

The Many Dimensions of Chinese Feminism
by Ya-chen Chen

Rousseau in Drag: Deconstructing Gender
by Rosanne Terese Kennedy

Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice
edited by Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Söderbäck

UNDUTIFUL DAUGHTERS

New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice

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work, with special attention to the problems of cultural differences, language and representation, embodiment, rights, violence, sexual economics, and political action. By rethinking feminisms' history as well as their present, and by unearthing neglected contributions to feminist theory, this series intends to unlock conversations between feminists and feminisms and to open up feminist theory and practice to new audiences.

—LINDA MARTIN ALCOFF AND GILLIAN HOWIE

PREFACE: THE SOCIETY OF UNDUTIFUL DAUGHTERS

One is not born, one becomes an undutiful daughter. Moreover, and depending on one's theoretical disposition, one can be undutiful to one, three, or a multiplicity of structural and occasional others. Strangely enough, though, it is more difficult and slightly more problematic to be undutiful to two others simultaneously. The oedipal constellation surrounding one's relationship to two others raises issues and contestations of an altogether different order. Let me start therefore by exploring this numerical sequence of self-others relations and the different forms of dutifulness they may engender. It mostly comes down to zeros and ones.

Disloyalty to One is a must for any self-respecting theorist well-read in the classic feminist texts of the second half of the twentieth century. The rule of One—the universalistic standard of the dominant vision of the subject as coinciding with rationality, consciousness, and self-regulating moral agency—has come under fire from the very early days of the second feminist wave right through the successive waves of poststructuralist, postcolonial, punk, queer, and other branches of critical theory. This hegemonic or majoritarian vision of the subject is indexed, as psychoanalysis teaches us, onto a symbolic order that establishes the phallic rule of One—as in the Name-of-the-father—reducing the rest to the status of unrepresentable others; that is to say, to a lack or necessary absence: non-ones.

Marxist dialectics, on the other hand, can enlighten us on the necessary and often violent antagonism that opposes One to constitutive binary others. This scheme structures the triangulation between the self, the oppositional others, and the transcendent breaking point of a new order of relations to come. It also institutionalizes a hierarchical system that defines difference as structural pejoration: to be different from means to be worth less than—that is to say, to settle for the position of One Minus.

Disloyalty to a multiplicity is almost a contradiction in terms and calls for more imaginative forms of sustainable betrayal. As Gilles Deleuze convincingly argues, a nomadic process of becoming de-links difference from both the black hole of symbolic lack and the oppositional dialectics of hierarchical subcategories. It also, however, dissolves any specificity related to actualized identities, thus de-linking One from both transcendent categories and ontological foundations. Nomadism leads to the overcoming of all bounded and steady unitary identities. Multiplicities and process-oriented complex beings frame a conceptual apparatus that aims at freeing difference from negativity and at unfolding its affirmative potential.

Compared to all of the above—that is to say, fractions of One and subtractions of wholes on the one hand, and multiple series on the other—being unfaithful to Two emerges as a singularly difficult challenge. The figure of Two seems to be so systematically de-territorialized that it becomes slippery. Luce Irigaray's work—especially in the second phase, which is devoted to reconfiguring radical heterosexuality—is the most creative contribution to a different relationship to Two—the sexually differentiated yet multiple space of difference.

Thinking about Two rests on what I have called a “virtual feminine,”¹ which I set in opposition to Woman as Other-than or different-from; the second sex of the dominant One, which is specularly connected to the same as its devalued Other. Taking off from Irigaray, as the undutiful daughter I have always been, I have defended sexual difference as a political practice, constructed in a non-Hegelian framework. Rejecting negation, I have nomadized difference, stressing the need to work through many differences between, among, and within women.² Just like Marilyn Frye, I see “differences among women” as being constitutive of the category of sexual difference and not exterior or antithetical to it.³

The sexual politics of this project is clear, albeit complex. For Irigaray, it is about how to identify points of exit from the universal model of Man as the measure of Oneness, toward a radical version of heterosexuality based on the recognition of the specificities of each sexed subject position. More specifically, Irigaray 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 toward the recognition of the positivity of difference.

This radically heterosexual project of rethinking the Two, however, is not heterosexual, nor does it imply the dismissal of homosexual love. Elizabeth Grosz, for instance, refers to Irigaray's advocacy of a “*tactical homosexuality*” modeled on the corporal relations of the precordial daughter to her mother.⁴ This mother-daughter bond aims at exploring and reclaiming bodily pleasures and contacts that have been eradicated from conscious memory. It thus becomes a tool for undoing the oedipal plot and allowing women to experiment with different approaches to their morphology and identity formation.

That this can be empowering for female homosexual identity is explicitly stated by Irigaray. She argues that radical heterosexuality postulates the need for a female homosexual nucleus: a primary homosexual bond that is required to recompose women's primary narcissism after it has been badly wounded by the phallogocentric symbolic. The recovery of primary narcissism is the ontological foundation for this fundamentally political practice of transformation or autopoietic self-assertion.

The other woman—the other of the Other—is the site of recognition of one's effort of becoming in this special sense of in-depth metamorphosis. This primary narcissism must not be confused with secondary narcissistic manifestations—with which women have been richly endowed under patriarchy. Vanity, the love of appearances, the dual burden of narcissism and paranoia are the signs of female objectification under the power (*potestas*) of the One. Nor is it *per se* the prelude to a lesbian position: it simply states the structural significance of love for one's sex, for the sexual same, as a crucial building block for one's sense of self-esteem. Whereas under phallogocentrism, the maternal marks the lack or absence of symbolic recognition, in the “virtual feminine” proposed by Irigaray, it can be turned into an empowering and affirmative gesture. In this respect, Irigaray's Two accomplishes the magical trick of turning non-ones into One-plus or super-ones capable of fecund multiples. We can therefore relax and be dutiful with regard to a virtual feminine as the stepping-stone to a future, multiple Two, while continuing our struggle against maternal despotism and paternal control.

All of the above therefore can provide undutiful daughters with rigorous and gratifying grounds to demonstrate the precise scale and intensity of their transgressive undutifulness. The preliminary conclusion I would draw from this is that, considering the variety of

possible strategies, one actually cannot just become undutiful once and for all. A paradoxical sense of commitment is therefore needed by undutiful daughters in order to actually endure the challenge of their undutifulness. This statement is itself—and rather willfully—loyal to Michel Foucault's analysis of process-oriented relations of power as being both restrictive and productive, positive and negative, *potestas* and *potentia*. Deleuze travels much further down this road and stresses the necessity of pursuing critical theory not as the critique of representation or the struggle for recognition within the logic of Law and Lack, but rather as the actualization of intensities and forces. The point therefore is to practice undutifulness as affirmative politics and to endure in the process.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF DEFAMILIARIZATION

Endurance can be supported by practical strategies. One of the defining features of the undutiful daughters' mind-set is a productive form of conceptual disobedience. Ever since Adrienne Rich defined the feminist project as a way of being disloyal to one's civilization, out of love for that same civilization, the transformative aspects of this project require a radical repositioning on the part of the subject, which is neither self-evident, nor free of pain.⁵ No process of consciousness-raising ever is. Post-structuralist feminism has implemented the methodology of disidentification from familiar and hence comforting values and identities.⁶

Disidentification involves the loss of cherished habits of thought and representation, a move that can be exhilarating in its liberatory side-effects, but that can also produce fear and a sense of insecurity and nostalgia. Change is certainly a painful process, but this does not equate it with suffering, nor does it warrant the politically conservative position that chastises all change as dangerous. The point in stressing the difficulties and pain involved in the quest for transformative processes is rather to raise an awareness of both the complexities involved—the paradoxes that lie in store—and to develop a nomadic "ethics of sustainability."⁷

Changes that affect one's sense of identity are especially delicate. Given that identifications constitute an inner scaffolding that supports one's sense of identity, shifting our imaginary identifications is not as simple as casting away a used garment. Psychoanalysis has taught us that imaginary relocation is as complex and time-consuming as shedding an old skin. Moreover, changes of this qualitative kind happen more easily at the molecular or subjective level and their translation

into a public discourse and shared social experiences is a complex and risk-ridden affair. In a more positive vein, Spinozist feminist political thinkers like Genevieve Lloyd⁸ and Moira Gatens⁹ argue that such socially embedded and historically grounded changes are the result of "collective imaginings"¹⁰—a shared desire for certain transformations to be actualized as a collaborative effort. They are transversal assemblages aimed at the production of affirmative politics and ethical relations.

Let me give you a series of concrete examples of how disidentifications from dominant models of subject-formation can be productive and creative. First of all, feminist theory is based on a radical disengagement from the dominant institutions and representations of femininity and masculinity, in order to enter the process of becoming-minoritarian or of transforming gender. In so doing, feminism combines critique with creation of alternative ways of embodying and experiencing our sexualized selves.

Secondly, in race discourse, the awareness of the persistence of racial discrimination and of white privilege has led to serious disruptions of our accepted views of what constitutes a subject. This has resulted on the one hand in the critical reappraisal of blackness¹¹ and on the other in radical relocations of whiteness.¹² Specifically, I would like to refer to Edgar Morin's account of how he relinquished Marxist cosmopolitanism to embrace a more "humble" perspective as a European.¹³ This process includes both positive and negative affects: disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of Marxism is matched by compassion for the uneasy, struggling, and marginal position of postwar Europe, squashed between the United States and the Soviet Union. This produces a renewed sense of care and accountability that leads Morin to embrace a postnationalistic redefinition of Europe as the site of mediation and transformation of its own history, which I discussed above.

All these disidentifications occur along the axes of becoming-woman (sexualization) and becoming-other (racialization), and hence remain within the confines of anthropomorphism. A more radical shift is therefore needed to break from the latter and develop post-anthropocentric forms of identification. Donna Haraway's work is fundamental in actualizing this shift. My nomadic theory's vital geocentrism—the love of *Zoe*—is a parallel effort in the same direction. Becoming-animal/-earth or becoming-imperceptible are more radical breaks with established patterns of thought (naturalization) and introduce a radically imminent planetary dimension. This anthropological exodus, however, is especially difficult emotionally as well as methodologically. It actually establishes disloyalty to our own human

species as a practical alliance with nonhuman others. All closeted anthropocentric feminists need to come out at this point and express their dutiful adherence to their own species supremacy. The others can move on and run with the she-wolves of nomadic becoming.

The positive benefits aspects of disidentification are epistemological but extend beyond; they include a more adequate cartography of our real-life conditions and hence less pathos-ridden accounts. Becoming free of the *topos* that equates the struggle for identity changes with suffering, results in a more adequate level of self-knowledge. It therefore clears the grounds for more adequate and sustainable relations to the others who are crucial to the transformative project itself.

On the methodological front, de-ocdipalizing the relationship to both human and nonhuman others is a form of radical pacifism that sets strong ethical requirements on the philosophical subject. It locates the core of subjectivity in relationality and collaboration, not in aggressive self-assertion. This requires a form of disidentification from a century-old habit of anthropocentric thought and humanist arrogance. Defamiliarization is a sobering process by which the knowing subject evolves from the normative vision of the self he or she had become accustomed to. The frame of reference becomes the open-ended, inter-relational, multisexed, and trans-species flows of becoming by interaction with multiple others. A subject thus constituted explodes the boundaries of humanism at skin level and turns undutifulness into the generous proliferation of complex, internally contradictory, and productive relations.

Nonhuman others are therefore no longer the signifying system that props up the humans' self-projections and moral aspirations. Nor are they the gatekeepers that trace the liminal positions in between species. They have rather started to function quite literally, in a code system of their own. Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of "becoming-animal" expresses this profound and vital interconnection by positing a qualitative shift of the relationship away from species-ism and toward an ethical appreciation of what bodies (human, animal, others) can do. An ethology of forces emerges as the ethical code that can reconnect humans to nonhumans. De-ocdipalizing the relationship to nonhuman others is a method of defamiliarization that expresses a posthuman bodily materialism and lays the grounds for bio-egalitarian ethics.¹³

ODE TO DOLLY, THE UNDUTIFUL SHEEP

Let's take, for example, Dolly the sheep as the main figuration for becoming-animal as the expression of the perverse temporalities and

contradictions that structure our technological culture. Dolly is that sex which is not one—a collective entity repackaged as a bounded self. She/it is simultaneously the last specimen of her species—descended from the lineage of sheep that were conceived and reproduced as such—and the first specimen of a new species: the electronic and biogenetic sheep that Phillip Dick dreamed of, the forerunner of the android society of *Blade Runner*. Cloned, not conceived sexually, a heterogeneous mix of organism and machine, Dolly simply changes the name of the game. Severed from reproduction and hence divorced from descent, both the gender and the kinship, Dolly is no daughter of any member of her/its old species—simultaneously orphan and mother of her/itself. First of a new gender, she/it is also beyond gender dichotomies. Her undutifulness defeats our powers of comprehension.

A copy made in the absence of one single original, Dolly pushes the logic of the postmodern simulacrum to its ultimate perversion. She/it brings Immaculate Conception into a biogenetic third-century version. The irony reaches a convulsive peak when we remember that Dolly died of a banal and all too familiar disease: rheumatism. After this, to add insult to injury, she suffered a last indignity: taxidermy. She was embalmed and exhibited in a science museum as a scientific rarity (shades of the nineteenth century) and a media celebrity (very twentieth century!). Dolly is simultaneously archaic and hypermodern, she/it is a compound of multiple anachronisms, situated across different chronological axes, she/it inhabits different and self-contradictory time zones. Like other contemporary techno-teratological animals or entities (the onco-mouse comes to mind), Dolly shatters the linearity of time and exists in a continuous present. This techno-electronic timeless time is saturated with asynchronicity—that is to say, it is structurally unhinged.

Thinking about Dolly blurs the categories of thought we have inherited from the past—she/it stretches the longitude and latitude of thought itself, adding depth, intensity, and contradiction. Because she/it embodies complexity—this entity that is no longer an animal but not yet fully a machine, is THE philosophical problem of today.

Like Dolly the sheep, we need to become nobody's mother or daughter—*machines élibérées* (bachelor machines); we must pursue a genealogical line that got us to the point where it is possible for us to think at all. The undutiful antidaughters of unrepresentable mothers and long-dead fathers can mutate into anti-ocdipal agents of complex processes of reconfiguring what bodies can do, what the

task of thinking is, and how we can allow the inhuman elements to emerge productively.

NOMADIC FEMINISMS

In conclusion, undutiful daughters of contemporary cognitive capitalism constitute the political branch of complexity theory: Heterogeneity is injected into their practice from the word go and unitary formations get undone accordingly along the way. The “molar” line (that of Being, identity, fixity, and *potestas*) and the “molecular” line (that of becoming, nomadic subjectivity, and *potentia*) constitute two dissymmetrical paths. The central challenge nomadic feminism faces is how to undo the gravitational pull toward dualistic thinking, so as to redistribute the power relations rhizomatically, asymmetrically, and unpredictably. The differences in the starting positions are important in that they mark different qualitative levels of power relation. In other words, you can have a becoming-woman that produces Lady Thatcher and one that produces Lady Gaga: 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.

The collapse of the empire of One makes it all the more urgent to reassert sexual difference as the privileged principle of alterity, of not-One as constitutive of the subject, and to elaborate nomadic forms of ethical accountability to match it. What is needed is an ethics of embodied differences that can sustain this challenge: an undifferentiated grammar of becoming simply will not do. Not a minus, not a lack, nomadic feminists are complexity in action. What needs to be abandoned once and for all is the delusional fantasy of unity, totality, and One-ness. To recognize this basic, ego-deflating principle is the ground zero of ethical subject formation.

Nomadic subjects are the expression of irrepressible flows of relations and encounters, and hence also affectivity and desire, that they are not in charge of. This humbling experience of radical relationality, which is constitutive of the nonunitary subject, far from opening the doors to relativism, anchors the subject in an ethical bond to alterity, to the multiple and external others that are constitutive of that entity that, out of laziness and habit, we call the “self.” The split, or nonunitary nature of the subject entails the recognition of an affective, interactive entity endowed with intelligent flesh and an embodied mind.

What matters here is to keep open the disloyal 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 dominatrices. The point is to go beyond the logic of reversibility. This is especially important for those social subjects—women, blacks, postcolonial and other “others”—who are the carriers of the hopes of the minorities. The process of becoming nomadic is not merely antiessentialist, but asubjective, beyond received notions of individuality. It is a transpersonal mode, thoroughly undutiful and ultimately collective.

Becoming nomadic unfolds by constructing communities where the notion of transience, of passing, is acknowledged in a sober secular manner that binds us to the multiple “others” in a vital web of complex inter-relation. Kinship systems and social bonding, like political agency, can be rethought differently and differentially, moving away from the blood, earth, and origin of the classical social contract. A nomadic politics of becoming-minoritarian is a posthumanist, vitalist, nonunitarian, and yet accountable recomposition of a missing people. A community not bound together by the guilt of shared violence or by unpayable ontological debts, but rather by the compassionate acknowledgment of our shared need to negotiate processes of sustainable transformations with multiple others in the flow of monstrous energy of a “life” that does not respond to our names.

You can never therefore be fully and self-assuredly undutiful; you can only go on trying to become undutiful. Faithful to the premise that politics begins with our desires and that desires escape us, are always ahead of us in that they are the driving force that propels us, I want to argue that we need to remain loyal to the process of becoming-undutiful. This is the lucid expression of our paradoxical political passion in the peculiar historical context in which we are trying to make a positive difference. Being children of our times—and not born fully clad and armed for combat from our fathers’ head—we are in love with the changes and transformations we have witnessed in our lifetime. Neither nostalgia nor utopia will do. We rather need a leap forward toward a creative reinvention of life-conditions, affectivity, and figurations for the new kind of subjects that we have already become. In the meantime, we need to live with transitions and processes, in-between states and transformations, lingering within complexities and paradoxes, resisting the fear for the imminent catastrophe.

There is consequently little time or space for nostalgia. Deleuze’s hybrid nomadic selves; the multiple feminist-operated becoming-woman of women; Irigaray’s virtual feminine; Haraway’s cyborgs; the overexposed faces of celebrities and the anonymous faceless masses of migrants and asylum-seekers who, not unlike Hélène Cixous’s new Medusa express the transposed differences that constitute our era.

They are often rendered in the old-fashioned social imaginary as monstrous, hybrid, scary deviants. What if what was at fault here, however, was the very social imaginary that can only register changes of this magnitude on the panic-stricken moralistic register of deviancy? What if these unprogrammed-for others were forms of subjectivity that had simply shrugged off the shadow of binary logic and negativity that had moved on? Through becoming-animal, machines, earth—through met(ri)amorphoses and meta(!)morphoses—the process of transformation of the feminist subject goes on. So what if the undutiful nomadic daughters look, feel, and sound a bit unusual? What if their texts are disturbing, challenging, and often too dense for the sedentary reading habits of the majority? There is something monstrous, hybrid, and vibrant in the air, dear readers, I feel new ideas coming our way. We just do not know yet what this new *corpus* can do.

ROSI BRAIDOTTI

NOTES

1. See Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).
2. See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); and *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
3. Marilyn Frye, "The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 21:4 (1996), pp. 991–1010, see especially pp. 1001–1002, 1006–1007.
4. Elizabeth Grosz, "The Herero and the Homo: The Sexual Ethics of Luce Irigaray," in *Engaging With Irigaray*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 338.
5. See Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976).
6. See Joan Kelly, "The Double-Edged Vision of Feminist Theory," *Feminist Studies* 5:1 (1979), pp. 216–227; Teresa De Laurentis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); and Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*.
7. For a more detailed account of this notion, see Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).
8. Genevieve Lloyd, *Part of Nature: Self-knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).
9. Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).
10. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).
11. Yvon Warc, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London and New York: Verso Books, 1992); and Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti, eds., *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies* (London: Zed Books, 2002).
12. See Edgar Morin, *Penser l'Europe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).
13. Keith Ansell Pearson, *Virgoid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).