receptive to differences to represent the political will that unifies many women?

The crucial political question that confronts feminists who are willing to acknowledge the importance of multiple locations and of cultural diversity is: how is this awareness—the recognition of differences—likely to affect the often fragile alliance of women of different classes, races, ages, and sexual preferences? How does the recognition of difference affect the making of political coalitions? The process of defining and refining political consensus requires, however, the willingness to ask the question of how common interests and visions intersect with differences among women.

# Theories of Gender; or, "Language Is a Virus"<sup>1</sup>

As I have already assessed and criticized the comparative and respective merits of "gender" as opposed to "sexual difference" theories,<sup>2</sup> I will, for a number of reasons, deal exclusively with gender theories in this chapter.

First, because I think it important at this stage of women's studies research to explore as wide a range of different feminist theories as possible and especially to take into account theoretical ideas coming from different cultural contexts. This is no mere cultural pluralism but rather the awareness of the equal relevance of theoretical traditions that may appear very far from each other. To remain within Western Europe, for instance: whereas "sexual difference" theories are mostly French-oriented, "gender" theories are closer to English-speaking feminism. Through the feminist seventies, as I argue in chapter 7, this different cultural background led to mutual mistrust and serious communication problems,<sup>3</sup> but of late new orientations have emerged that seem to approach cultural differences in Western, white feminist theory as a positive source of theoretical debates.<sup>4</sup>

Second, gender deserves special attention precisely because of the new and interesting developments that have taken place in this field of late. I will also want to suggest that the notion of "gender," in its feminist redefinitions, can be of relevance and inspiration for other disciplines in the humanities. The starting point for the feminist analysis is that the notion of gender challenges the pretense at universality and

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This text was originally delivered as a speech at the opening of the academic year in the faculty of the humanities at Utrecht University, September 1991. An earlier version was delivered in response to Nancy Miller's paper "Decades," which was presented at the conference "*Penser le changement/Change*," held at the University of Montreal in May 1991.



objectivity of conventional systems of knowledge and of accepted norms of scientific discourse. It introduces the variable of sexual difference at the very heart of theoretical research. In so far as "gender" attempts to articulate an alternative to the pretense to objectivity, neutrality and universality of scientific knowledge, it can play a revitalizing function in other scientific areas.

Recent developments in gender theory show that attention to "gender" results in renewed emphasis being placed on the situated, that is to say local structure of knowledge.

That one cannot speak on behalf of humanity as a whole, that the intellectual or academic position cannot claim to represent universal values but rather extremely specific—class, race, age, sex-specific—ones, must not be mistaken for a relativistic statement. The recognition of the partiality of scientific statements, their necessary contingency, their reliance on concrete mechanisms that are overdetermined by history and socioeconomic factors, has nothing to do with relativism. Rather, it marks a significant change in the ethics of discursive and intellectual style. The rejection of old-fashioned universalism in favor of paying more attention to the complexity of "situated knowledges"<sup>5</sup> calls for more flexibility in research, especially in the field of the humanities, and for a new sensitivity to differences.

Differences of class, race, sex, age, culture, and nationality require an intellectual or academic recognition that the old-style humanist, universalist mode does not grant. Speaking on behalf of "mankind" today, without recognizing that this umbrella term fails to account for people other than white, male, adult, professional, Western individuals, is an historical aberration. Research on "gender" is one of the areas in which constructive alternatives to the old universalist mode are being experimented with. I believe this kind of experimentation is of great value to the whole field of the humanities and to all intellectuals who are interested in neither nostalgic attachment to the old universalism nor in reactionary appeal to the status quo ante.

Let me add a few words about the subtitle of this chapter "language is a virus." This is a quotation from the performance artist Laurie Anderson, a Barnard College graduate in the humanities and a leading figure in the contemporary arts, as well as in feminist thought.<sup>6</sup> I chose this particular extract as an expression of my desire to trespass one of the most invisible and consequently greatest divides: that which separates "high" or university culture from "low" or popular culture.

I have always taken the belief in an ivory tower devoted to the higher cultural pursuits in opposition to the vulgarity of common culture as a sign of what is known in policy-making circles as "the crisis of the

humanities." There is no denying that university-based knowledge today struggles to keep up with what is happening in the world around it. The most outspoken apologists of French postmodernism, such as Derrida and Lyotard,<sup>7</sup> do not hesitate to confront the challenge that contemporary culture throws openly to the rather sedate tradition of university knowledge. They claim that the humanities must prove again their relevance to an increasingly managerial, technocratic, chronically bureaucratized social context. In other words, relevance is not to be taken for granted—it must be earned again by hard work.

Moreover, within women's studies, relevance is less of a problem than gaining access to the very segregated clubs of academic respectability. Born of a social movement, fueled by one of the most intense shudders of rebellion that Western culture experienced in modern times, women's studies is implicitly connected to the currents of ideas, to the movements of thought of late postindustrial patriarchal society.

In my own feminist work, therefore, I have given up the distinction between high and low culture, and I treat with a great deal of respect and curiosity the works of art—even of pop art—and the kind of ideas or theories that are being developed outside the university. I sometimes think that there is more vitality, less depressed reliance on the past, less inertia outside our venerable institutions than within them.

Accordingly, I approach with equal interest texts—written, visual or performed—of a nonacademic nature.

On this point I may be permitted to cite the crucial work accomplished by some of the poststructuralists, especially Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, on equalizing all texts, within a general theory of discourse.<sup>8</sup> Discourse is the network of circulation of texts, meant both as material, institutional events and as symbolic or "invisible" effects. A text is a term in a network that creates meaning, values, and norms and distributes them in a social context.

Within contemporary continental philosophy therefore, the study of popular culture has quite an intellectual tradition, which distinguishes it from the British and American approach to "cultural studies:"<sup>9</sup> suffice it to cite the pioneer work of Walter Benjamin.<sup>10</sup>

Since feminist women have been particularly active in popular culture, especially the music industry, and have used it creatively and intelligently, I have opted for music as the ideal illustration for the ideas I will present here. Let this also be a tribute for artistes of the caliber of Laurie Anderson, who have had the courage to experiment with different forms

of expressions and who, without falling into the model of the engagé intellectual,<sup>11</sup> are writing informed, refined, and lucid analyses of what the embodied life of the female mind is like in late patriarchy.

## The Sex/Gender Distinction

Gender is not originally a feminist concept; it has a previous identity, derived from research in biology, linguistics, and psychology.<sup>12</sup> This multilayered history makes it unreliable as a concept, and the subsequent feminist appropriations and adaptations of "gender" add even more layers of complexity.

The feminist adoption of "gender" as a ruling notion occurs through the intermediary of Simone de Beauvoir. Her study of the philosophical and material structure of "otherness" as a fundamental category in human experience led her to assert the constructed, rather than biologically given, nature of identity. "One is not born, one becomes a woman" is the synthesis of her analysis.

In this sentence, the emphasis falls on the word *born*; central to Beauvoir's concerns is in fact the critique of the naturalistic, that is to say biologically deterministic, arguments for the inferiority and the subsequent oppression of women. By stressing the role played by history, traditions, and culture in conditioning women into inferior roles, Beauvoir draws a distinction between the natural sex and the cultural gender roles that one is expected to play. In so doing, she attacks misogyny by disclosing its brutally reductive basis.

By giving to the issue of woman as other such a central position in her philosophy of liberation through transcendence, Beauvoir also lay the foundations for a critique of sexist or misogynist biases in science and scholarship: *The Second Sex* is the first text of an in-depth criticism of modern knowledge systems. Beauvoir shows both the extent of the depreciation of women and the ubiquity of the figure of woman in intellectual and psychic life. Thus, she stresses the crucial role played by woman as the site or location of otherness: it is by negation of this privileged "other" that the male subject can construct himself as the universal standard of normality and normativity.

The central aim of Beauvoir's analysis of gender is, however, not critical but creative: she aims at providing a foundational theory for the reappraisal and redefinition of female subjectivity. Her proposed solution is the path to transcendence, which means that any woman can and should overcome the contingency of her particular situation as the

"other" in order to gain access to the position of subject. In other words, women will not be liberated until they can make statements that are received as representing human values, ideas valid for the whole of humanity and not only for the "second" sex. Beauvoir demands the same rights and entitlements for women that men have always been granted by virtue of their sex.

Beauvoir's emphasis on the cultural bases for the alleged inferiority of women, and her corresponding program of liberation through transcendence inaugurate the distinction sex/gender that was to give feminism its *titre de noblesse*.

It does then become theoretically plausible and socially necessary to utter the statement, which Aretha Franklin was to turn into a best-selling tune: "You make me feel like a natural woman."

The conceptual structure of this statement is far from simple; it in fact problematizes the claim to being female by subordinating the notion of identity to two requirements: relation—"You make me feel. . ." and denaturalization—"like a natural woman." In other words, for Aretha Franklin (and Carole King before her) as well as for Hegel, identity is acquired in a relational link to the other. Acquiring an identity is therefore quite an achievement, as Freud reminds us in his work on the psychopathology of the subject. This achievement, and the hard work required to construct oneself as a woman—or a man—prove that sex and gender are not to be confused, and that the unity between the empirical and the symbolic—between being male and a man, being female and a woman—is acquired at a high cost.

As Judith Butler puts it in her witty analysis:<sup>13</sup>

"I feel like a woman" is true to the extent that Aretha Franklin's invocation of the defining other is assumed: "You make me feel like a natural woman." This achievement requires a differentiation from the opposite gender. Hence one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair.

Butler puts her finger on one of the crucial aspects of Beauvoir's gender theory: its dualistic structure; "One is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender." This binary way of thinking is in keeping with Beauvoir's Cartesian assumptions, which lead her to separate mind from body and build the gender/sex distinction on a binary foundation. Thus, for Beauvoir, gender is to culture as sex is to nature and mind to body.

Beauvoir's intellectual hostility to naturalism spills over to issues such as the body and, by extension, sexuality and motherhood, which she tends to dismiss as part of the "facticity" of women's life—that is to say, that which a feminist ought to try and transcend.

It took feminists a long time to become critically aware of the fact that Beauvoir's dualism and Cartesian dismissal of the body, combined with her adaptation of Hegelian dialectics to the differences between the sexes, while making the emancipation of women theoretically representable, created as many problems as they solved.<sup>14</sup> Although this realization also led to bitter disappointment on the part of some,<sup>15</sup> it seems to me inevitable that younger generations of women have had to come to terms with the legacy of Beauvoir's binary definition of gender, that is, its subordination to the dialectics of conflicting consciousness.

Back to Aretha Franklin. The second point she makes about gender identity concerns the denaturalization of the signifier *woman*. Again, Judith Butler comments: " 'Like a natural woman' is a phrase that suggests that 'naturalness' is only accomplished through analogy or metaphor. In other words, 'You make me feel like a metaphor of the natural and, without "you," some denaturalized ground would be revealed.' "<sup>16</sup>

Butler is saying here that the constructed, relational structure of female identity is such that "nature" can only signify a displaced and infinitely deferred horizon, accessible only metaphorically. If "feeling like a woman" expresses the struggle for identity, and the consequent hiatus between sex and gender, "feeling like a natural woman" comments upon the denaturalized structure of human subjectivity.

An important and related point here is the role played by desire as a relational category that discloses the fundamental structures of the self: the pointedly highlighted "You" defines the speaking (in this case the singing) subject, and calls her object of desire, "*him*," into question. One could translate this into the statement that it takes a man as object of desire to make one feel "like a natural woman." In a double-barreled shot, the institution of sexuality and the force of heterosexuality are singled out. I shall return to this later on in this chapter.

These seemingly abstract notions and subtle intellectual distinctions between sex and gender, self and other, nature and culture had immediate and rather wide-ranging practical consequences. Beauvoir's sex/gender distinction and her program for the emancipation of women

paved the way for the second wave of the feminist movement. Central to what the media nicknamed "women's lib" and "the bra-burning brigades" of the 1960s was the conviction, elevated to the rank of a political creed, that anatomy is not destiny and that a woman's human potential and related socioeconomic roles are not exhausted by her functions as wife and mother.

In other words, the notion of "gender" accompanied and highlighted the struggle of the "second sex" to state their radical revindications of their social, economic, intellectual, and political position in a male-dominated world.

This explosion of women's revindications, demands, hopes, and aspirations took many different forms. Many volumes of feminist scholarship have been devoted to analyzing the intellectual and political climates of the sixties; I shall not even attempt to enter this debate.<sup>17</sup>

I just want to stress that what made the second wave significant in the history of feminist struggles, is that it posited a common link among women, insofar as they are constructed as the second sex, subjected to the authority first of fathers, and later of husbands—linked by a bond of oppression, of servitude. The positive side of this analysis is that women become valid and trustworthy interlocutors for other women. The novelty of the sixties was that women started talking to other women, to compare notes on their respective conditions. The "other" for a woman ceased to be necessarily the other sex. To illustrate this extraordinary moment, I will single out a few aspects that strike me as significant: anger, ambition, and political separatism.

As an example of the healthy anger generated by the movements for the liberation of women, I have chosen the singer who symbolizes for many of us the passion, the political vigor, of the sixties and also sadly embodies their limitations: Janis Joplin. I will start with the reinterpretation made by Bette Midler,<sup>18</sup> though this may shock the purists who would much rather have the original than the simulacrum:

You know, sometimes people say to me: "Rose, when is the first time you heard the blues?." And you know what I tell them? I tell them: the day I was born! You know why? You know why?

'Cos I was born a woman! [thunderous roar from women] Ah! we've got some noisy females in the house tonight. I do like to hear that high-pitched sound! I do.

Oh, being a woman is so interesting, don't you find it? What are we ladies, what are we? We're waitresses at the banquet of life! Get into that kitchen and rattle them pots and pans, and you'd better look pretty g--good doing it, too or else you're going to lose your good thing.

And why do we do that? I'll tell you why we do that: we do that to find love.

Oh, I love to be in love, don't you love to be in love? Ain't it great to be in love? Ain't it wonderful? Ain't it just grand to lie there late at night in your bed, waiting for your man to show up. And when he finally does, round about 4 o'clock in the morning, with whiskey on his breath and the smell of another woman on his person . . . oh, honey!, I can smell another woman at 500 paces, that's an easy one to catch!

So what do you do when he comes home with the smell of another woman on him? Do you say: "Oh, honey, let me open up my loving arms and my loving legs, dive right in, the water is fine!"? Is that what you say, girls? Or do you say: "Pack your bags! I'm putting on my little waitress caps and my fancy high-heel shoes and I'm going to find me a real man, a good man, a true man, a man to love me for sure!"

You know, I tell you something, I thought, I one time thought, I actually thought I found myself one, when he . . . when he held me in his arms. . . . [fades into the song: "When a man loves a woman"].

As an interpretation of Joplin's anger, this is a highly significant extract; it captures both the lucidity of vision of the women in the late sixties and also a sort of powerlessness.<sup>19</sup> Joplin only just missed the feminist wave—she died of an overdose just as Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectics of Sex* went to press. And yet, in a way unique to artists, she felt the spirit of the times and knew that this was the age of the new women.

A great deal of this anger can be found in all the texts written by the women who triggered off the second wave. That most of them dedicated their books explicitly to Simone de Beauvoir<sup>20</sup> testifies not only to the importance of her book but also to the speed with which women were setting up a theoretical tradition of their own: a new intellectual genealogy for women.<sup>21</sup>

As an example of the ambition generated in women by the lifting, or rather the overthrowing, of ancient taboos about their "natural inferiority" and social subordination, let us turn to the real Janis Joplin. In the song "Mercedes Benz,"<sup>22</sup> she addresses an appeal to the good Lord to please provide her with this car as a quintessential status symbol, so that

she can keep up with her friends (and with the Joneses!) and not lose face.

This prompts a word of warning: ambition is a rare and difficult quality for people who have long been oppressed. It is taking women a long time to set the standards of their ambition at a number of variable goals and targets. At first, as often is the case with decolonized nations, ambition took a straight and relatively simple form: "give me, too!" Give me jobs, give me goods, give me that great equalizer, that great compensation—give me symbolic worth, give me money, give me a Mercedes Benz!

Money—which Joplin spent as quickly as she earned it, though she actually drove around in her legendary silver Porsche—points to one dimension of the liberation of women that was to grow in complexity over the next two decades: the issue of the symbolic system.

That money is a major symbol in our society is not only a common-sense notion but also a concept that structural anthropology and psychoanalysis have developed into a theory of how social order is established and maintained. Georges Dumezil has pointed out that the symbolic functions in our civilization are quite constant: the divine, the military and the transmission of knowledge. That women are traditionally excluded from the social administration of the symbolic functions (the church, the army, the university) shows the masculine structure of our culture. That Janis Joplin addressed her request for symbolic compensation to God shows just as strongly that she had understood how the symbolic works.

I will return to this later on in this chapter. For the moment suffice it to say that it took some time for feminists to extricate the issue of the symbolic from the monetary issue and to confront it in all its other aspects.

As an example of political separatism I have chosen another voice, which has been representative not only of feminist but of many other liberation struggles: that of Patti Smith. She was the high priestess of rock modernism, crossed into funk: erudite, setting Rimbaud's texts to music, she brought popular culture as close as it could go to performance art. A myth and a great artist—not the least of her achievements is, quite simply, to have survived the end of the sixties and seventies, alive and still creative. In "Rock'n roll nigger,"<sup>23</sup> she puts it succinctly:



Baby was a black sheep, baby was a whore, baby's got big, big and bigger. Baby got something, baby got more, baby baby baby was a rock-'n roll nigger.

Look around you, all around you, do you like the world around you?  
Are you ready to be heard?

Outside of society, that's where I want to be!

In this extract can be seen the basic elements of the sixties' political revolt: the author attacks the dominant ideology of her social context, emphasizing the racist, class-conscious, and sexist practices that make Western culture into a dominant, regulatory, and excluding system. The accent is put on the practices of exclusion that are implicit in such a system. That the rebellious intellectual may want to be out of this, in self-imposed separation, seems to follow quite logically.

With Patti Smith, millions of women chose the way out, in a gesture of political feminist separation that struck patriarchy where it was most effective: at home.

Reversing the liberal distinction between the public and the private, feminists politicized the latter and, declaring that the personal is the political, questioned and problematized that which is the key to patriarchy: the power of the father and, secondarily, that of the husband. The "second sex," conscious of the power games of the gender system, set as its target the institution of the family, that is to say, the political economy of heterosexuality.

## Compulsory Heterosexuality<sup>24</sup>

The next moment in the feminist redefinition and analysis of "gender" includes Gayle Rubin's classic reading of the sex/gender distinction in the light of cultural anthropological analysis on the exchange of women; this was to have enormous consequences for the feminist analysis of the political economy of sex.<sup>25</sup> Following Lévi-Strauss's work on kinship structures, Rubin studied the material and symbolic function of women as objects of exchange among men. By focusing on the phenomenon of exogamy, she identifies the circulation of women in a patrilineal society as the key to the "gender system" that sustains the patriarchal order.

This points up a number of interesting features: that women are merchandise, to be used as means of trade for men,<sup>26</sup> but also and more importantly, that the social order such as it exists is a male homosocial

contract. In other words, the gender system that constructs the two sexes as different, unequal, and yet complementary, is in fact a power system that aims at concentrating material and symbolic capital in the hands of the fathers—that is to say older men—or control younger men and the women. The family is thus the power unit that seals the wealth of men and establishes heterosexuality as the dominant political economy for both sexes. As such, heterosexuality is the institution that supports the gender system.

Gayle Rubin radicalizes Beauvoir's analysis by showing how central the objectification of women is to the material but also symbolic upkeep of the patriarchal system and the forms of knowledge, representation, and scientific investigation that the system perpetuates. Thus, the sex/gender distinction is turned into a political economy where the institution of heterosexuality supports the male homosocial bond by ensuring that women are circulated and lose the father's name to gain the husband's.

Adrienne Rich builds on Rubin's work by introducing the notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" into the gender debate. She draws a much stronger connection between the condition of women and the structures of the family, motherhood as an institution, and the normative enforcement of one model of sexual behavior: reproductive heterosexuality.

Rich's work is extremely important in that it also constitutes an innovative rereading of Beauvoir-style feminism. In her poetry even more than her essays, Rich presents an in-depth analysis of the paradoxes of female identity, especially of motherhood as an experience that determines a woman's sense of sexed identity, while remaining an institution that enforces the law of the fathers.

Another significant innovation that Adrienne Rich draws from black feminism<sup>27</sup> is the idea that gender is not at all a monolithic category that makes all women the same; rather, it is the mark of a position of subordination, which is qualified by a number of powerful variables.

Central among them is the variable of race, or ethnicity. Through her notion of "the politics of location" Rich emphasizes the importance of situating oneself in the specificity of one's social, ethnic, class, economic, and sexual reality. "Situating" for Rich does not have the same resonance as in the existentialist call for being situated in the world. It rather aims at bringing to the fore the importance of a lucid analysis of the material conditions that overdetermine one's speaking position.

The fact of being woman is no longer taken by Rich as sufficient evidence of a common position. In a transmutation of values, Rich recommends that feminists try to define the female condition not in a reactive but in a creative manner, that is to say, not only in terms of oppression but also in the light of the positive values associated with being a woman. In her analysis, sexuality and race intersect to produce a complex vision of gender as a system that creates differences and subjects them to power relations. "Gender" thus turns into a complex network of power formations, as opposed to the binary model of domination proposed in earlier versions.

As an illustration of this theoretical style, which is also known as the "woman-identified" approach insofar as it emphasizes the positive aspects of female identity, I would quote as a musical illustration the song "I am woman,"<sup>28</sup> sung by Helen Reddy, in which she states, with disarming candor: "I am woman, watch me grow, in numbers too big to ignore . . . I am strong, I am invincible, I am woman!" This surely sounds old-fashioned, in its slightly utopian celebration of the new possibilities now opening up for women. Beyond grief and complaints, it is the strength, the intelligence of woman that gets celebrated.

The next significant development in gender theories is also prompted by Gayle Rubin's pioneering work, but it takes a more sociological turn. The neomaterialist thinkers Christine Delphy, Monique Plaza, and Monique Wittig<sup>29</sup> interpret the political economy of heterosexuality in a number of interesting ways.

First, by referring to a much more orthodox brand of Beauvoir's thought, they develop the notion that women are a social class, that is to say that sexuality is to feminism as labor is to Marxism: a fundamental concept on which one can build a revolutionary consciousness. Being a class means that all women are subjugated through the political economy of reproductive heterosexuality; it follows that the task of feminism is to overthrow the terms of this class relation and change the material conditions that engender them.

There follows a very unqualified emphasis on materialism in the Marxist mode: as the material conditions that structure both social relations and theoretical practice.

One of the effects of this approach was the violent rejection of the celebratory mode in feminist theory, especially of the movement known as "écriture féminine,"<sup>30</sup> which stressed the importance of language and

the unconscious, and made extensive use of psychoanalysis, semiotics, and philosophy in order to reevaluate female identity.

In a move of radical rejection of all identities created in the patriarchal system, Monique Wittig opened the era of suspicion about the very notion of "woman," which is taken as the ideological construct of a male-dominated gender system. For Wittig "woman" as concept is imbued with masculine projections and imaginary expectations; it is therefore epistemologically unreliable and politically suspicious.

Wittig's radical critique of "woman" rests on her rejection of "essentialism." Wittig argues that in patriarchal ideology "woman" stands for a normative model of reproductive heterosexuality; she stands for nature, motherhood, the male-dominated family. Such notions are essentialist because they pass off as natural and therefore as inevitable or unchangeable conditions that are in fact socially induced and culture-specific.

By extension, Wittig turns upside down Beauvoir's distinction between sex and gender, radicalizing the terms of the opposition.

For Beauvoir, the differences between the sexes are part of the fundamental dialectics that structures human consciousness; they rest and build upon a biological given: sexually differentiated bodies. Gender roles are therefore caught in a law of dialectics and negation, in which the male stands for the human and the female for the other-than-human.

Wittig changes this around: the gender system is not the cultural recoding of a biological reality but rather the expression of a patriarchal ideology that requires binary oppositions between the sexes in order to assert male dominance.

Consequently, the gender system for Wittig functions by a dualistic logic of binary oppositions that create sexed identities ("men" and "woman"). These identities serve the purpose of providing an essentialist basis to patriarchal power, that is to say, they comfort the social system in the belief in the "natural," or historically inevitable structure of its institutions, values, and modes of representation, especially its vision of the subject.

For Wittig the gender system constructs the female as sexed, conflates the male with the universal (man = mankind), and sets both sexes up in the social framework of compulsory heterosexuality. It is important to emphasize this point: that for Wittig, as for Beauvoir, only women have a gender, men being exempted from such mark of specificity in so far as they represent the human.

It thus follows that the term *woman*, far from being the foundational category it was for Beauvoir, is a culturally determined notion. Taking her distance from Adrienne Rich's reevaluation of the terms, Wittig proposes that feminists abandon this mystifying, essentialist notion and rather take as their point of assembly and identification a much more subversive figure: "the lesbian." In her highly controversial statement: "A lesbian is not a woman," Wittig argues that the lesbian represents a form of political consciousness that rejects male-dominated definitions of woman and calls into question the whole gender system, with its conveniently arranged sexual bipolarization. In other words, the lesbian is like a third pole of reference: she is neither "nonman," nor "non-woman" but, rather, radically other.

In other words, the lesbian marks the overcoming of identities based on the phallus and consequently the bypassing of the gender system. This radical change in perspective takes gender as an instance of male dominance; it organizes sexuality through a power system where control is exercised by men. Control is exercised through this objectification of women but also, as object-relation feminist theorists point out,<sup>31</sup> by eroticizing the act of control itself. The link sexuality/power thus provides the groundwork for a critique of masculine desire for power, that is to say: the eroticizing of control by men.

This shift in perspective also corresponds to a change in political climate; a much sharper sense of separatism comes into place. As an example of the intensity of this particular moment of feminist theory I have chosen the deconstruction of feminine identity by women punk rockers of the early 1980s. Few moments in popular culture can match the punks in iconoclastic rejection of stereotypes, in uncompromising criticism and political determination.

For a critique of femininity, the best musical example of this rejection of the eternal feminine and the positivity of "woman" in European feminism is the work of punk artist Nina Hagen; in her song "Unbeschreiblich Weiblich," she puts it as follows:

Warum soll ich meine Pflicht als Frau erfüllen?  
 Für wen? Für die? Für dich? Für mich?  
 Ich hab keine Lust meine Pflicht zu erfüllen!  
 Für dich nich, für mich nich, ich hab keine Pflicht!

MARLENE HATTE ANDERE PLÄNE,  
SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR SAGT GOTT BEWAHR!  
UND VOR DEM ERSTEN KINDERSCHREIN MUSS ICH MICH ERST MAL  
SELBST BEFREIN!  
UND AUGENBLICKLICH FÜHL ICH MICH  
UNBESCHREIBLICH WEIBLICH  
WEIBLICH,  
WEIBLICH.

[translated into English as:]

Why should I fulfill my duty as a woman?  
For whom? For them? For you? For me?  
I have no desire to fulfill my duty!  
Not for you, not for me, I have no duty!

MARLENE HAS OTHER PLANS,  
SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR SAYS "FOR GOD'S SAKE!"  
AND BEFORE THE FIRST BABY CRIES I MUST FIRST  
FREE MYSELF!  
AND RIGHT NOW I FEEL INCREDIBLY FEMININE  
FEMININE  
FEMININE

Similar emotions are expressed by the British punk band Crass, in their incomparable "Beruertax Bride," from the cult album *Penis Envy*:

The utter consoler is back, ready and waiting for the moment of truth in the spiritual mating. The utter consoler is back: ready and waiting to be owned, to be cherished, to be — for the naming.

The public are shocked by the state of society, but as for you, you're a breath of purity.

Well, don't give me your morals: they're filth in my eyes; you'll pack them away with the rest of your lies.

Your painted mask of ugly perfection, the ring on your finger a sign of protection, it's the ring of age-free, it's a soldier's obsession. How well you've been called to support your oppression! ONE God! ONE Church! ONE husband! ONE, ONE, ONE.

## The Institutionalization

From the early eighties, the main factor that influenced the growth of gender theories in the Western world was the institutionalization of

women's studies in the universities. This resulted in a major output of research on this field; the added quantity corresponds also to higher qualitative demands for a more systematic approach to feminist theory.<sup>32</sup>

Institutionalized research in women's studies has a twofold aim, as I state in chapter 12 ("Women's Studies and the Politics of Difference"): on the one hand to consolidate the wealth and range of knowledge produced by women and on the other hand to refine the methodological accuracy of the key notions in feminist theory. The pedagogical factor adds an incentive to the systematization of the founding notions of feminist methodology. With the institutionalization of women's studies courses, the need emerged to ensure effective transmission of the range, depth, and variety of feminist forms of knowledge. Experience shows that, no matter what the subject may be, the best teaching practice is to lay one's convictions open to the critical scrutiny of younger generations. Students are one's most valuable critics. This is particularly strong within women's studies, where the question of intergenerational exchanges is crucial to the issue of how to establish a genealogy of feminist theories.<sup>33</sup>

With my example of this institutionalized phase of feminist theory, and the generational problem it creates, I have chosen to strike a positive note. That women are allowed to teach and study their own cultural traditions, that woman are the measure of knowledge, is more than a welcome relief from the monotonous style of androcentric scholarship. It calls for joy as well as intellectual excitement.

In this respect, my musical illustration—almost a hymn of celebration—is Annie Lennox and Aretha Franklin's song, "Sisters are doing it for themselves," from the album of the same name: "We've got lawyers, doctors, politicians too. Look around you: there's a woman right next to you: sisters are doing it for themselves!"

Over the last few years women's studies research on gender has concentrated on the notions of relation.

Joan Scott encourages feminists to approach gender as marking a set of relations, thereby developing one of Adrienne Rich's insights. Sex, class, race, and age are fundamental axes or variables that define the gender system; using the poststructuralist analysis of power and discourse extensively, Scott takes her distance from Wittig's idea of gender as an ideological system and leans toward a notion of gender as a network of power relations.

Central to this approach is the idea of the co-extensivity of power and discourse—that is to say, the notion that the struggle for naming, the epistemological struggle, is at the heart of feminist theory and politics.

The central question now becomes: how to redefine the female subject after gender dualism has collapsed? How can we think the complexity of the differences—of class, race, age, sexual preference—that separate women, while postulating a commonness of situation and vision? Previous work on gender has in fact shown that female identity is a site of differences and that a woman occupies different subject positions at different times.

The paradox that emerges out of this, as I have stated earlier, is that feminist theory in the nineties is based on the very notion of gender that it problematizes, complexifies, and, in cases such as Wittig's, undermines. One very important effect of this new awareness of gender as a network of relations is that a new state of mind has come into place within feminism. Less emotional and intellectual energy is spent on opposition and complaint, but the old naive self-celebration appears equally unsatisfactory. What is emerging instead—also thanks to the impact of generations of younger women—is a calmer determination over achieving the aims of improving the status of women and the forms of representation that are reserved for women.

As an example of this new approach, in which women's otherness is not necessarily taken as a mark of inferiority but rather as the starting point for positive differences, for something new and better, I have chosen the song "It's obvious," from the group *Au Pairs*;<sup>34</sup> its refrain, "You're equal, but different, that's so obvious," could well be the slogan for contemporary feminists.

As I have discussed elsewhere, another theoretical development in theories of gender that needs to be stressed is the work of Teresa de Lauretis on what she calls the technology of gender.<sup>35</sup> Relying on Foucault's notion of the "materiality" of discourse, de Lauretis approaches the construction of female identity as both a material and a symbolic process. Gender is a complex mechanism—a "technology"—which defines the subject as male or female in a process of normativity and regulation of what the human being is expected to become, thus producing the very categories it purports to explain. De Lauretis argues that gender as a process of constructing the subject produces such categories as: men, women, heterosexual, homosexual, pervert etc. etc., and intersects with other normative variables—such as race and class—to produce a for-



midable power system that constructs socially normal subjects. As a consequence, she calls for feminists to destabilize the normativity of the dominant forms of sexed identity, and to find new definitions for the female feminist subject.

Judith Butler takes a slightly different orientation: she takes up Wittig's analysis of "women" and innovates on de Lauretis's insight about gender as a technology. Butler's question becomes: if gender as a process constructs the very categories of identity it purports to explain, is it still useful to feminists?

Concentrating her critique on the dualistic nature of the sex/gender opposition, Butler argues that "woman" as a category constructed by this binary opposition is both normative and exclusionary. Normative because it enforces compulsory heterosexuality, exclusionary because it conceals the multiplicity of differences that constitute the subject.

Butler's analysis, in other words, focuses on the "woman" part of Beauvoir's famous: "One is not born, one becomes a woman." Attacking the normative fiction of heterosexual coherence, Butler calls for feminists to produce a whole array of new, noncoherence genders.

## Toward a Feminist Genealogy

In this short overview of the development of "gender theories" I have tried to sketch the evolution of the notion from the substantive value that Beauvoir granted it to the recent view of gender as process, technology or even performance.

This evolution parallels another: whereas in earlier versions, the masculine represented the human, recent "gender theories" are more optimistic about women's entitlement to speaking as subject. Language, however man-made, has shown remarkable plasticity and adaptability to the requirements of female feminist subjects.

One clear trend over the last ten years is the increasing recognition of the importance of differences among women, especially those based on class, race, and sexual preferences. In the concluding section of this book, I will go on to indicate some of the directions in which I would like to see feminist theory grow.

What has already become clear, through this rapid growth of theories about the status, structure, and political significance of the female feminist subject is that the challenge for women's studies in the 1990s is to assess and systematize the different methodologies of gender. I have already discussed Donna Haraway's use of the expression "femi-

nist figurations'<sup>36</sup> to describe these different theoretical ways of representing the subject in feminism. The challenge today is to find new images of thought to help feminists think about changes and changing conditions that they have contributed to bring about.

I would like to argue that the quest for adequate representations of the feminist subject is part and parcel of a feminist theoretical genealogy: I am a great believer in the usefulness of a feminist intellectual tradition. Why?

First because, although the stock of cumulated feminist knowledge has grown considerably, women still have no codified tradition of their own. Such a theoretical capital requires time and hard work in order to come into being; it also calls for women to have the means by which to bring about such transformations.

The central point remains: so few women are in a position of symbolic power, that is to say, in a position to systematize, codify, and transmit their own intellectual traditions. In such a situation, women of a feminist inclination have had to review upwards their own relationship to ambition. Gone is the candid, simplistic longing for ambition to be fulfilled by a Mercedes Benz. A new kind of realism has set in, of which the singer Madonna is the best example: for the women of today, being material girls living in a material world is not the aim, it is only the starting point.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, the symbolic recognition female feminists aspire to today is that of being entitled to elaborate their own forms of scientific discourse, and to have them recognized as scientific. This point is particularly relevant if one takes into account the forms taken by contemporary antifeminism. Whereas earlier on the standard antifeminist line was that women's studies is a mere ideological construct, at best a politically motivated critique or satire of patriarchy, the line in the nineties is that feminism does have its theoretical bases. These, however, are usually seen as disrespectful of tradition, iconoclastic, even nihilistic. Feminists are regularly accused of destroying tradition, upsetting the cannon, criticizing but offering nothing in return.

Another version on this theme merges with the misogynist traditions of anti-intellectualism and female underemployment to produce yet another antifeminist line: women's studies scholars are found to be too theoretical, abstract, jargon-ridden, even obscure. Their difficult notions and elaborate prose are compared to the crystal-clear lucidity of good old home-made common sense, and are dismissed in the name of pragmatic, down-to-earth realism.

Those who thus dismiss feminist theory have never bothered to read any of the founding texts of this tradition, and they add arrogance to ignorance by sitting on judgment upon a field they are not qualified to assess. What remains constant in the antifeminist line is that women are judged insufficient either by lack (not enough theoretical power) or by excess (too much theory); the result is the same.

I consequently support the establishment of a systematized feminist theoretical genealogy, a tradition of female feminist theorists and critics to counterbalance the continuous antiwoman line that so many learned institutions promote and support. There is such a thing today as feminist theory, and it is other than the critique of sexist biases in science and scholarship. It is other than protest, rebellion, anger, it is a theoretical movement with its own assumptions, ruling principles, criteria, and intellectual histories. Feminist theory is a radically non-nostalgic and forward-looking form of thought; for female intellectuals, the past is not such a great model and there is no way for us to go but up.

Although there is a great variety of approaches within women's studies, there is consensus on a number of crucial points. The first is that new ideas, new theories, different ways of thinking—if they are to be something more than merely utopian—must be born of careful, caring repetitions of old ideas. Parthenogenesis is hardly a viable option. Far from being nihilistic destroyers of past traditions and traditional wisdom, feminists are lucid readers, diagnosticians of their political and cultural implications for women and for the gender system that constructs them. As analysts of this system, feminists are very much part of it; linked to patriarchy by negation of its very premises, feminists know that only patterns of studied repetition, only a strategic form of mimesis such as Irigaray proposes, can generate authentic differences. As I have argued throughout this book, one does not reinvent the subject "woman" by sheer willpower; rather, the process requires the deconstruction of the many, often contradictory, meanings and representations of "woman." Only through such a process can a new definition of "woman" emerge, because language is endowed with amazing resilience and complexity.

As Laurie Anderson puts it: language is a virus!

Consequently, the powers of language are incalculable, and one just does not know whom one may have contaminated with messages, ideas, texts that may well appear obvious and even tired out to their author.

That language is a fabulous prison-house is a truth that women learned at their own expense well before the appearance of the electronic avant-garde art of today. One of the great masters of modernism, Virginia Woolf, in her speech on BBC radio in the thirties, made us aware of the viral, contaminating structure of language and gave her answer to it:

Only after the writer is dead do his words to some extent, only to some extent, become disinfected, purified of the accidents of the living body. Now this . . . suggestion is one of the most exciting and most mysterious properties of words. Most exciting if you are a person in having to use them. Everyone who has ever written a sentence must be conscious, or half conscious of it. Words, English words, are full of echoes, memories, associations, naturally. They have been out and about, on people's lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries. And that is one of the chief difficulties in writing them today. They are stored with other meanings, with other memories. And they have contracted so many famous marriages in the past. The splendid word *incarnadine* for example, who can use that without remembering *multitudinous seas*? In the old days, of course, when English was a new language, writers could invent new words and use them. Nowadays it is easy enough to invent new words, they spring to the lips, whenever we see a new sight or feel a new sensation. But we cannot use them, because the English language is old. You can not use a brand-new word in an old language because it is a very obvious yet always mysterious fact that a word is not a single and separate entity, it is part of other words. Indeed it is not a word, but it is part of a sentence. Words belong to each other, although of course only a great poet knows that the word *incarnadine* belongs to "multitudinous seas." To combine new words with old words is fatal to the constitution of the sentence. In order to use new words properly you'd have to invent a whole new language, and that is . . . we shall come to it—is not at the moment our business. Our business is to see what we can do with the old English language as it is. How can we combine the old words in new orders, so that they survive, and so that they create beauty, so that they tell the truth. That is the question.

Just as new language is born of patient frequentations, caring and frequent encounters with the old, so equally history is not a four-lane highway but a discontinuous line, where progress is often achieved by twisting and turning, repeating and going back. History as repetition is a genealogical cycle, the careful sifting through of old notions, to improve them, to make them less regulative, more beautiful. Teleologically

ordained historical “progress” in the eighteenth-century sense may not be available to us as an historical option, but this does not mean that no progress is possible at all and that nihilism is around the corner.

Walter Benjamin<sup>38</sup> warned us that the angel of history moves on by walking backwards toward a future that s/he neither controls nor predicts. In her characteristic “as if” mode, Laurie Anderson revisits these strange angels of history and provides a perfect illustration of the kind of nomadic consciousness that I have been defending in this book. It is only fair, therefore, to conclude by returning to Anderson’s work as a quest for alternative figurations of contemporary subjectivity.

As I suggested earlier (see the introduction to this book, “By Way of Nomadism”), Anderson’s performance-art enacts multiple displacements of the physical facticity. As Susanne McClary points out,<sup>39</sup> Anderson’s bodily presence is technologically mediated to such an extent that, the closer the audience gets to her, like being able to hear the sound of her heartbeat, the more her “true self” recedes into the distance. Anderson’s body is not one, but a shifting horizon of technologically mediated transitions: an acoustically gifted cyborg, not unlike the character in *The Ship Who Sang*.<sup>40</sup>

This illustrates beautifully the paradox of embodied postmodern subjectivity, that is to say the simultaneous overexposure and disappearance of the naturalized, essentialistic understanding of an authentic self, which I have addressed throughout this volume.

Anderson’s mediated, multiple, shifting “selves” are also a strategy aimed at displacing established expectations about gender identity and especially about the female body as object of display and spectacle. Blurring gender boundaries gracefully but firmly, Anderson’s musical play with nomadic shifts expresses the constant interaction of repetition and difference; of presence and discontinuity; of authenticity and simulation.

In her musical rendition of Walter Benjamin’s theses on the dialectics of history, Anderson locks together two crucial ideas, which are also powerful political strategies: on the one hand the need for metabolic repossession of meanings and representations, which I also call mimetic repetition; on the other hand the necessity to find points of exit from the debris of the posthumanist universe.

Walking backward toward the new, which is also the unknown, in order to be able to name a better and fairer present, feminists and other

nomadic intellectuals are the strange angels of a failed system, stumbling to a new age.

Let Laurie Anderson have the last word with her song "The Dream Before" (for Walter Benjamin):<sup>41</sup>

Hansel and Gretel are alive and well  
And they're living in Berlin  
She is a cocktail waitress  
He had a part in a Fassbinder film  
And they sit around at night now  
Drinking Schnapps and Gin  
And she says: Hansel, you are really bringing me down  
And he says: Gretel, you can really be a bitch  
He says: I've wasted my life on our stupid legend  
When my one and only love  
Was the wicked witch.  
She said: what is history?  
And he said; history is an angel  
Being blown backwards into the future  
He said: history is a pile of debris  
And the angel wants to go back and fix things  
To repair things that have been broken  
But there is a storm blowing from paradise  
And the storm keeps blowing the angel  
Backwards into the future.  
And this storm, this storm  
is called  
Progress.

# NOTES

## Introduction: By Way of Nomadism

1. bell hooks, "Postmodern blackness," in *Yearning* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990); quotation from p. 27.
2. Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
3. I have offered a comparative analysis of Irigaray and Haraway in "Feminist Deleuzian Tracks; or, Metaphysics and Metabolism," in K. Boundas and D. Olkowski, eds., *Deleuze: Text, Theory, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
4. My reading of cyborgs as rhizomatic figurations of thought does not mean to suggest any structural comparison between Haraway and Deleuze. In some respects, nothing could be further removed from Haraway's scheme of thought than references, let alone close attention to the unconscious or the politics of subjective desire.
5. Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind* (London: Harvester, 1991).
6. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).
7. See Nancy K. Miller, "Subject to Change," in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist studies/Critical studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1986.
8. Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 115–50.
9. Maurizia Boscaglia, "Unaccompanied Ladies: Feminist, Italian, and in the Academy," *differences* 2, no. 3 (1991): 122–35.
10. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
11. Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eye: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," *Boundary 2*, no. 3 (1984): 333–58; Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
12. Caren Kaplan, "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse," *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987): 187–198. Quote from p. 197.
13. See especially Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 1980).
14. Kaplan, "Deterritorializations," p. 198.
15. See, for instance, Naomi Schor, "Dreaming Dissymmetry: Foucault, Barthes, and Feminism," in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987); and also Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).
16. This point is argued by John Howell, *Laurie Anderson* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1992), p. 17.

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17. Patricia Yaeger, *Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 31.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
19. Donna Haraway, "Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape," in Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 86.
20. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865; reprint, London: Puffin Books, 1977).
21. A great deal has happened to aboriginal activism and to Australian critical consciousness since, and Australian feminists have been instrumental in bringing out this issue. See, for instance, Maeghan Morris's analysis of the film "Crocodile-Dundee" in *The Pirate's Fiancée* (London: Verso, 1988).
22. Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984).
23. Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).
24. Danielle Haase-Dubosc, closing remarks at the conference "One Century of Franco-American Cultural Exchanges," held at Reid Hall, the Columbia University Center in Paris, June 24–25, 1993. Quote from p. 5 of a six-page ms.
25. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 1974); translated into English as *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Athlone, 1984). See also Gilles Deleuze, "La pensée nomade," in *Nietzsche aujourd'hui* (Paris: Union Générale d'édition, 1973); translated into English as "Nomad Thought," in David B. Allison, ed., *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1985). See also Luce Irigaray: *Speculum: De l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974); translated into English as *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
26. Luisa Passerini, *Autoritratto di Gruppo* (Florence: Giunti, 1988).
27. Sneja Gunew, "Discourses of otherness," in *Displacements: Migrant Story-Tellers* (Melbourne: Deakin University, 1982), p. 1.
28. Christa Wolf, *Cassandra* (London: Virago Press, 1984).
29. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, p. 19.
30. Colette, *La Vagabonde* (1920; reprint, Paris: Albin Michel, Livres de Poche, 1983), p. 26. Citation translated into English as: "No one is expecting me, on a road that leads neither to glory, nor to wealth and certainly not to love."
31. Nicole Ward Jouve, *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).
32. I am grateful to Mieke Aerts for pointing this out to me, on a train ride to Kassel, Germany; what better place for such an insightful comment?
33. I am grateful to Patricia Yaeger and Naomi Schor who, quite independently of each other, brought this point to my attention. I am especially indebted to the former for suggesting this expression.
34. Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines* (London: Picador, 1988).
35. Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972).
36. Alice Jardine, "Pre-Texts for the Transatlantic Feminist," *Yale French Studies* (December 1981): 220–36.



37. Leila Sebbar and Nancy Huston, *Lettres Parisiennes* (Paris: Barrault, 1986).
38. I am grateful to Juul Hymans, of Radio Mundo, for helping me to formulate this insight.
39. Barbara Krueger, *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture* (London: I.C.A., 1983); *Love for Sale* (New York: Harry M. Abrams, 1990); "No progress in pleasure," in Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).
40. Jenny Holzer, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim, 1988.
41. Although the actual collection of slides remains unfortunately unpublished, the work has been presented in Brunhilde Biebuyck and Mihaela Bacou, eds., "Paroles Urbaines," *Cahiers de littérature orale*, no. 24 (1988).
42. Brian Eno, *Music for Airports*, EG Records EEG CD 17.
43. I want to thank Christien Franken for donating this expression. It is a citation from Anne Aronson and Diana L. Swanson, "Graduate Women on the Brink: Writing as 'Outsiders Within,'" *Women's Studies Quarterly*, nos. 3 and 4 (1991): 165.
44. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938; reprint, London: Penguin, 1978).
45. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La jeune née* (Paris: U.G.E., 1975).
46. Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977).
47. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (London: The Women's Press, 1984).
48. Caren Kaplan, "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice," in Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies*.
49. Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them* (London: The Women's Press, 1982).
50. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotexte, 1986).
51. sabelle Stengers, *D'une science à l'autre; Des concepts nomades* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).
52. Nathalie Sarraute, *Enfance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).
53. Rosa Capiello, *Oh, Lucky Country!* (St. Lucie: University of Queensland-Press, 1984).
54. Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country* (London: Penguin, 1966).
55. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Reading the Satanic verses," *Third Text* (Summer 1990): 41-60.
56. Sadie Plant, "Nomads and revolutionaries," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 24, no. 1 (January 1993): 88-101; quote from p. 89.
57. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Scritti corsari* (Turin: Garzanti, 1975).
58. See, for instance, Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1977); translated into English as *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); see also, Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).
59. Feminists were, however, among the first to notice and comment upon the aggressive nature of what was polemically called "cock-rock." For a pertinent analysis, see Robyn Archer, *A Star Is Torn* (London: Virago, 1986).
60. On December 20, 1989, in Operation Just Cause, 23,000 U.S. troops with air cover seized control of Panama, to capture the rebel president Noriega; 230

- people died. Noriega took refuge in the Papal Nunciature but, after the building was bombarded for ten days with rock music and other psychological measures, he gave himself up and was flown to the United States to await trial on drug charges. Source: the entry "Noriega" in *A Dictionary of Twentieth-Century World Biography* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
61. Dacia Maraini, *Donna in guerra* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975). Translates into English as *Woman at War*.
  62. Kathy Acker, *In Memoriam to Identity* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).
  63. Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* (Cambridge: Polity Press/New York: Routledge, 1991).
  64. See on this point, Nancy Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).
  65. The latter is cleverly unveiled by Michelle le Doeuff in her *L'imaginaire philosophique* (Paris: Payot, 1984).
  66. Michelle le Doeuff is the first to offer a paradoxical example of this attitude of rejection of poststructuralism.
  67. Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).
  68. I have analyzed in more detail the special position of Dutch feminism in my "Dutch Treats and Other Strangers," in Joke Hermsen and Alkeline van Lenning, eds., *Sharing the Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991). See also the special Utrecht issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* 16, no. 4 (November 1993).
  69. Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, "Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism," in Linda J. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).
  70. Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Post-modernism,'" Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.
  71. For a telling account of this, see Sarah Kofman, *Aberrations* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982).
  72. I have expressed this quite firmly in *Patterns of Dissonance*, especially in my analysis of the polemic between Foucault and Derrida on the question of the critique of phallogocentrism and the role of "pathos" in it (see chapter 3).
  73. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, "Presidential Address," *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women* (New York: Ballantine, 1990), p. 250.
  74. For a masterful discussion of the issue of citations in the body of the text, see Gayatri C. Spivak, "Translator's preface," in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. ix-xxxvii.
  75. The expression was coined by Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (London: The Women's Press, 1984).
  76. The most relevant theorist of feminist genealogies is Luce Irigaray, especially in *Le temps de la différence* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1989). See also Teresa de Lauretis, "Feminist genealogies," Belle van Zuylen lecture, University of Utrecht,

Utrecht, November 1991, reprinted in *Women's Studies International Forum* 16, no.4 (1993): 393-403.

77. Kathy Acker, *In Memoriam to Identity*, p. 49.

## 1. Organs Without Bodies

1. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
2. Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," *Socialist Review*, no. 80 (1985): 65-107.
3. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); vols. 2 and 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984) Translated into English, under the title *History of Sexuality*, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1987-1988).
4. Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966). Translated into English, under the title *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973).
5. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Advanced Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).
6. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 1974); translated into English as *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Athlone, 1984). *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 1980).
7. Georges Canguilhem, *La connaissance de la vie* (Paris: Vrin, 1965); *Etudes d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences* (Paris: Vrin, 1968); *Idéologie et rationalité dans l'histoire des sciences de la vie* (Paris, Vrin, 1977); trans. A. Goldhammer, *Ideology and rationality in the history of the life sciences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).
8. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966). Partially trans. A. M. Sheridan, in *Ecrits: A Selection* (New York: Norton, 1977).
9. Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique* (Paris: P.U.F., 1963); trans. A. M. Sheridan, *Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Modern Perceptions* (New York: Pantheon, 1983). *Histoire de la folie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); *La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).
10. Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979); *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (Paris: Galilee, 1986); "Some of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggles," in *Wedge*, no. 6 (1984). Jacques Derrida, *Eperons* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977). Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits; Encore* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).
11. Rosi Braidotti, "Femmes et philosophie," *Revue d'en face*, no. 13 (1982); "U-topies: Des non-lieux postmodernes" (U-Topia: postmodern non-places), in *Les Cahiers du Grif*, no. 30 (1985); "Bio-éthique ou nouvelle normativité?" (Bio-ethics or new normativity?), *les Cahiers du Grif*, no. 33 (1986); "Du bio-pouvoir à la bio-éthique" (From bio-power to bio-ethics), *Cahiers du College International*

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- de Philosophie (C.I.P)*, no. 3 (1987); *Patterns of Dissonance* (Cambridge: Polity Press/New York: Routledge, 1991).
12. Donna Haraway, "Situated knowledges," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1990).
  13. Gilles Deleuze, "Philosophie et minorité," *Critique*, no. 369 (1987).
  14. Evelyn Fox Keller, "From Secrets of Life to Secrets of Death," in Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth eds., *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
  15. Louise Vandelac, "La face cachée de la procréation artificielle," *La Recherche* 20, no. 213 (September 1989): 1112–1124.
  16. Françoise Laborie, "Cecie est une éthique," *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 41 (1985): 1215–55; 1518–43.
  17. Michel Foucault, *La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).
  18. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1962).
  19. Evelyn Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1983); *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Luce Irigaray, *Speculum* (Paris: Minuit, 1974); *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977).
  20. Pierre Fedida, "L'anatomie dans la psychanalyse," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, no. 3 (1971).
  21. Jean Beaudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).
  22. Constance Penley, "Feminism, Film Theory, and the Bachelor Machines," *M/F*, no. 10 (1985).
  23. Jean Lipovetsky, *L'ère du vide* (Paris: Galilee, 1983).
  24. Paul Virilio, *L'insecurité du territoire* (Paris: Stock, 1976).
  25. Michel Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*.
  26. Germaine Greer, *Sex and Destiny* (London: Picador, 1984).
  27. Rolyn Rowland, "A Child at ANY Price?," *Women's Studies International Forum* 8, no. 5 (1985).
  28. David Slater, "Theories of Development and Politics of the Postmodern: Exploring a Border Zone," *Development and Change* 23, no. 3 (1992): p. 303.
  29. Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
  30. Jacques Derrida, *Eperons* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977).
  31. Elaine Showalter, "Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and Woman of the Year," in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
  32. Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).
  33. Elizabeth Badinter, *L'un est l'autre* (Paris: Jacob, 1986).
  34. Luce Irigaray, *Ethique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1974).

## 2. Body Images and the Pornography of Representation

1. Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique* (Paris: P.U.F., 1963); trans. A. M. Sheridan, under the title, *Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Modern Perceptions* (New York: Pantheon, 1983); *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).
2. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); vols. 2 and 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); translated into English, under the title *History of Sexuality*, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1987–1988).
3. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1, p. 188; my translation of quotation.
4. Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, p. 328. Translated into English, under the title *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 318.
5. On this point, see my study *Patterns of Dissonance*, (Cambridge: Polity Press/New York: Routledge, 1991).
6. Robert Badinter, former justice minister in the French government and now chair of the Constitutional Council, attempted to open the discussion on female homosexuality in the framework of the new reproductive technologies. His prowoman position, however, was severely criticized by among others Kristeva, who expressed serious concerns about the decline of paternal power. The main texts of the debate are Robert Badinter, "Discours de Vienne (20/3/85)," *Actes* 49/50 (1985): 79–81; *Le Debat*, special issue on "Le droit, la médecine, et la vie," no. 36 (1985); Julia Kristeva, "Une morale pour le surhomme," *Liberation*, July 6, 1985, p. 16.
7. Pierre Fedida, "L'anatomie dans la psychanalyse," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, no. 3 (1971): 109–26.
8. In *Birth of the clinic*, p. 200.
9. Pierre Fedida, "L'anatomie dans la psychanalyse," p. 125, my translation.
10. T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947).
11. See especially *The Cloning of Joanna May* (London: Collins, 1989).
12. There have been some powerful feminist critiques of this; see for instance Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
13. Evelyn Fox Keller, "From the Secrets of Life to the Secrets of Death," in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
14. *Science et vie*, no. 153 (1985).
15. Susan Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).
16. See Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Vision* (London: MacMillan, 1989); Rosalyn Petchesky, "Fetal images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," in Michelle Stanworth, ed., *Reproductive Technologies*, p. 37 (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1987).
17. Carol Vance delivered this paper at the university of Amsterdam on December 6, 1990.

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18. Gayatri Spivak's witty remark was also made at the congress Double Trouble, held in Utrecht in May 1990.
19. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974).
20. Margaret Whitford, "Luce Irigaray and the Female Imaginary," in *Radical Philosophy*, no. 43 (1986): pp. 3–8; "Rereading Irigaray," in Teresa Brennan, ed., *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, p.106 (London: Routledge, 1989).
21. Evelyn Fox Keller and Carol Grontowski, "The Mind's Eye," in Sandra Harding and Mary Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality*, p. 207 (Reidel: Dordrecht, 1983); Evelyn Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism* (New York: Freeman, 1985).
22. Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (London: Methuen, 1986).
23. Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," *Signs*, vol. 11, no.3 (1986): 439–56.
24. Jessica Benjamin, "A Desire of One's Own," in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
25. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
26. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, p. 149 (London: Free Association Books, 1990).
27. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and women*, pp. 183–202.

### 3. Mothers, Monsters, and Machines

1. Donna Haraway, "'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, pp. 127–48 (London: Free Association Books, 1991).
2. For an enlightening and strategic usage of the notion of "mimesis," see Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977).
3. To refer to the concept elaborated by the French philosopher of difference, see Gilles Deleuze in collaboration with Felix Guattari, *Rhizome* (Paris: Minuit, 1976).
4. The notion of "experience" has been the object of intense debates in feminist theory. See for example, Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (London: Open University, 1986), and *Feminism and Methodology* (London: Open University, 1987); Joan Scott, "Experience," in Joan Scott and Judith Butler, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22–40.
5. Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (London: Methuen, 1985).
6. Cf. Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir," *L'Arc*, no. 49 (1972).
7. This expression, originally coined by Laura Mulvey in film criticism, has been taken up and developed by Donna Haraway in a stunning exploration of this intellectual mode; see "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," and "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science,

- Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, pp. 183–202 and 127–48.
8. I explored this notion of monstrosity at some length in a seminar held jointly with Marie-Jo Dhavernas at the College international de Philosophie in Paris in 1984–1985. The report of the sessions was published in *Cahier du College International de Philosophie*, no. 1 (1985): 42–45.
  9. See Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967); *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972); *La carte postale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980).
  10. On this point, see Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman in Modernity*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).
  11. For a feminist critique of Aristotle, see Sandra Harding and Maryl Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality* (Boston: Reidel, 1983).
  12. The most enlightening philosophical analysis of the scopophilic mode of scientific knowledge is Michel Foucault's *Naissance de la clinique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).
  13. This is the fundamental starting point for the work of feminist philosopher of sexual difference Luce Irigaray; see, for instance *L'éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).
  14. Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).
  15. Ambroise Paré, *Des monstres et prodiges* (1573; Geneva: Droz, 1971).
  16. The second and third volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon, 1987–1988) outline quite clearly all these regulations in the art of existence.
  17. Pierre Darmon, *Le mythe de la procreation à l'âge baroque*, (Paris: Seuil, 1981).
  18. See for instance Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," *Signs* 11, no. 3 (1986); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
  19. S. G. Allen and J. Hubbs, "Outrunning Atalanta: Destiny in Alchemical Transmutation," *Signs* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1980): 210–29.
  20. Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978).
  21. Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1988).
  22. David Hevey, ed., *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
  23. As Monique David-Menard argues in *L'Hystérique entre Freud et Lacan* (Paris: Ed. Universitaire, 1983).

#### 4. Re-figuring the Subject

1. Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* (Cambridge: Polity Press/New York: Routledge, 1991).
2. This is the line taken by Shari Benstock in *Women of the Left Bank* (Austin: University of Texas, 1986).
3. I borrow the notion of "discourse" from Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Minuit, 1977).

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4. It has also been acknowledged by both: Foucault in the preface to the American edition of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie I* (Paris: Minuit, 1974); translated into English as *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Athlone, 1984), and Deleuze in his masterful *Foucault* (Paris: Minuit, 1988).
5. See Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (London: Methuen, 1984).
6. For a more thorough discussion of this problem, see S. Benhabyb and D. Cornell, eds., *Feminism as Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
7. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (Yale University Press, 1975).
8. Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman in Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
9. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum: De l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1977); *Ethique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).
10. For a definition of the "technology of the self," see Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vols. 2 and 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); translated into English, under the title *History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon, 1987–1988). See also my reading of this scheme of subjectivity in *Patterns of Dissonance*.
11. See Rosi Braidotti, "Feminist Deleuzian Tracks; or, Metaphysics and Metabolism," in K. Boundas and D. Olkowski, eds., *Gilles Deleuze: Text, Theory, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
12. For a fuller exposition of these ideas, see Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966) and *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969).
13. An equally forceful analysis of these conditions of production is provided by Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
14. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).
15. I developed this point in the chapter "Organs Without bodies."
16. Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* p. 245, fn. 4 (London: Free Association Books, 1990).
17. Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" p. 57.
18. Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).
19. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectics of Sex* (New York: Picador, 1969).

## 5. Discontinuous Becomings: Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman of Philosophy

1. I am grateful for the comments made by Nicholas Davey on the notion of "becoming," during the work of the Oxford Conference on Deleuze, December 1991, organized by the British Society for Phenomenology.
2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 272.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977).
4. I am grateful to Roland Bogue for elucidating this distinction during the work of the December 1991 Oxford Conference.



5. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 272.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
8. This is the position defended by the philosopher Luce Irigaray in her work on sexual difference.
9. For an excellent analysis of the split between "woman" as representation and "women" as experience, see Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
10. I have explored further the lines of intersection between Deleuze's polysexuality and feminist attempts to think subjectivity beyond gender polarities in "Feminist Deleuzian Tracks; or, Metaphysics and Metabolism," in K. Boundas and D. Olkowski, eds., *Gilles Deleuze: Text, Theory, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
11. Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977). Translated into English as *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 140.
12. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 276.
13. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 133.
14. Julia Kristeva, "Women's time," *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981): 13–35; reprinted in N. O. Keohane, M. Z. Rosaldo and B. C. Gelpi, eds., *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
15. Gayatri C. Spivak, "In a word: Interview," *differences*, nos. 1 and 2 (1989): 124–156.
16. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Minuit, 1991), p. 69.
17. Caren Kaplan, "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice," in Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Critical Practice* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 138.

## 6. The Ethics of Sexual Difference: The Case of Foucault and Irigaray

1. Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition Post-Moderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979); "One of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggle," *Substance*, no. 20 (1980).
2. Sigmund Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia, Dementia Paranoides" (1911; reprinted in *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 9, London: Penguin, 1979).
3. Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil), 1967; *Marges* (Paris: Minuit, 1972); *Eperons* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978).
4. The reference is to one of Jacques Derrida's books, *La carte postale*, the postcard.
5. My analysis of the intersection between feminism and modernity is in disagreement with the postmodern diagnosis, as, for instance, in Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman in Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

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6. Michel Foucault: *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
7. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 9.
8. Ibid. p. 10.
9. Ibid. p. 22.
10. Cf. Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel* (Milan: Rivolta Femminile, 1974); *E già politica* (Milan: Rivolta Femminile, 1977); Luisa Muraro, *Guglielma Manfreda* (Milan: La tartaruga, 1984).
11. Both titles were translated and published by Cornell University Press in 1985.
12. On this particular point I disagree with the reading of Irigaray proposed by Elizabeth Gross in her article "Irigaray and Sexual Difference," *Australian Feminist Studies*, no. 2 (Autumn 1986).

## 7. Envy; or, with Your Brains and My Looks

1. Especially in Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977).
2. See Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (London: Methuen, 1985). Also Jessica Benjamin, "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination," in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., *The Future of Difference* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980).
3. Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman in Modernity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985).
4. This is the line I try to argue in my doctoral dissertation, *Féminisme et philosophie*, Université Paris I, Panthéon Sorbonne, 1981; and in the following articles: "Femmes et philosophie, questions à suivre," *La revue d'en face*, no. 13 (1982); "Modelli di dissonanza," in P. Magli, ed., *Le donne e i segni* (Urbino: Le Lavoro Editoriale, 1983).
5. J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
6. See Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire XX-encore* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).
7. See Jacques Derrida, *Eperons* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987).
8. See Michel Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs* and *Le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).
9. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Minuit, 1972); also, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980).
10. This is the line pursued by Irigaray, especially in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977); as well as by the Italian, Alessandra Bocchetti, in *L'Indecente indifferenza*, (Rome: Edizioni del Centro Culturale Virginia Woolf, 1983); and by Adriana Cavarero, "Per una teoria della differenza sessuale," in Diotima, ed., *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1987).
11. See Elisabeth Badinter, *L'une est l'autre* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1986); and G. Lipovetsky, *L'ère du vide* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).
12. See Gena Corea et al., eds., *Man-Made Women* (London: Hutchinson, 1986).
13. Marta Lonzi, Anna Jaquinta, and Carla Lonzi, *La presenza dell'uomo nel femminismo* (Milan: Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1978).

14. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938; reprint, London: Penguin, 1978).
15. Phyllis Chesler, *About Men* (London: The Women's Press, 1978).
16. See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Experience," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980).
17. See Monique Wittig, "La pensée straight," *Questions Féministes*, no. 7 (1980). Translated into English as *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

## 8. Sexual Difference as a Nomadic Political Project

1. See for instance, the work of Rada Ivekovic from Zagreb, Dasa Duhacek from Belgrade and Zarana Papić from Ljubljana.
2. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Penguin, 1972).
3. Marguerite Duras, an interview, in Alice Jardine and Anne Menke, eds., *Shifting Scenes: Interviews on Women, Writing, and Politics in Post-68 France* p. 74 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
4. Luce Irigaray, "Egales à qui?" *Critique*, no. 480 (1987): 420–37. Translated into English as "Equal to Whom?" *Differences* 1, no. 21 (1988): 59–76.
5. Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* (Cambridge: Polity Press/New York: Routledge, 1991).
6. Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).
7. See Claire Duchén, *Feminism in France* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).
8. See the Milan Women's Bookshop, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Political Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). See also Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, eds., *Italian Feminist Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) and *The Lonely Mirror* (New York: Routledge, 1993). See also Joke Hermsen and Alkeline van Lenning, eds., *Sharing the Difference: Feminist Debates in Holland* (London and New York, 1991).
9. This point is made strongly by Teresa de Lauretis in "The Essence of the Triangle; or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously," *differences* 1, no. 2 (1988): 3–37; see also the issue of *Les cahiers du Grif* no. 45 (1990), "Savoir et différence des sexes," devoted to women's studies, where a similar point is raised in a French context.
10. One of the classics here is Gail Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," in R. Rapp, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975). See also Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht, Holland/Boston, USA/London, England: Reidel, 1983).
11. For accounts of this shift of perspectives, see Claire Duchén, *Feminism in France: From May 1968 to Mitterrand* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); see

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- also Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984).
12. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: Norton, 1976); *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (New York: Norton, 1979); *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (London: the Women's Press, 1985).
  13. See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum* (Paris: Minuit, 1974); *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977); *Ethique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1984). See also Hélène Cixous, "Le rire de la Méduse," *L'Arc*, no. 61 (1974); *La jeune née* (Paris: U.G.E., 1975); *Entre l'écriture* (Paris: des femmes, 1986); *Le livre de Promethea* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).
  14. As Michel Foucault argued in his *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).
  15. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).
  16. For a discussion of essentialism, see Teresa de Lauretis, "The Essence of the Triangle"; Naomi Schor, "This Essentialism That Is Not One," *differences* 1, no. 2 (1988); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Thinking* (London: Routledge, 1990); Rosi Braidotti, "Essentialism," in Elizabeth Wright, ed., *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A critical Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Elizabeth Gross, *Lacan: a Feminist Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).
  17. One just has to compare the vision of female homosexuality in Hélène Cixous' *Le livre de Promethea* with that of Monique Wittig in *Le corps lesbien* (Paris: Minuit, 1973) to appreciate the difference.
  18. Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review*, no. 91 (1986): 1053-1075.
  19. *Ibid.*, "Deconstructing Equality Versus Difference," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 33-50.
  20. This point has been the object of my book-length study, *Patterns of Dissonance*; see also Nancy Miller, "Subject to Change," in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); see also Naomi Schor, "Dreaming Dissymmetry," in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
  21. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, *Feminism as Critique* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987).
  22. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon, 1990).
  23. Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
  24. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum; Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un; L'Éthique de la différence sexuelle*.
  25. See, for instance Nancy Miller, ed., *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman in Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Naomi Schor "Dreaming Dissymmetry," in Gayatri Spivak, ed., *In Other Worlds* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987); Domna Stanton, "Difference on Trial: a Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva," in Nancy Miller, ed., *The Poetics of Gender*.
  26. This was evidenced by the special issue of the journal *Hypatia*, no. 3 (1989), on French feminist theory.

- Luisa Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1991). See also the collective volume *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social Symbolic Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
28. Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone* (Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1990).
  29. Monique Wittig, *Le corps lesbien* (Paris: Minuit, 1973); *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).
  30. An important landmark text in this tradition is G. T. Hull, P. Bell Scott, and B. Smith, eds., *But Some of Us Are Brave* (New York: Feminist Press, 1982).
  31. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outside* (Trumansberg, New York: Crossing, 1984).
  32. See for instance C. Moraga and G. Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back* (Watertown: Persephone, 1981), and *Loving in the War Years* (Boston: South End, 1983).
  33. Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
  34. Chandra Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience," *Copyright*, no. 1 (1987); "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," *Feminist Review*, no. 30 (1988); "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," in C. Mohanty, A. Russo, and L. Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, pp. 1–47 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
  35. Barbara Smith, "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism," in Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983).
  36. Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
  37. bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, South End Press, 1981); *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, Boston: South End Press, 1984); *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: Between the lines, 1990).
  38. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London: Free Association Books, 1990).
  39. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).
  40. Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).
  41. This network is called NOI&SE (Network of Interdisciplinary Studies on Women in Europe), and it includes the universities of York (UK); Antwerp (Belgium); Paris VII (France); Madrid (Spain); Bologna (Italy); Bielefeld (Germany); Dublin (Ireland); Odense (Denmark); and Utrecht (the Netherlands). It was set up and coordinated by my department in Utrecht in 1987.
  42. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*
  43. Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987; *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990). See especially chapter one.
  44. Luce Irigaray, "Equal to whom," pp. 59–76.
  45. Antoinette Fouque, "Women in Movements: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," *differences* 13, no. 3 (1991): 1–25.

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46. Marguerite Duras, an interview, in *Shifting Scenes: Interviews on Women, Writing and Politics in Post-68 France*, p. 74.
47. Dorothy Kaufmann, "Simone de Beauvoir: Questions of Difference and Generation," in *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986). See also, Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, eds., *Conflicts in Feminism*.
48. Emblematic of this change of perspective is the polemic that opposed Foucault to Sartre on the issue of the role of the intellectuals and Beauvoir to Cixous and Irigaray on the "liberation" of women. For a summary of these debates, see my *Patterns of dissonance*.
49. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," in N. O. Keohane, ed., *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
50. On this point, I am indebted to the discussion on feminism and psychoanalysis that took place in the graduate seminar of the Women's Studies program in Utrecht in March/April 1993, especially remarks made by Maaikje Meijer and Juliana de Novellis.
51. *Ibid.*
52. This was a famous slogan during the May 1968 riots in Paris.
53. Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane: Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Milan: Garzanti, 1988).
54. Caren Kaplan, "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice," in Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 139.
55. Cindy Sherman, *History Portraits* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991).
56. I am grateful to Joan Scott for pointing out this aspect of Sherman's work to me.
57. Caren Kaplan, "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse," *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987): 194.

## 9. The Politics of Ontological Difference

1. Catharine Stimpson, "Women's Studies in the U.S. Today," unpublished seminar paper, 1988.
2. Luce Irigaray, *L'éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).
3. Naomi Schor, "This essentialism which is not one," *differences* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1989).
4. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977); *La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).
5. Michel Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); Teresa de Lauretis, *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
6. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980).
7. Evelyn Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1983); *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
8. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
9. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, *Feminine Sexuality* (New York: Norton, 1982).
10. See on this point, the special issue on "Feminism and the Body," *Hypatia* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1991), ed. Elizabeth Grosz.

11. Teresa Brennan, "Impasse in Psychoanalysis and Feminism," in S. Guney, ed., *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
12. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1977).
13. See Margaret Whitford, "Reading Irigaray," in T. Brennan, ed., *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).
14. F. Molino, "Femminismo e psicoanalisi," in C. Marcusso and A. Rossi-Doria, eds., *La ricerca delle donne* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1986).
15. Luce Irigaray, *L'éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).
16. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), p. 80.
17. Gayatri Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of Women," in Mark Krupnick, ed., *Displacement: Derrida and After* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).
18. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985).
19. Margaret Whitford, "Luce Irigaray and the female imaginary," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 43 (Summer 1986): 3–8.
20. Luce Irigaray, *L'éthique de la différence sexuelle*; A. Cavarero, "Il pensiero della differenza sessuale," in Maria-Cristina Marcuzzo and Anna Rossi-Doria, eds., *La ricerca delle donne* (Torino: Rosenberg and Sellier, 1987).
21. Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Link, 1974).
22. Rosi Braidotti, "Envy," in *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
23. Naomi Schor, "This Essentialism Which is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," *differences* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1989).
24. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Meta-Ethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1987).
25. Nancy Miller, *The Politics of Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); "Changing the Subject," in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

## 10. On the Female Feminist Subject; or, from "She-Self" to "She-Other"

1. Clarice Lispector, *La passion selon G. H.* (Paris: des femmes, 1978), p. 45.
2. Luisa Muraro, "Commento alla: *Passione secondo G. H.*," *DWF*, no. 5/6 (1986): 65–78.
3. Luce Irigaray, "Femmes divines," *Critique*, no. 454 (1985).
4. Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1990).
5. Hélène Cixous, "L'approche de Clarice Lispector," in *Entre l'écriture* (Paris: des femmes, 1986), pp. 115–99.
6. For a fuller analysis on this point, see chapter 1, "Organs Without bodies," in this book.
7. Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); L. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989); Joan Scott "Deconstructing Equality vs. Difference," *Feminist Studies* 14,

- no. 1 (1988): 35–50; N. Fraser and L. Nicholson, "Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, no. 5 (1988): 373–94.
8. Jean-François Lyotard, "Some of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggles," *Wedge*, no. 6 (1984). He is also credited with providing the clearest definition of postmodernism, in *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979). For a feminist reply to Lyotard, see Seyla Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-François Lyotard," in L. Nicholson, ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism*, pp. 107–32. See also Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* (Cambridge: Polity Press/New York: Routledge, 1991).
  9. Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983); Katharine Stimpson, *Where the Meanings Are* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
  10. Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (London: Open University, 1986); *Feminism and Methodology* (London: Open University, 1987); S. Harding and M. B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality* (Boston: Reidel, 1983).
  11. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); *A Feeling for the Organism* (New York: Freeman, 1985).
  12. Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (London: Methuen, 1985).
  13. Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987): 621–43. See also her *Thinking Fragments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
  14. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981): 13–35; reprinted in N. O. Keohane, M. Z. Rosaldo, and B. C. Gelpi, eds., *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982).
  15. Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 1987).
  16. Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," *Boundary 2*, no. 3 (1984): 333–58.
  17. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
  18. Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); *Histoire de la folie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).
  19. Patrizia Violi, *L'infinito singolare* (Verona: Essedue, 1987).
  20. Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969); *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968); *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962).
  21. For a fuller analysis of this vision of the body, see chapter 1, "Organs Without Bodies," in this book. See also Elisabeth Grosz, "Notes Toward a Corporeal Feminism," *Australian Feminist Studies*, no. 5 (1987).
  22. The terminology is reminiscent of the existentialist legacy: the "facticity" of the body as opposed to the "transcendence" of the thinking consciousness. I am aware of the dualism implicit in the existentialist position, while I appreciate the effort at actually thinking the body. For a pertinent critique of existentialism in relation to feminism, see M. le Doeff, *L'étude et le rouet* (Paris: Seuil, 1989). For a lucid critique of the category "sex," in the sense of an anatomical reality,



- allegedly opposed to the "gender" system by which in fact it is constructed, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
23. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); vols. 2 and 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); translated into English, under the title *History of Sexuality*, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1987–1988). For a feminist analysis see J. Diamond and L. Quinby, eds., *Foucault and Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988).
  24. Much has been written about the "death of the subject" as leitmotif in the poststructuralist crusade against classical visions of the subject as coinciding with *his* consciousness. The double move that comes under criticism is the simultaneous identification of subjectivity with consciousness and both of them with masculinity. For a summary of the feminist reactions to this, see my *Patterns of Dissonance*.
  25. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum* (Paris: Minuit, 1974); *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977); *L'éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).
  26. For evidence of its limitations, see Gayatri Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," in M. Krupnick, ed., *Displacement: Derrida and After*, pp. 169–95 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); "Feminism and Deconstruction Again: Negotiating with Unacknowledged Masculinism," in Teresa Brennan, ed., *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 206–224 (London: Routledge, 1989).
  27. M. Culley and C. Portuges, *Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching* (Boston: Routledge, 1985); see also G. Bowles and R. Duelli-Klein, eds., *Theories of Women's Studies* (London: Routledge, 1983).
  28. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); "A Desire of One's Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective Space," Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, pp. 78–99.
  29. Jessica Benjamin, "A Desire of One's Own," p. 94.
  30. The term is better rendered in French, where *assujettissement* covers the multi-layered nature of subjectivity, as the process of interaction of self and other, in a multiplicity of relations of difference.
  31. Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1990).

## 11. Women's Studies and the Politics of Difference

1. See Rosi Braidotti, "Dutch Treats and Other Strangers: An Introduction," in Joke Hermsen and Alkeline van Lenning, eds., *Sharing the Difference*: (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); see also Margo Brouns, *Fourteen Years of Women's Studies in the Netherlands* (Den Haag: STEO, 1988).
2. See Valerie Miner and Helen E. Longino, eds., *Competition: A Feminist Taboo?* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1987); and Evelyn Fox Keller and Marianne Hirsch, *Conflicts in Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
3. See Teresa de Lauretis, "Feminist Genealogies: A Personal Itinerary," Belle van Zuylen lecture, delivered at the University of Utrecht, November 1991 and published in *Women's Studies International Forum* 16, no. 4 (1993): 393–403.

4. Christa Wolf, *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays* (London: Virago, 1984).
5. See Nancy Miller, *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
6. This can also be proved by the number of English translations of Italian feminist works; see for instance Milan Women's Bookshop, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social Symbolic Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, eds., *Italian Feminist Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Paulo Bono and Sandra Kemp, eds., *The Lonely Mirror* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

## 12. Ethics Revisited: Women and/in Philosophy

1. Lisa Alther, *Kinflicks* (New York: Knopf, 1975).
2. *Ibid.* p. 242.
3. *Ibid.* p. 249.
4. Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," New Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis, *SE*, vol. 21, 1932.
5. Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and Its Discontents', *SE*, vol. 21, 1932.
6. Helene Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women* (New York: Grune and Statton, 1945).
7. S. Moller-Okin, "Rousseau's Natural Women," *Journal of Politics*, no. 41 (1979): 393–416.
8. Genevieve Lloyd, "The Man of Reason," *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 1, 1979.
9. M. Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel* (Milan: Rivolta Femminile, 1974).
10. Jean-François Lyotard, "One of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggle," *Substance*, no. 20 (1978): 9–19.
11. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938; reprint, London: Penguin, 1978); *A Room of One's Own* (1928; reprint, London: Penguin, 1974).
12. Jessica Benjamin, "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination," in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, *The Future of Difference* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Barnard Women's College, 1980), pp. 41–70.
13. Luce Irigaray, *L'éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).
14. A. Snitow, C. Stansell, and S. Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).
15. A. Koedt, E. Levine, and A. Rapone, *Radical Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Press, 1973).
16. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).
17. Dorothy Dinerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).
18. E. Person, "Sexuality as the Mainstream of Identity: Psychoanalytic Perspectives," in C. R. Stimpson and E. Person, *Woman, Sex, and Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
19. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will* (London: Penguin, 1975).
20. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

21. Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (New York: Norton, 1979).
22. B. Krueger, *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture* (London: Institute of the Contemporary Arts, 1983).
23. Hélène Cixous, "Rethinking Difference: An Interview," in G. Stambolian and E. Marks, eds., *Homosexualities in French Literature: Cultural Contexts/Critical Texts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).
24. Michel Foucault, *L'histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 80.
25. Michel Foucault, *L'histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 84.
26. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), p. xii.
27. Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: New Left Books, 1975), p. 32.
28. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 437.
29. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 290.
30. Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).
31. Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in H. Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic*, p. 59 (Washington D.C.: Bay Press, 1983).

### 13. The Subject in Feminism

1. The case of Virginia Woolf has been somewhat controversial in feminist scholarship; many feminist scholars have expressed strong criticism of Woolf's relationship to the women's movement. For an interesting assessment of this debate, see Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985); see also Michele Barrett's preface to the edited collection of Woolf's papers, *Women and Writing* (London: The Women's Press, 1982).
2. There has been a great deal of discussion of late over the assessment of Simone de Beauvoir's life and work. Not all of this is exactly of great scholarly significance; in fact, I find that a mixture of malicious gossip and journalistic polemic surrounds Beauvoir's legacy. For a more sober and useful attempt at an evaluation see Michele le Doeuff, *L'étude et le rouet* (Paris: Seuil, 1989). See also the special issue, dedicated to Beauvoir, of *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986).
3. For an excellent exposition of women's cultural and literary traditions, see research done in Utrecht by Maaïke Meijer on women's poetry, *De lust tot lezen* (Amsterdam: van Gennep, 1988). See also the doctoral dissertation of Fokkeliën van Dijk on women's oral literature traditions in biblical texts: "Sporen van vrouwenteksten in de Hebreeuwse bijbel," (Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, Utrecht, 1992).
4. For an enlightening account of the development of this field of studies in the Netherlands, see Margot Brouns, *Veertien jaar vrouwenstudies in Nederland: Een overzicht* (Groningen: RION, 1988); for the United States, the Ford Foundation Report, drafted by Katharine Stimpson and Nina Kressner Cobb, *Women's Studies in the 90s* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1986). For a European overview, see the acts of the conference jointly organized by the journal *Les Cahiers du Griff* and the European Commission in Brussels, February 1988, called *Women's Studies: Concepts and Reality*. For a more methodological introduction, see Glo-

ria Bowles and Renate Duelli-Klein, eds., *Theories of Women's Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1983). For the intersection between sex and gender, see Gloria T. Hull et al., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982).

5. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938; reprint, London: Penguin, 1978), p. 18.
6. Nancy Miller, *Subject to Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
7. The expression occurs in *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), and also in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
8. On feminist epistemology, see Sandra Harding and Merrill P. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality* (Leiden: Reidel, 1983); Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (London: Open University Press, 1986) and *Feminism and Methodology* (London: Open University Press, 1987); see also Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), and *A Feeling for the Organism* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1983). On knowledge and power, see Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, *Feminism and Foucault* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988).
 

Joke Hermsen is currently researching the reception of philosophical ideas in Belle van Zuylen, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Ingeborg Bachmann. Christien Franken analyzes women artists' reception of aesthetic ideas (case studies: Virginia Woolf, Anita Brookner, and A. S. Byatt).
9. Of great significance for this angle of research is the work of feminist film critics, for whom the notion of partial perspectives is very important. Research currently being done on this problem includes work by Anneke Smelik on contemporary women's cinema and feminist film theory, with emphasis on subjectivity and pleasure.
10. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives," *Feminist Studies*, no. 3 (1988).
11. I am using the term *symbolic* here in the traditional structuralist sense, following the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss on structures of myths and, even more important, the work of Jacques Lacan on psychoanalysis and the unconscious. The term *symbolic* has undergone some drastic redefinitions in the hands of feminist theorists. Of special relevance in this respect is the work of Luce Irigaray. For interesting ongoing research on Irigaray, see the forthcoming doctoral dissertation of Anne-Claire Mulder, on the notion of the divine and of incarnation.
12. Especially in her collected essays *In Other Worlds* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
13. The feminist critique of biology has a long tradition, stretching from Evelyn Fox Keller and Donna Haraway, already cited, to Ruth Bleier, *Gender and Science* (New York: Pergamon, 1984); and Ruth Hubbard and Marian Lowe, *Woman's Nature: Rationalizations of Inequality* (London: Pergamon, 1986). Current research in this area in Utrecht includes the doctoral dissertation of Ines Orobio de Castro, on the medical and psychological discourse surrounding transsexualism and the doctoral dissertation of Ineke van Wingerden on the biocultural implications of the medicalization of the aging process in women
14. Of particular importance in this respect is the work of Evelyn Fox Keller, especially *A Feeling for the Organism*. Christien Brouwer is conducting ongoing

research in Utrecht on this area for her doctoral dissertation on the gender-metaphors in the discourse of nineteenth-century plant geography.

15. A great deal of work is being devoted at the moment to assessing the respective and comparative merits of these two schools of thought, from a feminist perspective. As far as the French school is concerned, see my book-length study, *Patterns of Dissonance* (Cambridge: Polity Press/New York: Routledge, 1991). Current doctoral research being conducted in Utrecht, on this topic, includes Denise de Costa's work on the French school, with special emphasis on "*écriture féminine*." For the German tradition, see Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, eds., *Feminism as Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). For an attempt to compare the two theoretical traditions, especially in terms of ethical and political questions, see the important work of Baukje Prins, *Women, Morality and the Problem of Exclusion: A Critical Inquiry into the Ethical Theories of Jürgen Habermas and Nel Noddings*, M.A. thesis, University of Groningen, 1990.
16. Of particular significance to the crisis of the humanities is the impact of discourses such as psychoanalysis and semiotics, as well as the fast-changing scientific paradigms in the fields of physics and the biomedical sciences. For an attempt to restructure the relationship between the humanities and this changing context, see Ilya Progogyne and Isabelle Stengers, *La nouvelle alliance: Métamorphose de la science* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).
17. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, pp. 62–63.
18. The full quotation from Adrienne Rich reads: "There are ways of thinking that we don't yet know about. I take those words to mean that many women are (even now) thinking in ways which traditional intellection denies, or is unable to grasp." *Of Woman Born* (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 192.
19. Teresa de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, p. 9.
20. Teresa Brennan, *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).
21. On this point, praise must be given to the immense effort accomplished by feminist historians in order to unveil and rehabilitate women's history. I cannot praise enough the work of Michelle Perrot, who is a pioneer of women's history in Western Europe. Of special significance is the research currently done by Bertheke Waaldijk in Utrecht, combining women's political and social history with a re-reading of the philosophy of history.

## 14. United States of Europe or United Colors of Benetton?

1. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938; reprint, London: Penguin, 1978).
2. For a lucid analysis of postindustrial production, see Gayatri C. Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
3. Christa Wolf, "Essay I," in *Cassandra* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 268.
4. Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition post-moderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979); *Tombeau de l'intellectuel* (Paris: Galilée, 1984).

5. Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).
6. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
7. See "Women in the Beehive," in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism*, pp. 189–203 (New York: Methuen, 1987). See also Naomi Schor's pertinent reply to this attack in "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," in *differences* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 38–58.
8. For further analysis of the new structure of this kind of "power," see the work of Gilles Deleuze, especially *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980). In a more feminist vein, the work of Donna Haraway on communication techniques is highly relevant; see her "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse," *differences* 1, no. 1 (1989): 3–43, and also "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," *Socialist Review*, no. 80 (1985): 65–107.
9. As an example, the women's studies department of the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands is the coordinating center for an ERASMUS project on women's studies, which has been renamed NOIÛSE (Network of Interdisciplinary Women's Studies in Europe). It has been continuously financed since 1987 by the European community; the participants are women's studies departments from the universities of York (UK); Paris VII (France); Antwerp (Belgium); Bielefeld (Germany); Odense (Denmark); Dublin (Ireland); Bologna (Italy); Madrid (Spain); and Utrecht. Each partner university has a local coordinator responsible for the selection of the students and the financial awards of the grants. The project is interdisciplinary, and it allows students to follow courses in any of the humanities, social sciences, theology, and natural sciences programs available in the partner universities. More than forty students have been circulated through this network, and the results have been most encouraging. The working language is English, with a fairly wide range of accents and idiomatic variations that reflect the mother tongues of the participants. The network, whose coordinator is Christine Rammrath, publishes an Erasmus brochure every year, which outlines all available courses in the partner universities.
10. The Hull-coordinated network specializes in women's literature and involves the following countries: Utrecht (Netherlands); Barcelona (Spain); Bologna (Italy); Bochum (Germany). The Bradford network specializes in feminist issues on health and involves Utrecht (Netherlands); Barcelona (Spain); Cologne (Germany).
11. On this point, see Catharine Stimpson's analysis of the "Americanness" of women's studies in "What Matter Mind: A Theory About the Practice of Women's Studies," in *Where the Meanings Are* (New York: Methuen, 1988), pp. 38–53.
12. M. MacLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); *Understanding Media* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964).
13. This expression is borrowed from H. D., in her book *Her* (London: Virago, 1984).
14. Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas* (London/Boston/Melbourne: Ark Publications, 1982).
15. Many American feminists have commented on this trans-Atlantic connection, especially Alice Jardine and Domna Stanton; see Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, *The Future of Difference* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980).

## 15. Theories of Gender; or, "Language Is a Virus"

1. The expression is a quote from Laurie Anderson, "Language Is a Virus," on the album *Home of the Brave*, WEA 05 75 99254 002.
2. On this point, see my book *Patterns of Dissonance* (Cambridge: Polity Press/New York: Routledge, 1991).
3. One example of this communication blockage was the debate on equality versus difference; another was the never-ending discussion on essentialism. For a lucid discussion of the former, see Joan Scott, "Deconstructing Equality Versus Difference; or, The Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 33–50. On essentialism see Scott's article "The Essential Difference" in the special issue of *differences* 1, no. 2 (1988); see also my entry in Elizabeth Wright, ed., *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (London: Routledge, 1992).
4. See in this respect the new collections of feminist articles on Dutch feminism in English, e.g., Joke Hermsen and Alkaline van Lenning, eds., *Sharing the Difference* (London: Routledge, 1991). See also the collection of texts on Italian feminism: Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, eds., *Italian Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
5. The expression *situated knowledges* is from Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (London: Free Association Books, 1990).
6. I have already expressed my debt of gratitude to Laurie Anderson in "Dies Irae," *Copyright* 1, no. 1 (1987): 119–24.
7. See Jacques Derrida, *Qui a peur de la philosophie?* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979). See also Jean-François Lyotard, *Le postmodernisme expliqué aux enfants* (Paris: Galilée, 1982); "Some of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggles," *Wedge*, no. 6 (1984): 3–12; *La condition post-moderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979). For a feminist reply to Lyotard, see Seyla Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to J. F. Lyotard," in L. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism*, pp. 107–32 (New York: Routledge, 1990).
8. See Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977). See also Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1967).
9. For an illuminating account of this approach, see S. Franklin, C. Lury, and J. Stacey, eds., *Off-Center: Feminism and Cultural Studies* (London: HarperCollins, 1991).
10. Before the poststructuralists, Walter Benjamin had already perfected what is now becoming known as "cultural studies," or the serious analysis of contemporary culture. The revival of Benjamin in scholarship is also linked to the boom of cultural studies in the institutions, especially in the United States.
11. The existentialist prototype, which, it may be worth remembering, is symbolized by Juliette Greco to the same degree, if not more, as by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. For an interesting overview of the question of women in the music entertainment industry, refer to Robyn Archer, *A Star Is Torn* (London:

- Virago, 1986); also Sue Steward and Susan Gardt, *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered* (London: Plute Press, 1984).
12. This point is made strongly by Donna Haraway in her important article on the history of this concept, "Gender for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, pp. 127–48. For a more detailed historical account, see also on this point Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," *Feminist Studies*, no. 1 (1990): 115–50. At the moment critical surveys of the notion of gender seem quite needed in feminist theory.
  13. In *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 22.
  14. For an intelligent and generous criticism of Beauvoir, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, and Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).
  15. Particularly poignant here was the disappointment about and disapproval of Simone Beauvoir by the proponents of "écriture féminine," specially Hélène Cixous.
  16. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 154, n. 34.
  17. See, among others, Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Boston: Kegan Paul & Hall, 1983).
  18. From the "Concert Monologue," from the sound track of the film *The Rose*, WEA 05 7567160 102. For an account of Joplin's life, see Miriam Friedman, *Janis Joplin: Buried Alive* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973).
  19. I have analyzed the paradox of female performers in popular culture, together with Anneke Smelik, in a lecture that she subsequently developed into the article "Carrousel der Seksen," in R. Braidotti, ed., *Een beeld van een vrouw* (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1993).
  20. This is the case not only for Millett and Firestone but also for Grace Atkinson in her classic *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Link Books, 1974.)
  21. For a discussion of the notion of "genealogy," see Luce Irigaray, *Le temps de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1989); see also chapter 13 in this book, "The Subject in Feminism." See also the text of Teresa de Lauretis's inaugural lecture, *Feminist Genealogies*, Utrecht, 1991, reprinted in *Women's Studies International Forum* 16, no. 4 (1993): 393–403.
  22. From the song "Mercedes Benz" on the album *Pearl*, Strong Arm Music/CBS CDC B5 641887.
  23. From the song "Rock'n Roll Nigger" on the album *Easter*, Arista 2C 266; 60561
  24. The expression was coined by Adrienne Rich in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs*, no. 5 (1980): 631–60.
  25. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," in R. Reiter Rapp, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).
  26. Luce Irigaray devotes a brilliant study to this question in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Seuil, 1977). J. J. Goux also studies the analogy between women and money in *Les iconoclastes* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).
  27. Adrienne Rich, "The Politics of Location," *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (London: Virago, 1987). For the impact of black feminism, see Audre Lorde, *Sister Out-*



- sider (New York: Crossing, 1984); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); G. Hull, S. Patricia Bell, and B. Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Men Are Black, but Some of Us Are Brave* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982).
28. From the album *Helen Reddy's Greatest Hits*, Capitol CDP7 46490-2.
  29. See Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression* (London: Hutchinson, 1984); "Pour un féminisme matérialiste," *L'Arc*, no. 61 (1975). See also Monique Plaza, "Pouvoir phallic morphique et psychologie de la femme," *Questions Féministes*, no. 1 (1977); "Nos dommages et leurs intérêts," *Questions Féministes*, no. 3 (1978). See also Monique Wittig, *Le corps lesbien* (Paris: Minuit, 1973); *Les guerrillères* (Paris: Minuit, 1968); "The Straight Mind," *Feminist Issues*, no. 1 (1980): 103-111; "One Is Not Born a Woman," *Feminist Issues*, no. 2 (1981): 47-54.
  30. The movement "écriture féminine" saw creative writers such as Hélène Cixous, Annie Leclerc, Marguerite Duras, and others join hands with theoreticians such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and others, in exploring specific forms of feminine writing, theory, or expression. For a detailed analysis see my *Patterns of Dissonance*.
  31. See especially Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Parthenon, 1988); Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
  32. See Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); *Feminism and Methodology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987).
  33. For a discussion of the impact of the institutionalization of women's studies, see Alice Jardine, "Notes for an Analysis," in Teresa Brennan, ed., *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1989); see also Evelyn Fox Keller and Marianne Hirsch, eds., *Conflicts in Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
  34. From the album *Playing With a Different Sex*, Human Records RR 9994.
  35. See Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
  36. In the paper "The Promises of Monsters," delivered at the graduate school for women's studies, Arts Faculty, Utrecht, October 1990.
  37. The reference is to Madonna's song "Material Girl," from the album *Like a Virgin*, Sire, 925 181-1.
  38. In the chapter "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, pp. 253-64 (New York: Schocken Books, 1968). Here is the crucial extract: "A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is

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- turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress" (pp. 257-58.)
39. Susanne McClary, *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
  40. Anne McCaffrey, *The Ship Who Sang* (New York: Ballantine, 1969).
  41. Laurie Anderson's "The Dream Before," *Strange Angels*, Warner Brothers, 925 900-2.

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