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Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited

Rosi Braidotti

FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP on Irigaray in English is by now a fully developed field and the reception of her work is now fully documented (Chanter, 1995; Whitford, 1991). Yet this philosophy of difference remains marginal and its complexity is often dismissed. In this article I will consequently argue for the relevance and interest of Irigaray's theory of the subject by cross-reading it with Deleuze's nomadology. I will also raise a number of points: first, that although great continuity exists between different moments of her *opus*, Irigaray's work does show an earlier and a later phase. The latter focuses increasingly on the metaphysics of two and the importance of heterosexual love in structuring the social field, the public sphere and hence political life. It displays a narrower focus and a more restrictive definition of differences than the earlier texts, up to and including *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993a).

My work is more closely related to the earlier Irigaray, that is to say a post-structuralist philosopher whose starting premise is the non-unitary vision of the subject. A subject which is definitely not one, but rather multi-layered, interactive and complex. This emphasis on the differences within the subject is the point of departure for the transversal connection that I will draw in this article between sexual difference and philosophical nomadism.

First, however, let me make a number of introductory remarks for the sake of contextualizing this article.

Body Materiality and Sexual Difference

Sexual difference theory is not only a reactive or critical kind of thought, but is also an affirmative one, in that it expresses women's ontological desire, women's structural need to posit themselves as female subjects, that is to

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say, not as disembodied entities but rather as corporeal and consequently sexed beings. Read through the lenses of the 'politics of location', the redefinition of the female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting any universal, neutral and consequently gender-free understanding of human embodiment. The feminism of sexual difference should be read as emphasizing the political importance of desire as opposed to the will, and of stressing its role in the constitution of the subject. Not just libidinal desire, but rather ontological desire, the desire to be, the tendency of the subject to be, the predisposition of the subject towards being.

In this perspective, the subject of feminism is simultaneously sexed and social; s/he is motivated by the political consciousness of inequalities and therefore committed to asserting diversity and difference as a positive and alternative value. The feminist subject of knowledge is an intensive, multiple subject, functioning in a net of interconnections. I would add that it is rhizomatic (that is to say non-unitary, non-linear, web-like), embodied and therefore perfectly artificial; as an artefact it is machinic, complex, endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness in the impersonal mode. It is abstract and perfectly, operationally real, and one of the main fields of operation is sexual difference. The 'feminine' for Irigaray is neither one essentialized entity, nor an immediately accessible one: it is rather a virtual reality, in the sense that it is the effect of a project, a political and conceptual project of transcending the traditional ('molar') subject position of Woman as Other of the Same, so as to express the other of the Other. This transcendence, however, occurs through the flesh, into embodied locations and not in a flight away from them.

As I have often argued (Braidotti, 1991, 1994, 2002) the body, or the embodiment of the subject, is a key term in the feminist struggle for the redefinition of subjectivity. It is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the material social conditions (Braidotti, 1989; Grosz, 1987). As Chanter put it: Irigaray 'brings the body back into play, not as the rock of feminism, but as a mobile set of differences' (1995: 46). The body is then an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed; it's a cultural construction that capitalizes on the energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous and unconscious nature.

Feminist philosophies of sexual difference are historically embedded in the decline and crisis of Western humanism, the critique of phallogocentrism and the crisis of European identity. The philosophical generation that proclaimed the 'death of Man' led to the rejection of humanism and also marked the implosion of the notion of Europe. Especially in her more recent work, Irigaray has also contributed to the dis-assembly of the package of geo-political specificity of Western discourses and of philosophy in particular. The fact that she considers sexual difference as the matrix of power does not mean that she neglects or down-plays other differences. On

the contrary, Irigaray broadens the range of her intervention to cover spatio-temporal coordinates and a number of many constitutive relations, including race and ethnicity and especially religion. The fact that the notion of 'difference' as pejorative goes to the heart of the European history of philosophy and of the 'metaphysical cannibalism' of European thought makes it a foundational concept. It has been colonized by hierarchical and exclusionary ways of thinking, which means that historically it has also played a constitutive role not only in events that Europe can be proud of, such as the Enlightenment, but also in darker chapters of our history, such as in European fascism and colonialism. Because the history of difference in Europe has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, it is a notion for which critical intellectuals since the post-structuralists have chosen to make themselves accountable. Therefore, feminism shares with post-structuralist philosophies not only the sense of a crisis of the Logos, but also the need for renewed conceptual creativity and for politically informed cartographies of the present. One of the aims of feminist practice therefore is to overthrow the pejorative, oppressive connotations that are built not only into the notion of difference, but also into the dialectics of Self and Other. This transmutation of values could lead to the re-assertion of the positivity of difference by enabling a collective re-appraisal of the singularity of each subject in his/her complexity. In other words, the subject of feminism is not Woman as the complementary and specular other of man, but rather a complex and multi-layered embodied subject who has taken her distance from the institution of femininity. 'She' no longer coincides with the disempowered reflection of a dominant subject who casts his masculinity in a universalistic posture. She, in fact, may no longer be a she, but the subject of quite another story: a subject-in-process; a mutant; the other of the Other; a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis.

The quest for a point of exit from phallogocentric definitions of Woman requires a strategy of working-through the images and representations that the (masculine) knowing subject has created of Woman as Other. Irigaray renders this through the strategy of 'mimesis'. It amounts to a collective re-possession of the images and representations of Woman such as they have been coded in language, culture, science, knowledge and discourse and consequently internalized in the heart, mind, body and lived experience of women. A feminist who wishes to repossess and re-invest images and representations of Woman is really dealing with fragments and figments of the phallogocentric imaginary. Irigaray argues that this imaginary needs to be repossessed by women precisely because it is loaded with phallogocentric assumptions that reduce Woman to unrepresentability. Repetitions engender difference, for if there is no symmetry between the sexes, it follows that the feminine as experienced and expressed by women is as yet unrepresented, having been colonized by the male imaginary. Women must therefore speak the feminine, they must think it, write it and represent it in their own terms.

This is the 'virtual feminine' which I set in opposition to *Woman* as Other-than or different-from, that is to say, specularly connected to the same as its devalued Other. Sexual difference as a political practice is constructed in a non-Hegelian framework whereby identity is not postulated in dialectical opposition to a necessarily devalorized other. This definition of the feminist subject as a multiple, complex process is also an attempt to rethink the unity of the subject, without reference to either humanistic beliefs or naive social constructivism. It critiques dualistic oppositions, linking instead body and mind in a new flux of self.

The sexual politics of this project are clear: for Irigaray it is about how to identify and enact points of exit from the universal mode defined by man, towards a radical version of heterosexuality, that is to say, the full recognition of the specificities of each sexed subject position. More specifically, she wonders how to elaborate a site, that is to say, a space and a time, for the irreducibility of sexual difference to express itself, so that the masculine and feminine libidinal economies may coexist in the positive expression of their respective differences. This positivity is both horizontal/terrestrial and vertical/celestial, and it entails the (re)thinking through of gender-specific relations to space, time and the interval between the sexes, so as to avoid polarizing oppositions. Issues of 'other differences', notably religion, nationality, language and ethnicity are crucial to this project, and integral to the task of evolving towards the recognition of the positivity of difference. This aspect of Irigaray's philosophy becomes more prominent in the second phase of her work, as I indicated earlier.

This radically heterosexual project, however, is not heterosexist, nor does it imply the dismissal of homosexual love, although on this point there is a growing disparity between Irigaray's earlier and later work. Elizabeth Grosz, for instance, refers to Irigaray's advocacy of a 'tactical homosexuality modelled on the corporeal relations of the pre-oedipal daughter to the mother' (Grosz, 1994: 338). This mother-daughter bond aims at exploring and reclaiming bodily pleasures and contacts that have been eradicated from their memory. It thus becomes a tool for undoing the Oedipal hold over women and allows them to explore a radically different morphology and narcissism. Concludes Grosz: 'It provides a model of homosexuality not as a substitute for heterosexuality but as its disavowed prerequisite. It makes explicit the intolerable threat of women's desire within a culture founded on its denial' (Grosz, 1994: 338).

In her earlier work, Irigaray is especially keen to prevent the assimilation of female homosexuality into a Phallic mode of dialectical opposition to the other and thus of masculine identification. Nor is she dupe to the illusion that a mere choice of another woman as object of desire is enough to allow a woman to escape from the Phallic clutches. In either case (homo or hetero), Irigaray is not prescriptive – she just emphasizes the need for a space of experimentation by women for their desires and specific sexual morphology. Men are called upon to do the same: to reclaim a non-Phallic sexuality and re-signify their desires. Sexual difference cuts both ways. The

real difference – which produces the ethical passion of 'wonder' (Irigaray, 1993a) – is the escape from sexual sameness, that is, identification with male phallicity. It is precisely this kind of in-depth criticism of the socio-symbolic system based on the Phallic masculine economy of Sameness that connects Irigaray's work to the major thinkers of her generation. Deleuze is the philosopher that I find the closest to the aims and scope of Irigaray's early formulation of a subject that is not One, which I also call 'the virtual feminine'. The differences between these two thinkers, however, are as noteworthy as their similarities.

Juxtaposed to and compared with feminist discussions of sexual difference, Deleuze's work does not rest upon a dichotomous opposition of masculine and feminine subject positions, but rather on a multiplicity of sexed subject positions. The differences in degree between them mark different lines of becoming, in a web of rhizomatic connections. It is a vision of the subject as being endowed with multiple sexualities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 242).

I have often argued that there is an unresolved knot in Deleuze's relation to the becoming-woman and the feminine. It has to do with a double pull that Deleuze never solved and which is closely tied to his interaction with Guattari's work on molecular subjectivity, transversality and schizo-analysis. It is a tension between on the one hand, empowering a generalized 'becoming-woman' as the prerequisite for all other becomings and, on the other, calling for its dismissal. On the one hand, the becoming-minority/Nomad/molecular/bodies-without-organs/woman is based on the feminine, on the other hand it is posited as the general figuration for the kind of subjectivity which Deleuze advocates. Deleuzian becomings emphasize the generative powers of complex and multiple states of transition between the metaphysical anchoring points that are the masculine and feminine. But they do not quite solve the issue of their interaction. Deleuze's work displays a great empathy with the feminist assumption that sexual difference is the primary axis of differentiation and therefore must be given priority. On the other hand, he also displays the tendency to dilute metaphysical difference into a multiple and undifferentiated becoming. In the next section I will explore this tension further.

The Virtual Feminine

I want to argue for a productive cross-over between Irigaray's path-breaking work on affirmative 'mimesis' as a way of empowering new embodied and embedded constructions of the feminine and a more philosophically nomadic approach.

The point of convergence between these two strands of thought – which I consider of the greatest importance for feminist theory – is the quest for points of exit from phallogocentric modes of thought towards a more balanced approach. For Irigaray, the aim of this move is to achieve a more symmetrical representation of the differences both between the sexes and also (especially in the earlier phase of her work) within each category of the sexual

dichotomy. For Deleuze, the aim is, rather, to by-pass the parameters of phallogocentric representation altogether in order to create a new, more intensive image of the thinking subject as the expression of *potentia*, or affirmation.

I think that a combination of these two projects is necessary in order to pursue feminism's unaccomplished task of ensuring equality in and through the respect for difference and for diversity. The post-structuralist philosophers of difference, like Irigaray and Deleuze, offer both continuity with and radical disruption from the psychoanalytic and Marxist conceptual traditions of thinking about the embodied and embedded structures of subjectivity. I find in this philosophical school the roots for a theoretical practice which I describe in terms of 'bodily materialism'. Such a tradition is of the utmost importance in guiding our critical thought through the maze of contradictions that mark the status of bodily matter in the age of bio-power and globalized traffic in living matter of all kinds. This same age operates some dramatic disruptions in the socially received ideas about sexuality, sexed identity and gender roles.

For instance, Camilla Griggers (1997), in her acute and upbeat rendition of 'becoming-woman', looks critically at the construction of femininity and the post-feminist woman in late 20th-century USA as the 'abstract machine' of late capitalist technologies:

Her forms of expression are determined by optical and electronic media, psychopharmacology, the war machine, the chemical industry, plastics technology, bioscience. In this sense, the abstract machine of femininity could not be more real. (Griggers, 1997: ix)

Femininity is caught in the double bind of late postmodernity by being simultaneously 'Other' (of the same) and integrated in the majority. In late post-industrial societies this dominant femininity functions as the site of proliferating and commodified differences.

Deleuze stresses the need for new images for the subject-positions, as well. This results in the elaboration of a set of post-metaphysical 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: figurations such as rhizomes, becomings, lines of escape, flows, relays and bodies-without-organs release and express active states of being, which break through the conventional schemes of theoretical representation.

Alternative figurations of the subject, including different feminine and masculine subject-positions, are figural modes of expression, which displace the vision of consciousness away from phallogocentric premises. Deleuze's central figuration is a general becoming-minority, or becoming-Nomad, or becoming-molecular. The minority marks a crossing or a trajectory; nothing happens at the centre, for Deleuze, but at the periphery there roam the youthful gangs of the new Nomads (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The space of becoming is one of affinity and symbiosis between adjacent particles. Proximity is both a topological and a quantitative notion which

marks the space of becoming of subjects as sensitive matter. The space of becoming is one of dynamic marginality.

Consistent with his critique of the phallogocentric appropriation of symbolic subjectivity, Deleuze agrees with Irigaray that man as the privileged referent of subjectivity, the standard-bearer of the norm/law/logos represents the majority, that is: the dead heart of the system. The consequences are, on the one hand, that masculinity is antithetical to the process of becoming and it can only be the site of deconstruction or critique; on the other hand, the becoming-woman is a fundamental step in the process of becoming, for both sexes.

Deleuze states that all the lines of deterritorialization necessarily go through the stage of 'becoming-woman', which is not just any other form of becoming minority, but rather is the key: the pre-condition and the necessary starting-point for the whole process. The reference to 'woman' in the process of 'becoming-woman', however, does not refer to empirical females, but rather to socio-symbolic constructions, topological positions, degrees and levels of intensity, affective states. On the affirmative side, the becoming-woman is the marker for a general process of transformation: it affirms positive forces and levels of nomadic, rhizomatic consciousness.

That woman occupies a troubled area in the radical critique of phallogocentrism is a well-known tenet of feminist philosophies: in so far as woman is positioned dualistically as the other of this system, she is also annexed to the Phallus, albeit by negation. Deleuze – not uncharacteristically ignorant of the basic feminist epistemological distinction between Woman as representation and women as concrete agents of experience – ends up making analogous distinctions internal to the category of woman herself. From these assumptions, however, he draws damning conclusions for feminist philosophy. At this point his relationship to Irigaray becomes quite paradoxical because Deleuze clearly supports a feminist position:

It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity [. . .]. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 276)

In spite of such evident support for women's uphill struggle towards achieving full subjectivity, with human and citizenship rights, Deleuze, like Derrida and other post-structuralists, opposes to the 'majority/sedentary/molar' vision of woman as the structural operator of the phallogocentric system the woman as 'becoming/minority/molecular/nomadic'. Deleuze argues that all becomings are equal, but some were more equal than others. As against the molar or sedentary vision of woman as an operator of the phallogocentric system, Deleuze proposes the molecular or nomadic woman as process of becoming. In the next few sections I will explore this notion further and attempt an assessment.

In so far as the male/female dichotomy has become the prototype of Western individualism, the process of decolonizing the subject from this dualistic grip requires as its starting point the dissolution of all sexed identities based on the gendered opposition. In this framework, sexual polarizations and gender-dichotomy are rejected as the prototype of the dualistic reduction of difference to a sub-category of Being. Thus, the becoming-woman is necessarily the starting point in so far as the over-emphasis on masculine sexuality, the persistence of sexual dualism and the positioning of woman as the privileged figure of otherness, are constitutive of Western subject-positions. In other words, 'becoming-woman' triggers off the deconstruction of Phallic identity through a set of deconstructive steps that retrace backwards different stages of the historical construction of this and other differences so as to undo them.

Sexuality being the dominant discourse of power in the West, as Foucault taught us (Foucault, 1979, 1981, 1986, 1988),¹ it requires special critical analysis. The generalized becoming-woman is the necessary starting-point for the deconstruction of phallogocentric identities precisely because sexual dualism and its corollary – the positioning of Woman as figure of Otherness – are constitutive of Western thought. More significant still for feminist theory is Deleuze's next step: Deleuze's ultimate aim with respect to sexual difference is to move towards its final overcoming. The nomadic or intensive horizon is a subjectivity 'beyond gender' in the sense of being dispersed, not binary; multiple, not dualistic; interconnected, not dialectical; and in a constant flux, not fixed. This idea is expressed in figurations like: 'polysexuality', the 'molecular woman' and the 'bodies without organs', to which Deleuze's de-Phallic style actively contributes.

Ultimately, what Deleuze finds objectionable in feminist theory is that it perpetuates flat repetitions of dominant values or identities, which it claims to have repossessed dialectically. This amounts to perpetuating reactive, molar or majority-thinking: in Nietzsche's scale of values, feminists have a slave-morality. As an artist put it recently: 'ironic mimesis is not a critique, it is the mentality of a slave' (ICA Inventory, 1999). For Deleuze, 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 which structure her. This new general configuration of the feminine as the post-, or rather un-Oedipal subject of becoming, is explicitly opposed to what Deleuze constructs as the feminist configuration of a new universal based on extreme sexualization or, rather, an exacerbation of the sexual dichotomy.

This position is for me problematic theoretically, because it suggests a symmetry between the sexes, which results in attributing the same psychic, conceptual and deconstructive itineraries to both. Such an alleged symmetry between the sexes is challenged most radically by Irigaray, for

whom sexual difference is a founding, structural difference, which cannot be dissolved easily without causing psychic and social damage. This perspective is determined by Irigaray's acute sense of the historicity of women's struggles. A theory of difference which does not acknowledge sexual difference leaves me as a feminist critic in a state of sceptical perplexity. Or, to put it differently, Deleuze's critique of dualism acts as if sexual differentiation or gender dichotomies did not have as the most immediate and pernicious consequence the positioning of the two sexes in an asymmetrical power relationship to each other.

Deleuze proceeds *as if* there were clear equivalence in the speaking positions of the two sexes: he misses and consequently fails to take into account the central point of the feminist assertion of sexual difference, namely the idea that there is no symmetry between the sexes. Such a dissymmetry functions as a re-vindication of radical difference at the psychic, conceptual but also at the political level. Clearly, this radical dissymmetry has been covered up by being coded as devalorized difference. It has been made to rest on a linear, teleological sense of time. History as we have come to know it is the master discourse of the white, masculine, hegemonic, property-owning subject, who posits his consciousness as synonymous with a universal knowing subject and markets a series of 'others' as his ontological props.

Developing this insight further, I have argued (Braidotti, 1991) that one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted control over; one cannot diffuse a sexuality which 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. I concluded that Deleuze becomes caught in the contradiction of postulating a general 'becoming-woman' which fails to take into account the historical and epistemological specificity of the female feminist standpoint. He gets stuck on a fundamental ambivalence about the position of sexual difference within his own project of 'becoming-woman', which is both one of many possible becomings, and the one through which all other becomings are possible: it is both foundational and accessory, originary and accidental.

I do not mean to suggest, of course, that Deleuze does not have excellent reasons for doing so. Quite to the contrary, as stated earlier, the critique of psychoanalytic discourse, which he shared with Guattari, is a systematic deconstruction of the 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, even the feminine as the eternal other of this system. Nevertheless, in a feminist perspective based on sexual difference, the problems remain.

Moreover, Deleuze is not consistent in thinking through the problem of the 'becoming-woman'; he proceeds rather in a contradictory manner about it. It is the position of 'yes, but . . .', 'I know what you mean, but . . .'; this is the mode of denial, that is to say of wilful disavowal, which expresses

a structural and systematic indecision. A similar naïveté about sexual difference is expressed in *What is Philosophy?*, when Deleuze contemplates the possibility of the crucial conceptual character in philosophy being a woman: 'What might happen if woman herself becomes a philosopher?' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 71). May I be so bold as to venture that only a non-woman would contemplate this possibility as a great novelty, an unprecedented event or a catastrophe internal to the philosophical order and capable of subverting it? Since the 1970s, and especially in French-language cultures, women have been raising exactly this question. They have enacted a collectively driven repossession of the subject-positions by and for politically motivated women. I would expect this rather large corpus of work and experience, which I see as a real symbolic capital of female feminist intelligence, to be taken into account whenever the otherwise politically naive question: 'What happens when women start thinking for themselves?' actually gets asked.

Transformations and Deleuze's processes of becoming cannot be created by sheer volition and are not a matter of judgement and choice. Given the coextensivity of the psychic and the social in the radically immanent theories of the subject defended in different ways by both Deleuze and Irigaray, transformations do not include only 'internalized' reality – that would be a form of narcissism and paranoia. They also include radically de-essentialized forms of embodiment (Deleuze) or strategically re-essentialized embodiments (Irigaray). In any case, becomings or transformations are external and interrelational.

Minorities and Minoritarian Subjects

As an illustration of the general principle of becoming minoritarian, I would paraphrase Griggers (1997) who in turn paraphrases the Chiapas movement and argues that nomadic subjects could be any of the following: gays in Cuba; blacks in South Africa; a Palestinian in Israel; an illegal migrant in the EU; a gang member in any slum of the world's metropolises; a communist in the post-Cold War era; an artist without gallery or portfolio; a pacifist in Bosnia; a housewife alone on Saturday night in *any* neighbourhood in *any* city, in *any* country; a single woman on the metro at 10 p.m.; a peasant without land; an unemployed worker; a dissident amidst free-market fetishists; a writer without books or readers. In other words, the nomadic subject signifies the potential becoming, the opening out, the transformative power of all the exploited, marginalized, oppressed minorities. Just being a minority, however, is not enough: it is only the starting point. What is crucial to becoming-Nomad is undoing the oppositional dualism majority/minority and arousing an affirmative passion for and desire for the transformative flows that destabilize all identities.

The becoming-woman is subversive in that it works actively towards the transformation of the signs, the social practices and the embodied histories of white, institutionalized femininity. A Deleuzian approach calls to relinquish this quest for identity modelled on the molar/sedentary

subject, to activate instead multiple becomings, away from identity. Some of these transitions are happening already in the fact that so many bodies are malfunctioning or ceasing to produce the programmed codes, of which the use of Prozac, the spreading of anorexia and bulimia are clear symptoms. These breakdowns are not enough, however, to disrupt the machine. Griggers is especially intrigued and concerned about the position of the lesbian body in this economy of commodification. For lesbian identity is no exception to the rule of postmodern fragmentation. It is even situated in one of the zones of highest turbulence, at the crest of the wave of exposure and commodification of the sexed body. The proliferation of differences for the sake of the market economy being one of the distinctive traits of post-modernity, lesbianism runs an even higher risk of commodification than other brands of sexuality today. This is made manifest by notions such as the lesbian Phallus, lipstick dykes; lesbian S/M, Phallic lesbian mothers, Madonna's 15-minute burst of fame as Sandra Bernhard's lesbian lover and a general marketing of in-between gender identities in advanced post-industrial societies.

Lesbians are caught in the same historical contradictions as everyone else: they are simultaneously within and without the majority. The lesbian faces the task of assembling disorganized, monstrously hybrid disruptive bodies, while being simultaneously within the system she is trying to subvert.

Becoming-minority is a task *also* for the minorities, who too often tend to be caught in the paralysing gaze of the master – hating him/her and envying him/her at the same time, and getting stuck in patterns of reactive repetition. Becoming nomadic means you learn to reinvent yourself and you desire the self as a process of transformation. It's about the desire *for* change, for flows and shifts of multiple desires. Deleuze is no Romantic. Deleuze's nomadology stresses the need for a change of conceptual schemes altogether. An overcoming of the dialectic of majority/minority or master/slave. Both the majority and the minorities need to untie the knots of envy (negative desire) and domination (dialectics) that bind them so tightly. In this process, they will necessarily follow asymmetrical lines of becoming, given that their starting positions are so different. For the majority, there is no possible becoming, other than in the undoing of its central position altogether. The centre is void, all the action is on the margins.

For real-life minorities, however, the pattern is different: women, blacks, youth, postcolonial subjects, migrants, exiles and homeless may first need to go through a phase of 'identity politics' – of claiming a fixed location. This is both inevitable and necessary because you cannot give up something you have never had. Nor can you dispose nomadically of a subject position that you have never controlled to begin with. I think consequently that the process of becoming-Nomad (-minority, -woman) is internally differentiated and it depends largely on where one starts from. The politics of location is crucial. In other words, heterogeneity is injected into both poles of the dialectical opposition, which gets undone accordingly. The 'molar'

line (that of Being, identity, fixity and *potestas*), and the 'molecular' line (that of becoming, nomadic subjectivity and *potentia*), are absolutely not the same. They are two 'others'. Within phallogocentrism they have been captured in a dualistic mould. They are differentiated by structural inequalities that impose Sameness in a set of hierarchical relations. Deleuze defines the molar/majority as the standard and the molecular/minority as the other in the sense of 'the other of the same'. The central challenge of Deleuze's philosophy, however, is how to undo this dualistic mode and redistribute the power-relations of the two terms. More important than either of them, therefore, is the Line of Flight or of becoming. This is always and only a becoming-minoritarian as in woman/child/animal/imperceptible.

A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self – it's no metaphor. Being nomadic – homeless; a migrant; an exile; a refugee; a Bosnian rape-in-war victim; an itinerant migrant; an illegal immigrant – is no metaphor. Having no passport or having too many of them is neither equivalent nor is it merely metaphorical, as some critics of nomadic subjectivity have suggested (Boer, 1996; Felski, 1997; Gedalof, 1996). These are highly specific geo-political and historical locations: it's history tattooed on your body. One may be empowered or beautified by it, but most people are not; some just die of it. Figurations attempt to draw a cartography of the power relations that define these respective positions. They don't embellish or metaphorize: they just express different socio-economic and symbolic locations. They draw a cartographic map of power relations and thus can also help identify possible sites and strategies of resistance. In other words, the project of finding adequate representations, which was raised to new heights by the post-structuralist generation, is neither a retreat into self-referential textuality, nor is it a form of a-political resignation, as Nussbaum self-righteously argues (1999). Non-linearity and a non-unitary vision of the subject do not necessarily result in either cognitive or moral relativism, let alone social anarchy, as neo-liberals like Nussbaum fear. I rather see them as significant sites for reconfiguring political practice and redefining political subjectivity.

The differences in the starting positions are important in that they mark different qualitative levels of relation. Thus, if one starts from the majority position (the Same) there is only one possible path: through the minority (the Other) – hence the imperative to become woman as the first move in the deterritorialization of the dominant subject (also known as the feminization of Man). For those who start from the position of empirical minorities, on the other hand, more options are open. If the pull towards assimilation or integration into the majority is strong for the minorities (hence the phenomenon of Phallic women), so is the appeal of the lines of escape towards minoritarian becomings. In other words, you can have a becoming-woman that produces Margaret Thatcher and one that produces Kathy Acker: neither of whom is 'feminine' in any conventional sense of the term and yet they are as different from each other as the workhorse is from the racehorse.

What matters to Deleuze is to keep open the process of becoming-minoritarian and not to stop at the dialectical role-reversal that usually sees the former slaves in the position of new masters or the former mistresses in the position of dominatrix. The point is to go beyond the logic of reversibility. This point is especially important for those social subjects – women, black people, postcolonial and other 'others' – who are the carriers of the hopes of the Minorities.

The aim of this affirmative nomadic subjectivity is not only to undo the structures of phallogocentric power, as Irigaray would phrase it, or the voice of the majority, as Deleuze would put it, but also to express and empower constructive alternatives. Whether this is accomplished through the expression of the new 'virtual feminine', or through multiple becoming-minoritarian, this pattern of subversion is open to both the empirical referents of the majority/the Same and to those of the minorities/the others. Both have to relinquish their ties, but they do so in very dissymmetrical ways.

In so far as there is a structural dissymmetry in the starting position of the Same and of his Others, their lines of becoming are suitably discontinuous. In other words, some becomings operate a much-needed dislodgement of dominant subject positions (masculinity, heterosexuality, whiteness, gerontocracy, Euro-centrism in the imperialist mode). Others mark instead the conditions for the affirmation of new subject-positions and thus lay the foundations for possible futures. The difference between the two modes of becoming is not a matter of relativism, but of major power-dissymmetries and hence of structural differences.

The point of the matter is that, whether we like it or not, the historical condition of postmodernity has accelerated the displacement of the key categories of definition of subjectivity. We live in a world where safety and certainty have forever left our lives. This has immediate repercussions for our sense of sexed identity, but not only for that. Contemporary, globalized societies are organized along multiple axes of mobility, circulation, flows of people and of commodities. All that was solid keeps on melting into the ether of the cathodic, digitalized and disembodied Eye/I of the new world order.

Precisely because of the ubiquitous force of lives of displacement, I think it important to rethink embodiment in conjunction with movement; to rethink grounding in relation to nomadic shifts; to rethink a sense of belonging with the paradox of multiple and shifting locations; to rethink Irigaray with Deleuze, but both of them processed by a sobering dose of feminist politics of location. In other words: cartographies of power need to be produced and exchanged discursively.

The differences in degrees, types, kinds and modes of mobility, rootlessness, exile and nomadism need to be mapped out with precision and sensitivity. This cartographic accuracy is made necessary by the fact that nomadism is precisely not a universal metaphor, but rather a generic term of indexation for qualitatively different degrees of access and entitlement to socially empowering (or not) subject-positions in an historical era, for

people who are situated in one of the many poly-located centres which weave together the global economy. Power is the key issue here, and mobility is one of the terms which indexes access to it. Embodied and embedded subject-positions are the key issue at stake.

Alternative Patterns of Desire

In opposition to Irigaray's sexual preference for a radical redefinition of heterosexuality in a non-hierarchical manner, Deleuze and Guattari's work on sexuality offers a more diverse and internally differentiated set of options. This multi-sexual orientation clearly clashes with the metaphysics of the sexual dichotomy masculine/feminine, which Irigaray ends up upholding, albeit in a radical, renewed fashion. Irigaray's Lacanian side remains paradoxically dominant in her thinking about human sexuality.

Essentially, Deleuze and Guattari's case on sexual difference, sexuality and desire is set against Lacan. It rests on what they consider his semi-religious attachment to a concept of desire and lack. This capitalizes on and incorporates, on the one hand, the centuries-old tradition of Christian guilt and, on the other, the Hegelian tendency to define desire as the fulfilment of structural needs which are experienced as omissions and lacks. Both are related to the emphasis psychoanalysis places on 'interiority' as the location of the subject's 'true self'.

If I read this in Spinozist terms, that is to say in terms of affectivity, intensity and speed, psychoanalysis expresses a very negative set of forces: it is the morality of the confession, the priestly or 'pastoral' guidance so dear to Foucault, but distasteful to Deleuze's post-humanist secular mind-set. It smacks of the boudoir, the brothel and the bourgeois drama of the last century. For Deleuze, the same assessment applies to Lacanian psychoanalysis as to the French novel, which is claustrophobic, closeted, closed-in upon itself to the point of a onanistic jubilation and neurotic self-obsession. Flaubert's much-celebrated 'Emma Bovary, c'est moi!', and Sartre's commentary on it, would be perfect examples of what Deleuze has in mind in his criticism. The woman-identified sensibility of this classical writer conveys a sexuality that is simultaneously titillating and denied, exposed and disavowed. It is exemplified by the agony and the ecstasy of Bernini's rendition of Saint Theresa, modelled on the passion of Christ. It infuses the erotic imaginary of the 19th century, where the *Dame aux camélias* (and the cinema version of the same – *Camille* – played by Greta Garbo) embodies the excesses and the virtues of this kind of sexual passion. A passion which, as feminists from Germaine Greer (1999) to Naomi Wolf (1991) have pointed out, is predicated on the ill and decaying body of the 'femme fatale' whose sinfulness and delights turn into the living symbol of the 'fleurs du mal' and the perverse 'jouissance' they engender. This vision of the feminine as a sexualized imaginary is decadent, and as such it is quite mainstream in European culture.

I find in nomadic philosophy the inspiration for an altogether different erotic imaginary, perhaps slightly more cruel, but thankfully more

unsentimental as well. It is less sacrificial and more upbeat because it is turned outwards, not inwards. A more secular approach to intensity and passion, free of the constraints of the confessional and the brothel, and more attuned to the technologically mediated forms of desire that are experienced and experimented with nowadays. This eroticism is cosmic and hints at transcendence, but always through and not away from the flesh.

Desire is for me a material and socially enacted arrangement of conditions that allow for the actualization (that is, the immanent realization) of the affirmative mode of becoming. Desire is active in that it has to do with encounters between multiple forces and the creation of new possibilities of empowerment. It is outward-directed and forward-looking, not indexed upon the past of a memory dominated by phallogocentric self-referentiality. Unconscious processes are central to the discontinuous temporality of this non-unitary subject. The emphasis falls on the non-coincidence of the subject with his/her conscious self. Deleuze proposes instead a multi-layered, dynamic subject that is embodied, but dynamic, corporeal and in-process. It has to be built up over and over again and its expression is therefore concomitant with the constitution of the social field.

A body is, spatially speaking, a slice of forces that have specific qualities, relations, speed and rates of change. Their common denominator is that they are intelligent matter, that is: endowed with the capacity to affect and be affected, to interrelate. Temporally speaking, a body is a portion of living memory that endures by undergoing constant internal modifications following the encounter with other bodies and forces. In both cases, the key point is the embodied subject's capacity for encounters and interrelation. As such, desire and yearning for interconnections with others lie at the heart of Deleuze's vision of subjectivity.

This ontological vision of the primacy of desire, however, is expressed also as a critique of the psychoanalytic reduction of desire to (hetero) sexuality and of both to (preferably reproductive) genital activity. On this point the authors of the *Anti-Oedipus* are quite ruthless: they 'nomadize' desire because they want to free it from the normative cage within which psychoanalysis has enclosed it. Thus, a nomadic or Deleuzian Spinozist approach stresses that the affectivity (*conatus*) is indeed the heart of the subject, but that it is equally the case that this desire is not internalized, but external. It happens in the encounter between different embodied and embedded subjects who are joined in the sameness of the forces that propel them. Intensive, affective, external resonances make desire into a force that propels forward, but also always remains in front of us, as a dynamic, shifting horizon of multiple other encounters, of territorial- and border-crossings of all kinds.

In their appeal to a more positive theory of desire, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the idea of desire as lack reflects the specific historicity and the socio-economic conditions of a moment of capitalist domination. It is historically located and consequently dated. The 19th-century phase of capitalist appropriation through binary opposition having been replaced

with the informatics of domination (Haraway, 1990) and boundary-free flows of capital, a different notion of desire is being enacted today. Deleuze and Guattari want to think and act within the boundaries of the *here and now* and try both to reflect the new historical conditions and to subvert them by disengaging desire from capitalist accumulation. Resting on Nietzsche and Spinoza, Deleuze proclaims a notion of desire that no longer rests on the dualistically split subject of modernity, but rather on the intensive entity that is activated by eternal returns, constant becomings and flows of transformations in response to external promptings, that is to say sets of encounters with multiple others.

Mutant Ninja Barbies: Lesbian Feminist Deleuzians

Feminist theorists have been most receptive to Deleuze's notion of desire and to his critique of psychoanalysis. For instance, in her vehement rejection of sexual difference, Wittig was among the first to call upon Deleuze to defend her politico-epistemological hypothesis of a multiple, lesbian, non-Phallic sexuality. In this perspective, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'polysexuality' is taken as an apology not only for gay and lesbian politics, but also for the seemingly anti-psychoanalytic hypothesis of there being as many sexes as there are individuals.

In her most Deleuzian text, though it singularly lacks all reference to Deleuze's work, Wittig (1982: 111) reiterates her rejection of anything specifically feminine, dismissing it as biologically deterministic and 'naturalistic'. Wittig proposes instead Deleuze's category of minoritarian subject. As we know by now, in order to gain access to this minoritarian position, one has to be a member of a minority, but that alone does not suffice. For instance, a writer like Djuna Barnes is literarily and politically subversive in that, starting from her lesbian existence, she formulates views of general value for all, non-lesbians included. This kind of consciousness is what Wittig wants to defend, against the emphasis on and over-investment of the feminine proposed by the sexual difference theorists.

It seems to me that, although she quotes extensively Deleuze's defence of polysexuality and multiple sexualities, Wittig's line of argumentation is deeply alien to the insights of post-structuralism. What makes it alien is her relationship to language, figurations, affectivity and the unconscious. Judith Butler points out, quite rightly in my opinion, that Deleuze's post-Lacanian reading of the subject as a libidinal entity, situates desire not only as a positive force, but also as the point of vanishing of the wilful conscious self. This is the main reason why Butler disagrees with Deleuze. Butler differs radically, however, from Wittig's pre-psychoanalytic definition of sexuality as 'self-determined articulations of the individual subject' (Butler, 1990: 167), and of desire as the ideological transcription of social codes. Wittig is a humanist who is still caught in the metaphysics of substance. In being so simplistic about the *locus* of social power and so relentlessly dismissive of 'women' as 'female sex', Wittig ends up with a paradoxically *idealist* notion of both 'women', or the female sex, and of sexed identities.

The legacy of Wittig's flirt with a thousand little sexes, or the intersection of a trans-sexual imaginary with Deleuze's theory of desire, proved to be quite a success. It also spelled the end of interest in heterosexuality as a possible field of transformation or becoming. Classified and filed under the somewhat hasty label of hetero-'normativity', the idea of heterosexual desire declined within feminist theory, in favour of either polysexual becomings or different variations around the theme of homosexual or queer desire.

Irigaray's growing dogmatism on this issue did not help to foster a climate of productive dialogue among the different constituencies. The result has been a paradoxical marginalization, in feminist theory, of that very sexual preference which constitutes the majority for the vast majority of women. A re-essentialization of heterosexuality has been one of the worst effects of this new division of labour. Which explains why I never tire of asking the de-bunking question: 'That's all very well, but whatever happened to sexual difference understood as the dissymmetrical power relations between the sexed subjects?'

This question has also been asked in other quarters, where the dialogue between Deleuze, Irigaray and feminism has produced, in my opinion, more creative border-crossings. For instance, Elizabeth Grosz attempts to combine the empowering aspects of psychoanalytically inspired sexual difference theory (Irigaray) with an interest in lesbian desire as a brand of nomadology or becoming-minoritarian of women. A sensualist thinker with a great deal of interest in sexuality, Grosz emphasizes the Deleuzian vision of subjectivity as multiplicity, poly-centredness, collectivity, dynamism and transformation, one that is disengaged from the dialectics of hierarchical ordering and negation. Grosz reads heterosexuality as a compulsory and dominant instance of power – as well as forces like misogyny and homophobia – in terms of molar or majority formations that deny, diminish and humiliate a body's potential to express its intensity, or level and degree of desire. Grosz points to gay and lesbian sexualities as expressions of becoming-minoritarian, which show great promise for the project of dislocating humanistic subjects. What matters is how one lives and renders one's straightness as queer, one's lesbianism as queer. It is the procedural becoming that matters here.

What I find appealing in Grosz is the extent to which she connects her Deleuzian and Irigarayan moments, thus never failing to strike a blow for sexual difference while also shooting it through with nomadic flows. Thus, she reiterates Irigaray's position that female sexuality is the remainder and the 'unrepresentable' within the terms provided by a sexuality that takes itself as straightforwardly being what it is (Grosz, 1995: 222). Far more committed to refiguring queer sexuality than to sexual difference, however, Grosz takes her distance from the psychoanalytic organization of desire around the nucleus of fantasy, and pleads instead for multi-located pleasures. This position echoes Irigaray's reconfiguration of female sexuality as multiple, and complex within itself. Irigaray remains attached to the 'proper' object choice, as well as to the idea of the Symbolic, thus recasting

heterosexuality in a polymorphous mode, whereas queer theory privileges the 'improper' object choice, which it detaches from the Hegelian-linguistic scheme of signification.

Tamsin Lorraine (1999) argues that both Deleuze and Irigaray address that which is unrepresentable within Western philosophy: for Deleuze, a nomadic, fluid notion of thinking that bridges the constitutive gap between mind/body, reason/imagination, being/becoming; for Irigaray, on the other hand, what matters is a fluid, multiple feminine disengaged from the specular logic of masculine/feminine, active/passive, signifying/lacking. I argue that the multi-centred enfolded subject is the site of intersection between philosophical nomadism and sexual difference feminism.

I think that the key road-signs of this intersection are: Deleuze's empirical transcendental and Irigaray's sensible transcendental. They offer the most fruitful border-crossing between their respective systems of thought and their political projects. I would not want to disengage either of them, however, from the politics of location and the specific modes of accountability they propose. In my assessment, Deleuze and Irigaray itemize the enfolded subject and issues of difference in the framework of their vision of philosophy as the cartography of the present. That implies renewed and constant attention to the shifting grounds of socially mediated power-relations. I find in Grosz and others an excessive attention to the embodied issue, to the detriment of the embeddedness of embodied subjects in material, social relations. One of the striking paradoxes of the philosophy of embodiment proposed by Grosz, however, is that it is disembedded from contextual, historical and geo-political concerns. The real groundings of Grosz's thought are textual and, although issues of corporeality are thematically central to her *corpus*, they suffer from a systematic neglect of the geo-politics of their own power-locations. In this sense, I consider Grosz as a utopian writer, caught in the 'no-place' and 'not yet' of post-structuralist theories of difference and quite content with this position.

Conclusion

The becoming-minoritarian/woman of the subject does not stop at the empirical level, but it would rather force a re-alignment of the basic parameters of subjectivity: the power of *potestas* (constraint, negativity, denial) would have to confront the equally powerful power of *potentia* (plenitude, intensity, expression). I find this one of the strongest points of the radical – that is, embedded and embodied – philosophies of immanence I have explored here: the extent to which they resist the separation of self from society, the psychic from its outside, the symbolic from the material. Irigaray's multiple, not-one feminine sexuality and Deleuze's theory of the folded and unfolding intensive subject of becoming constitute a serious challenge to both the liberal vision of the autonomous subject and to the psychoanalytic dialectics of lack, loss and signification. Irigaray and Deleuze, moreover, agree that the very condition of possibility for a separation of the symbolic from the material (the inflated, universalistic posture

that flies into abstraction and leaves the embodied subject gasping for air) – the sheer thinkability of this separation – is the mark of the patriarchal, cash-nexus of power. A new materialist type of politics emerges from this.

The phallogocentric regime cannot be separated from the majority, that is, a material process of masculine colonization of social space. This starts from the theft of the bodies of women and 'others' and their confinement into a binary, Oedipalizing cage of negation. This hyper-inflated masculine colonizes the basic 'symbolic' functions of the West: the religious, military and political structures and segregates them in the Phallic mode. The very idea of a separation of self from society – that is, the separability of material from symbolic forces – is a politically enforced process of dividing and conquering which lies at the heart of the Phallic regime. The problem with liberalism is its undue glorification of the self, given as both centralized, unitary and plural. The problem with psychoanalytic theory on the other hand, is that it fails to acknowledge the political economy of its vision of the subject. Deleuze and Guattari consequently see psychoanalysis as an expression and manifestation of the political economy of capitalist production. As Massumi eloquently put it, the Freudian unconscious is 'an individualization of a despotic political structure (rather than despotism being the result of a projection of a personal unconscious structure)' (Massumi, 1992: 52). Deleuze then goes on to redefine desire as inter-dynamic affectivity that flows in the in-between spaces. Affect, yearning or tendency is 'a self-propelling drive inscribed in matter' (Massumi, 1992: 73). Although on this point Irigaray is closer to Lacan than to Deleuze, in that she respects the notion of the symbolic as the organizer and distributor of significant differences, she still aims to recombine that which patriarchal power had separated, namely the embodied subject from her/his *potentia*, that is, all s/he could become. Irigaray calls for the meltdown of that frozen slab of history that is the patriarchal symbolic and calls for radical re-enfoldings of men and women according to alternative systems which need to be negotiated and collectively applied. All other differences notwithstanding, Irigaray, like Deleuze, has explicitly stated that the production of new desiring subjects requires massive reorganizations and changes in the material fabric of society. This is the kind of radical materialism of the post-structuralist era, which I favour.

Note

1. For a feminist analysis, see Diamond and Quinby (1988) and McNay (1992).

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