

Intimate Citizenships

Gender, Sexualities, Politics

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2 Postsecular Feminist Ethics

Rosi Braidotti

The public debate at the end of the postmodernist era shows a decline of interest in politics, whereas discourses about ethics, religious norms, and values triumph. Some master-narratives circulate, which reiterate familiar themes: One is the inevitability of capitalist market economies as the historically dominant form of human progress (Fukuyama, 1989, 2002). Another is a contemporary brand of biological essentialism, under the cover of “the selfish gene” (Dawkins, 1976) and new evolutionary psychology. Yet another resonant refrain is that God is not dead. Nietzsche’s claim rings hollow across the spectrum of contemporary global politics.

In this chapter, I explore the so-called “postsecular” turn from three different angles. The first is the reactive or downright reactionary angle of religious extremism and neoconservative politics. The second concerns a change of emotional temperature, or a new political economy of affects—the pathos of the early third millennium. The third is transformative in that it calls for a postsecular ethics attuned to the complexities and contradictions of our era. After touching briefly on the first two, I will concentrate on the third aspect: the move towards an affirmative postsecular ethics and its implications for feminist politics.

THE REGRESSIVE ASPECTS OF THE POSTSECULAR CONDITION

God is not dead at all. The monotheistic view of the Divine Being merely slipped out the back window during the passionately secularized second half of the 20th century, only to return through the front door, with the clash of civilizations in the third millennium.

The postsecular defined as a neoreligious revival both supports and is enhanced by political restoration. This is clearly evidenced by the militant comeback of Christian and religious activism all over the world, in the public arena, beyond the boundaries of the private spiritual domain. When he was still only Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI had already declared

Nietzsche his own personal enemy. Today, he joins forces with the Evangelical Protestants’ “born again” fanaticism in leveling the charge of moral and cognitive relativism against any project that challenges the traditional, Christian, and humanistic view of the moral subject. This *doxa* or common belief stresses the necessity of strong foundations as the basic points of reference that guarantee human decency, moral and political agency, and ethical probity.

Solidified in these beliefs, the religious hard-line offensive operates a number of disjunctions: It separates women from mothers and rewards the latter, but also subjugates them to the rights of the embryo and the child. It also separates gays from humanity, depriving us of the right to have rights—which is the basic definition of Human Rights. It forcefully collapses human sexuality with reproduction, thereby demonizing all forms of homo and transsexuality. This translates into a campaign against contraception, family planning, and nonmarital sex of all kinds. It also produces the absurd proposal that abstinence is the cure for the HIV epidemic, which is spreading not only in sub-Saharan Africa, as everyone knows—but also in former Eastern Europe and especially the Baltic states, as most choose to ignore. Furthermore, Christian and other religious militants attack contemporary science on two fronts, bio-genetics or genetic technologies and evolutionary theories, to which they oppose contemporary variations on the theme of creationism and obscurantism, disguised as a return to tradition.

The politically conservative return of God, however, is not a linear, but rather a multilayered process, which works by racializing and naturalizing differences, thereby turning them into pillars to support structural inequalities (Braidotti, 2006). Phenomena that entail this degree of complexity cast a methodological challenge for the politically motivated social critic in that they call for nonlinear, intersectional analytic methods to deal with their inherent contradictions. Let me illustrate this with reference to gender. The current political situation positions women’s bodies as markers of authentic cultural and ethnic identity and as indicators of the stage of development of their respective civilization fault lines. Sexual difference has returned on the world stage in a fundamentalist and reactionary version, reinstating a worldview based on colonial lines of demarcation. The dominant discourse nowadays is that “our women” (Western, Christian, white, or “whitened” and raised in the tradition of secular Enlightenment) are already liberated and thus do not need any more social incentives or emancipatory politics. “Their women” (non-Western, non-Christian, mostly not white, and not whitened, as well as alien to the Enlightenment tradition), however, are still backwards and need to be targeted for special emancipatory social actions or even more belligerent forms of enforced “liberation.”

This is the line cynically run by archconservative and antifeminist politicians, like President George W. Bush, to justify their wars on terror through the theory of “Full Spectrum Dominance,” also known as “Project for a New American Century.” Paradoxically enough, the same arguments are

reiterated, with distressing regularity, by their non-Western opponents. This type of polarization results in mutual and respective claims about authentic and unitary female identity on the part of the "liberated" West and of its traditionalist critics. Each fails to take into account the patient and pragmatic work accomplished by the women's movements over the last 30 years, also and especially in the non-Western world.

One can only guess where this play of specular fundamentalisms leaves the sophisticated, feminist theoretical discussions about nonunitary, deconstructive, queer, or nomadic subject positions. Anything related to postmodernist theory or deconstructive methods is a "soft target" for the conservative and religious right and its crusaders. Moreover, the White House wasted no time in declaring, in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center, that academics are the "weak link" in the war against terror, suspected of disloyalty to their culture and lacking patriotism, which leaves the century-old tradition of "academic freedom" in tatters. In such a context, academic debates have become simultaneously less relevant to the public sphere and infinitely more important as a statement of freethinking and a political gesture of resistance.

A NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY OF NEGATIVE PASSIONS

As for the second aspect of the postsecular turn, the affective economy, we now live in a militarized social space, under the pressure of increased enforcement of security and escalating states of emergency. The Cold War doctrine of Mutually Agreed Destruction (MAD) mutated into the global notion of Self-Assured Destruction (SAD). Nuclear paranoia has given way to viral politics, hence the need for total coverage against any eventuality: Accidents are imminent and certain to happen—weapons of mass contamination are in store everywhere, starting from the food we eat. The epidemics or catastrophe will definitely break out; it is only a question of time. Graffiti on the walls of the Tate Modern Gallery, London, says it all: "After Cold War, Global Warning!"

In this context, mass political activism was replaced, especially after September 11, 2001, by public collective mourning. The politics of melancholia became dominant; "after being MAD, we're all SAD," or, as another popular saying goes, "God is dead, Marx is dead and I am not feeling too well myself!"

There is, of course, much to be mournful about, given the pathos of our global politics: our social horizon is war-ridden and death-bound. We live in a culture where religious-minded people kill in the name of "the Right to Life." Moreover, bodily vulnerability is increased by the great epidemics: some new ones, like HIV, Ebola, SARS, or the bird flu; others more traditional, such as TB and malaria. Health has become more than a public policy issue; it is a human rights and a national defense concern.

While new age remedies of all sorts proliferate, our political sensibility has taken a forensic shift: "bare life," as Agamben (1999) argues, marks the liminal grounds of probable destitution—infinite degrees of dying. Hal Foster (1996) describes our schizoid cultural politics as "traumatic realism"—an obsession with wounds, pain, and suffering. Proliferating medical panopticons produce a global patho-graphy (Seltzer, 1997).

Political philosophy reflects this mood—rediscovering with Derrida (2002) the mystical foundations of Law and political authority, or turning towards Schmidt's political theology (Schmidt, 1996), we have definitively moved away from high secularism. I choose to pass on the popularity of Leo Strauss (Norton, 2004) in American neotheological conservative political thought. Now that even Francis Fukuyama has come out as an "ex-neo-con," that seems like yesterday's news.

I do not want to suggest that the politics of mourning and the political economy of melancholia are intrinsically reactive or necessarily negative. A number of critical theorists argue forcefully the case for its productive nature and potential for creating solidarity (Butler, 2004a; Gilroy, 2004). I am also convinced that melancholia expresses a form of loyalty through identification with the wound of others and hence promotes the ecology of belonging by upholding the collective memory of trauma or pain. My argument is rather that the politics of melancholia has become so dominant in our culture that it ends up functioning like a self-fulfilling prophecy, which leaves very small margins for alternative approaches; therefore, I want to argue for the need to experiment with other ethical relations as a way of producing a postsecular ethics of affirmation.

The Feminist Dilemma

The bulk of European feminism is justified in claiming to be secular in the structural sense of the term: to be agnostic if not atheist and to descend from the Enlightenment critique of religious dogma and clerical authority. As the secular daughters of the Enlightenment, raised in rational argumentation and detached self-irony, our belief-system is civic, not theistic. In other words, we have only paradoxes to offer, as Joan Scott (1996) so eloquently put it:

Anticlericalism and critique of the Christian church, especially the dogmatic attitude of the Catholic Church, is an integral element of feminist secularism. Because the idea of a clash of civilization is Islam-phobic in character, it contains an explicit message about the status of women and gays as well as the degrees of tolerable emancipation. Feminists, however, cannot be simply secular, or be secular in a simple or self-evident sense. An automatic and unreflective brand of normative secularism runs the risk of complicity with anti-Islam racism and xenophobia. This position was taken up by significant European feminists, such as Elizabeth Badinter (2002) in France, Ciska Dresselhuys and Ayaan Hirsi Ali in the Netherlands, and

Oriana Fallaci in Italy (2002), often striking a strident and aggressive note. This is an objectionable stance not only because it is racist, but also in terms of its failure to acknowledge the historical specificity of the phenomenon of postsecularism in the world today.

The crisis of secularism amidst both second and third generation Muslim immigrants, as well as born again and born-that-way Christians, is a phenomenon that takes place within the social and political horizon of late globalized postmodernity, not in premodern times. It is of here and now. Even Samuel Huntington (1996) recognizes this important aspect. This means that the feminists' visceral reaction against the postsecular turn is a serious misreading: It is as if some of us had fallen into some bad dreams of our own, as if we were reliving the memories of our own struggles against the Christian and mostly Catholic Church on the back of the Muslim headscarves debate, or the never-ending discussions about the veil. We need to reconsider this.

The fact is that, in spite of our secular claims, if there is one philosopher who has singularly failed to affect European feminism to any significant degree, that would have to be the anti-Christ, Nietzsche. His critique of the Christian God and the obscure power of the Church have somehow fallen on deaf ears, or maybe they were deafened by the excessive noise made around the Nietzsche case in relation to national-socialism and Hitler's misappropriation of the *Übermensch* theory: the post-human man of the postmetaphysical era. It is one of the lasting paradoxes of the history of European philosophy how Nietzsche, the anti-Christian, has been accused of links to Nazism—though he effectively died long before any of that happened—whereas Heidegger, a self-declared and unrepentant Nazi, escaped any serious criticism. But then, the whole chapter of European philosophy's relationship to fascism and the Holocaust is something that nobody seems to want to confront openly.

Many argue that the value-system of European secular Humanism, that is to say respect for Human Rights, the modern notion of equality and democracy, which lie at the core of the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment, is implicitly religious. This position rests on the notion that a secular distillation of Judeo-Christian precepts is responsible for producing the notion of contractual agreements or respect for the law. In turn, this entails regard for the intrinsic worth of the individual person, the autonomy of the self, moral conscience, and the ethics of love. These values promote a teleological or evolutionary vision of the future and faith in human reason's capacity to achieve social progress. As William Connolly (1999) astutely remarked, this specific brand of secularized universalism has passed itself off as the embodiment of secularism, thus achieving absolute moral authority and the social status of a dominant norm.

The extent to which this normative consensus has been shaken is best demonstrated by Habermas himself who, in his conversations with then Cardinal Ratzinger and in his Lodz lecture of April 2005, gave clear

indications that he has fallen into postsecular anxiety. Habermas offers a significant example of the kind of cognitive and moral panic that has seized the humanistic community under the pressure of the clash of civilizations and the current political economy of fear on the one hand and melancholia on the other. Part of this panic is the result of contemporary biotechnological advances. Seldom has the future of human "nature" been the subject of such concern and in-depth discussions by elderly white men as in our globalized times. Habermas coined the term "postsecular societies" to signal the urgency of a critical reconsideration of the function of scientific beliefs and belief-systems in the world today. The mainstream reaction to our biotechnological progress has been a return to Kantian moral universalism. This is extremely influential in feminist theory, notably through the work of Martha Nussbaum (1999, 2006) and Seyla Benhabib (2002).

I wish to take some critical distance from these positions, both conceptually and politically. I will outline the former case in the next section. My political argument rests on a rejection of the mournful discourse about the crisis of humanist values—which paradoxically reverses into a triumphant celebration of humanism. Feminism is not prone to panic attacks, as we are used to living in states of permanent emergency and backlash. What is a crisis for the majority is a great historical opportunity for the marginal. This is politics of locations, not relativism (Braidotti, 2002, 2006).

The system of feminist civic values rests on a social constructivist notion of faith as the hope for the construction of alternative social horizons, new norms, and values. Ultimately, it is a belief in the perfectibility of *Wo/Man*, albeit it in a very grounded, accountable mode that privileges, as Haraway (1988) put it, partial perspectives. To call this position secular is slightly self-congratulatory, though not entirely inaccurate, in that it is an immanent, not transcendental theory, which posits generous bonds of cosmopolitanism, solidarity, and community across locations and generations. I shall return to this in my conclusion.

Faith in social progress and the self-correcting powers of democratic governance is the key idea. Faith itself, however, is the operative concept here. We are confronting today what I would call a postsecular realization that all beliefs are acts of faith, regardless of their propositional content, even or especially when they invoke the superiority of reason, science, and technology. All such systems contain a hard core of spiritual hope: as Lacan put it, if you believe in grammar, you believe in God.

There is a psychoanalytic aspect to this, the awareness of the importance of the emotional, affective, unconscious, and visceral elements of our otherwise rational and discursive belief system (Connolly, 1999). Today, however, psychoanalytic theories are sidelined in social and political philosophy, in favor of a neomaterialist reappraisal of political passions. Contemporary political ontology is Spinozist rather than Freudian-Hegelian. The emphasis falls on positivity and the critique of the negative. The Freudian theory

of libido harnesses the drives back onto a system that equates desire with a dialectical structure of recognition and sameness. This inscribes alterity as a limit or negation at the core of the desiring subject. Desire is deployed along an entropic curve for Freud and equated with lack in Lacan. My argument is that today we are in a position to delink them. Contemporary desire is nomadic, not libidinal; relational, not specular; connective, not dialectical; affirmative, not melancholic. Contemporary desiring subjects are relatively disengaged from a linguistically mediated system of signification. Desire is directed outwards, in flows of multiple relations: Deleuzian rhizomes (1976); Guattari's molecular politics (1984); Negri's multitudes (2004); feminist critiques of scattered hegemonies by Grewal and Kaplan (1994); of diasporic belongings by Avtar Brah (1996); Haraway's cyborgs (1985)—they are all figurations of multilayered relationality. They express the empowering force of transformative processes of becoming: biopower in the sense of vital politics.

The political economy of desire I defend does not condition the emergence of the subject on negation but on creative affirmation, not on "Loss" but on vital generative forces. Nomadic feminist thought imagines a subject whose existence, ethics, and politics are not indexed on negativity and hence on the horizon of alterity and melancholia. Nomadic subjectivity looks for the ways in which otherness prompts, mobilizes, and allows for the affirmation of what is not contained in the present conditions. It is the virtual or incorporeal politics of becoming: the quest for new creative alternatives, the politics of "Life," as in "zoe" itself. This is the third aspect of the postsecular turn, which I want to explore in-depth.

TRANSFORMATIVE OR AFFIRMATIVE ETHICS

The starting point of my case for affirmative ethics is the assumption that the proper object of such enquiry is not the subject's universalist or individualist core, "His" moral intentionality or rational consciousness (the gender is not coincidental), as much as the effects of truth and power that his/her actions are likely to have upon others in the world. This insight is drawn from poststructuralist thought, which prioritizes the ethical relation, rather than the moral essence of the subject. The emphasis on the relation expresses a pragmatic approach, which defines ethics as the practice that cultivates affirmative modes of relation, active forces, and values. The ethical good is that which acts as empowering modes of becoming, whereas morality is the implementation of established protocols and sets of rules (Ansell-Pearson, 1999; Deleuze, 1968).

What this means practically is that the conditions for politics and ethical agency are not dependent on the current state of the terrain; they are not oppositional and thus not tied to the present by negation—but are instead affirmative and geared to creating possible futures. Ethical relations create

possible worlds by mobilizing resources that have been left untapped, including our desires and imagination. They are the driving forces that concretize in actual material relations. They constitute a network, web, or rhizome of interconnection with others. This vision of ethics, inspired by Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, does not restrict the ethical instance within the limits of human otherness, but also opens it up to interrelations with nonhuman, posthuman, and inhuman forces.

This emphasis on nonhuman ethical relations can also be described as an eco-philosophy, in that it emphasizes one's reliance on the environment in the broadest sense of the term. Considering the extent of our technological development, emphasis on the ecology of belonging is not to be mistaken for biological determinism. It rather posits a nature-culture continuum (Haraway, 1997) within which subjects construct multiple relations. I also refer to this ethics in terms of social sustainability (Braidotti, 2006), although I cannot pursue this argument further here. According to this ethical approach, the practice or the pragmatics of ethical relations are essential. We need to create the conditions for the emergence of affirmative relations, by cultivating relational ethics of becoming.

Contrary to the Hegelian tradition—which is strong in psychoanalysis as in deconstruction—alterity is not a structural limit but rather the condition of expression of positive (i.e., nonreactive alternatives). The other is a threshold of transformative encounters. The "difference" expressed by subjects especially positioned as "other-than," that is to say always already different from, has a potential for transformative or creative becoming. This "difference" is not an essential given, but a project and a process that is ethically coded.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POSTSECULAR FEMINIST ETHICS

My position in favor of complexity promotes consequently a triple shift. First, it continues to emphasize the radical ethics of transformation in opposition to the moral protocols of Kantian universalism. Second, it shifts the focus from unitary rationality-driven consciousness to a process of ontology, that is to say a vision of subjectivity propelled by affects and relations. Third, it disengages the emergence of the subject from the logic of negation and attaches subjectivity to affirmative otherness—reciprocity as creation, not as the re-cognition of Sameness. In the rest of this section, I will concentrate on this third aspect: affirmation, or the critique of the negative. This will lead me to discuss affirmation as the politics of life itself, as "zoe," or generative force.

Let me start with an example. Otherness in our culture has historically functioned as the site of deprecation or negativity. Difference is postulated on a hierarchical scale that opposes it to the vision of "Subjectivity" as "Sameness." The subject is expected to be the same as a number of assumed

values. In our culture, these values are framed with reference to humanist ideals, which equate the subject with rationality, consciousness, and moral and cognitive universalism. This vision of the "knowing subject"—or the "Man" of humanism—posits itself as much by what it includes within the circle of his entitlements, as in what it excludes. Otherness is excluded by definition. This makes the others into structural or constitutive elements of the subject: the other functions as a negatively framed fraction of the same. The others play an important—albeit specular—role in the definition of the norm, the normal, the norm-active view of the subject.

These others are: the sexualized other, also known as women, gays, and transsex; the ethnic, native, or racialized others; and the natural, animal, and environmental others. They constitute the interconnected facets of structural otherness, which are constructed as excluded. To say that the structural others reemerge with a vengeance in postmodernity amounts to making otherness not into the site of negation, but rather into polyvalent sites of affirmation.

For example, it is a historical fact that the great emancipatory movements of postmodernity are driven and fuelled by the emergent "others": the women's and gay rights movement; the antiracism and decolonization movements; the antinuclear and proenvironment movements, animal rights included; are the voices of the structural "Others" of modernity. They also mark the crisis of the former "center" or dominant subject. In the language of philosophical nomadology, they express both the crisis of the majority and the patterns of becoming of the minorities.

A postsecular ethics for a nonunitary subject based on "Life" as "zoe" proposes an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the nonhuman or "earth" others. This practice of relating to others requires and is enhanced by the rejection of self-centered individualism. It implies a new way of combining self-interest with the well being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one's territorial or inhuman (i.e., environmental) interconnections. It is an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings for subjects constituted in and by multiplicity, which stands in open disagreement with dominant Kantian morality and its feminist components.

This also affects the question of universal values. An ethics of affirmation is capable of a universalistic reach, though it is critical of moral universalism. It expresses a grounded, partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality, and hence community building. There is a simple sense in which, as I argued earlier, contemporary biogenetic capitalism generates a global form of mutual interdependence of all living organisms, including, but not only humans. This sort of unity tends to be of the negative kind, as a shared form of vulnerability. Biotechnological advances like the Human Genome project, for instance, unify all human species in the urgency to oppose commercially owned and profit-minded technologies. Franklin, Lury, and Stacey refer to this situation as "pan humanity" (2000, p. 26), that is to say a *ethos* sense of intercon-

nection between the human and the nonhuman environment in the face of common threats. Again, notice the force of the negative here, but affirmation, as usual, is just around the corner.

The positive elements are twofold. First, the global recontextualization induced by the market economy also produces a sense of interconnection. Second, the renewed sense of interconnection produces the need for an ethics. The fact that "we" are in *this* together results in a renewed claim to community and belonging by singular subjects, who have taken critical distance from individualism. Far from falling into moral relativism, this results in a proliferation of locally situated micro-universalist claims.

One evident and illuminating example of this is the brand of situated cosmopolitan neohumanism that has emerged as a powerful ethical claim in the work of postcolonial and race theorists, as well as in feminist ones. Examples are: Paul Gilroy's *planetary cosmopolitanism* (2000); Avtar Brah's *diasporic ethics* (1996); Edouard Glissant's *politics of relations* (1997); Ernesto Laclau's *micro-universal claims* (1995); Homi Bhabha's "subaltern secularism" (1994); and Vandana Shiva's *antiglobal neohumanism* (1997) as well as the rising wave of interest in African humanism or Ubuntu, from Patricia Hill Collins (1991) to Drucilla Cornell (2004). American black feminist theory has been postsecular for a long time, as bell hooks (1990) and Cornell West (1994) *demonstrate*.

Edward Said (1978) was among the first to alert critical theorists in the West to the need to develop a reasoned account of Enlightenment-based secular humanism, which would take into consideration the colonial experience, its violent abuses and structural injustice, as well as its aftermath existence. French poststructuralist philosophers also argued that in the aftermath of colonialism, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and the Gulag—to mention but a few of the horrors of modern history—we Europeans need to develop a critique of Europe's illusion of grandeur in positing ourselves as the moral guardian of the world and motor of human evolution. This line is pursued in philosophy by Deleuze's rejection of the transcendental vision of the subject (1968); Irigaray's decentering of phallogocentrism (1974); Foucault's critique of humanism (1975); and Derrida's deconstruction of Eurocentrism (1997).

The anihumanism of social and cultural critics within a Western post-structuralist perspective can therefore be read alongside the cosmopolitan neohumanism of contemporary race, postcolonial, or non-Western critics. Both these positions, all other differences notwithstanding, produce inclusive alternatives to humanist individualism. Without wishing to flatten out structural differences, nor drawing easy analogies between them, I want to practice the politics of location and hence try to synchronize their efforts and tune their respective political aims and passions. It is an example of an encounter with otherness as a generative or affirmative force. Biocentered, egalitarian posthumanism on the one hand and non-Western neohumanism on the other transpose hybridity, nomadism, diasporas, and creolization

processes into means of regrounding claims to connections and alliances among different constituencies. This allows them to . . .

... STEP TOWARD AN ETHICS OF AFFIRMATION

About Pain and Vulnerability

The ethics of affirmation, with its emphasis on "Life" as a generative force, may seem counterintuitive at first. Yet, the urge that prompts this approach is anything but abstract. It is born of the awareness that in-depth transformations are at best demanding and at worst painful. My political generation, that of the baby-boomers, has had to come to terms with this harsh reality, which put a check on the intense and often fatal impatience that characterizes those who yearn for change. We may all be human, but some are definitely more mortal than others. We lost so many of our specimen to dead-end experiments of the existential, political, sexual, narcotic, or technological kind and to the inertia of the *status quo*—also known as the "Stepford wives' syndrome!"

This is not a complaint, nor is it meant as a deterrent against change. I consider melancholic states and the rhetoric of the lament as integral to the logic of advanced capitalism and hence as a dominant ideology. Many leading intellectuals specialize in and profit from this genre. Our conservative political context, moreover, has placed undue emphasis on the risks involved in change, playing *ad nauseam* the refrain about the death of transformative processes. Nothing could be further removed from my project. I simply want to issue a cautionary note: Processes of change and transformation are so important and ever so vital and necessary, that they have to be handled with care. We have to take the pain of change into account, not as an obstacle to, but as a major incentive for, an ethics of transformations.

Let us us talk about pain for a moment. In our culture it is associated with suffering by force of habit and tradition and accordingly is given negative connotations. Suppose we look a bit more critically into this associative link, however; negative affects, such as suffering, envy, and anger tell us that our subjectivity consists of affectivity, interrelationality, and forces. The core of the subject is affect and the capacity for interrelations to affect and to be affected. Let us agree to depsychologize this discussion from this moment on, not in order to deny the pain, but rather to find ways of working through it.

If we assume the affective core of subjectivity, for instance with Spinoza's theory of *conatus* or active desire for empowerment, then the aim of ethics becomes the expression of the active or productive nature of desire. It then follows that affirmative politics is not about an oppositional strategy; it is not another discourse about storming the Bastille of phallocentrism or undoing the winner's palace of gender. Diverse human multitudes

micropolitical practices of daily activism or interventions in and on the world we inhabit for ourselves and for future generations. If this is the aim, then what happens to that traditional association between pain and suffering? More specifically, how do we assess the pain linked to political processes of change and transformation?

We need to delink pain from suffering and rethink its role in constituting ethical relations. Transformative ethics involves a radical repositioning on the part of the knowing subject, which is neither simple, self-evident, nor free of pain. No process of consciousness-raising ever is. In feminist theory over the last 30 years we have explored this issue from the initial slogan "the personal is the political," through the politics of location (Rich, 1987) to the multiple situated perspectives of today. Feminist theory is double-edged and involves both critique and creativity. In poststructuralist feminism, this has also been discussed in terms of disidentifying ourselves from familiar and hence comforting values and identities (Braidotti, 1994; De Lauretis, 1986).

Disidentification involves the loss of cherished habits of thought and representation, which can produce fear, sense of insecurity, and nostalgia. Change is certainly a painful process. If it were not, more people might actually be tempted to try it out. This does not, however, equate it with suffering and hence acquire necessarily negative connotations. To believe this would be a politically conservative position. The point in stressing the difficulties and pain involved in the quest for transformative ethics and politics is to raise an awareness of both the complexities involved and the paradoxes that lie in store.

Changes that affect a person's sense of identity are especially delicate. Given that identifications constitute an inner scaffolding that supports such identity, shifting our imaginary identifications is not as simple as casting away a used garment. Psychoanalysis taught us that imaginary relocations are complex and as 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. Spinozist feminist political thinkers like Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens (1999) argue that such socially embedded and historically grounded changes are the result of "collective imaginings"—a shared desire for certain transformations to be actualized.

Let me give you a series of concrete examples of how disidentifications from dominant models of subject-formation can be productive and creative events. First of all, feminist theory is based on a radical disengagement from the dominant institutions and representations of femininity and masculinity, designed 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. In spite of masculine media hegemony and the pervasiveness of traditional representations, the

credible evidence among European women of a nostalgic desire to return to traditional gender and sex roles.

Second, 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 blackness (Gilroy, 200; Hill Collins, 1991) and on the other in radical relocations of whiteness (Griffin & Braidotti, 2002; Ware, 1992). Finally, 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 (1987). 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 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. 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 (Balibar, 2002).

Beneficial or positive aspects balance the negative aspects of the process. The benefits are epistemological but extend beyond this; they include a more adequate cartography of our real-life conditions and hence less pathos-ridden accounts. Becoming free of the topoi that equates pain with suffering and links in-depth change to the latter results in a more adequate level of self-knowledge. It enhances the lucidity of our assessments and therefore clears the grounds for more adequate and sustainable relations. This means that the emphasis commonly placed on the force of the negative is out of balance and needs to be reconsidered.

ON AFFIRMATION

In order to understand the kind of transmutation of values I am defending here, it is important to depsychologize this discussion about pain and approach it instead in more conceptual terms. We can then see how common and familiar this concept actually is. The distinction between good and evil is replaced by that between affirmation and negation, or positive and negative affects.

What is positive in the ethics of affirmation is the belief that negative affects can be transformed. This implies a dynamic view of all affects, even those that freeze us in pain, horror, or mourning. The slightly depersonalizing effect of the negative or traumatic event involves a loss of ego-indexes perception, which allows for energetic forms of reaction. Clinical psychological research on trauma testifies to this, but I cannot pursue this angle here. Diasporic subjects of all kinds express the same insight. Multilocality is the affirmative translation of this negative sense of loss. Following Glissant

of the pain of loss into the active production of multiple forms of belonging and complex allegiances. Every event contains within it the potential for being overcome and overtaken—its negative charge can be transposed. The moment of the actualization is also the moment of its neutralization. The ethical subject is the one with the ability to grasp the freedom to depersonalize the event and transform its negative charge.

Affirmative ethics puts the motion back into e-motion and the active back into activism, introducing movement, process, becoming. This shift makes all the difference to the patterns of repetition of negative emotions.

What is unfavorable about negative affects is not a normative value judgment but rather the effect of arrest, blockage, and rigidification, which comes as the result of a blow, a shock, an act of violence, betrayal, a trauma, or just intense boredom. Negative passions do not merely destroy the self, but also harm its capacity to relate to others, both human and nonhuman, and thus to grow in and through others. Such affects diminish our capacity to express the high levels of interdependence, the vital reliance on others that is the key to both a nonunitary vision of the subject and to affirmative ethics. Again, the vitalist notion of "Life" as "zoe" is important here because it stresses that the "Life" I inhabit is not mine; it does not bear my name—it is a generative force of becoming, of individuation, and differentiation.

What is negated by negative passions is the power of life itself, as the dynamic force, its vital flows of connections and becoming. This is why they should neither be encouraged nor should we be rewarded for lingering around them too long. Negative passions are black holes.

This is an antithesis of the Kantian moral imperative to avoid pain, or to view it as the obstacle to moral behavior. Postsecular affirmative ethics is not about the avoidance of pain, but rather about transcending the resignation and passivity that ensue from being hurt, lost, and dispossessed. One has to become ethical, as opposed to applying moral rules and protocols as a form of self-protection.

Taking pain into account is the starting point, the aim of the process; however, there also exists the quest for ways of overcoming the effects of passivity, the paralysis brought about by pain. The internal disarray, fracture, and pain are also the conditions of possibility for ethical transformation. The qualitative leap through and across pain is the gesture that actualizes affirmative ways of becoming. This is a gesture, which constructs hope as a social project.

It is those who have already cracked up a bit, those who have suffered pain and injury, who are better placed to take the lead in the process of ethical transformation. Their "better quality" consists not in the fact of having been wounded, but of having gone through the pain. Because they are already on the other side of some existential divide, they are anomalous in some positive way. They are a site of value transposition. Marxist epistemology and postcolonial and feminist standpoint theory have always acknowledged the privileged knowing position of those in the "margins."

The figure of Nelson Mandela—a contemporary secular saint—comes to mind, as does the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a world-historical phenomenon in postapartheid South Africa. This is a case of repetition that engenders difference and does not install the eternal return of revenge and negative affects, a massive exercise in transformation of negativity into something more sustainable, more life enhancing. Endurance is the Spinozist code word for this process. Endurance has a spatial side to do with the space of the body as an enfleshed field of actualization of passions or forces. It evolves affectivity and joy, as in the capacity for being affected by these forces, to the point of pain or extreme pleasure. Endurance indicates the struggle to sustain the pain without being annihilated by it.

Endurance also has a temporal dimension, duration in time. This is linked to memory: Intense pain, a wrong, a betrayal, a wound are hard to forget. The traumatic impact of painful events fixes them in a rigid, eternal present tense, out of which it is difficult to emerge. This is the eternal return of that which precisely cannot be endured and, as such, returns exactly in the mode of the unwanted, the untimely, the unassimilated or inappropriate/d. They are also, however, paradoxically difficult to remember, insofar as to do so entails retrieval and repetition of the pain itself.

Psychoanalysis, of course, has been here before (Laplanche, 1976). The notion of the return of the repressed is the key to the logic of unconscious remembrance, but it is a secret and somewhat invisible key, which condenses space into the spasm of the symptom and time into a short-circuit that mines the very thinkability of the present. Kristeva's notion of the abject (1980) expresses clearly the temporality involved in psychoanalysis—by stressing the structural function played by the negative, by the incomprehensible, the unthinkable, the other of understandable knowledge.

Deleuze calls this alterity "Chaos" and, as I indicated earlier, he defines it positively as the virtual formation of all possible form. Lacan, however, and Derrida with him I would argue, defines "Chaos" epistemologically as that which precedes form, structure, language. This makes for two radically divergent conceptions of time, and—more importantly for me today—of negativity. What which is incomprehensible for Lacan—following Hegel—is the virtual for Deleuze, following Spinoza, Bergson, and Leibniz. This produces a number of significant shifts: from negative to affirmative affects; from entropic to generative desire; from incomprehensible to virtual events to be actualized; from constitutive outsiders to a geometry of affects that require mutual synchronization; from a melancholy and split to an open-ended web-like subject; and from the epistemological to the ontological turn in poststructuralist philosophy.

Nietzsche also has been here before, of course. The eternal return in Nietzsche is the repetition, not in the compulsive mode of neurosis nor in the negative erasure that marks the traumatic event. It is the eternal return of and as positivity (Ansell-Pearson, 1999). In a nomadic Deleuzian-Nietzschean perspective, ethics is essentially about transformation of negative into posi-

tive passions (i.e., moving beyond the pain). This does not mean denying the pain, but rather activating it, working it through. Again, the positivity here is not supposed to indicate a facile optimism or a careless dismissal of human suffering. It involves compassionate witnessing of the pain of others, as Zygmunt Bauman (1993) and Susan Sontag (2003) point out—in the mode of empathic copresence.

THE QUESTION OF LIMITS

I end this section with the suggestion that one of the reasons why the negative associations linked to pain, especially in relation to political processes of change, is ideologically laden, in that it fits in with the logic of claims and compensations, which is central to advanced capitalism. This is a form of institutionalized management of the negative, something that also has become quite common in gender and antiracism politics.

Consequently, two more problematic aspects need to be raised. The first is that our culture tends to glorify pain by equating it with suffering, thus promoting an ideology of compensation. Contemporary culture has encouraged and rewarded a public morality based on the twin principles of claims and compensation, as if legal and financial settlements could constitute the answer to the injury suffered, the pain endured, and the long-lasting effects of the injustice. Cases that exemplify this trend are remuneration for the Shoah in the sense of restitution of stolen property, artworks, and bank deposits; similar demands have been made by the descendants of slaves forcefully removed from Africa North America (Gilroy, 2000) and more recently for damages caused by Soviet communism, notably the confiscation of properties across eastern Europe, both from Jews and others. A great deal of contemporary mainstream feminism has also moved in this direction. This fact makes affirmative ethics of transformation into a struggle against the mainstream. It also makes it appear more counterintuitive than it actually is.

The second problem is the force of habit. Starting from the assumption that a subject is a sedimentation of established habits, these can be seen as patterns of repetitions that consolidate modes of relation and forces of interaction. Habits are the structure within which nonunitary or complex subjects get reterritorialized, albeit temporarily. One of the established habits in our culture is to frame "pain" within a discourse and social practice of suffering, which requires rightful compensation.

Equally strong is the urge to understand and empathize with pain. People go to great lengths in order to ease it completely. Great distress follows from not knowing or not being able to articulate the source of one's suffering, or from knowing it all too well, all the time. The yearning for solace, closure, and justice is understandable and worthy of respect.

This ethical dilemma was already posed by J. F. Lyotard (1983) and, much earlier, by Primo Levi about the survivors of Nazi concentration camps; the kind of vulnerability we humans experience in face of events on the scale of small or high horror is something for which no adequate compensation is even thinkable. It is just incommensurable: a hurt, or wound, beyond repair. This means that the notion of justice in the sense of a logic of rights and reparation is not applicable. For the poststructuralist Lyotard, ethics consists in accepting the impossibility of adequate compensation—and living with the open wound.

This is the road to an ethics of affirmation, which respects the pain but suspends the quest for both claims and compensation and resists the logic of retribution of rights. This is achieved through a sort of depersonalization of the event, which is the ultimate ethical challenge. The displacement of the “zoe”—indexed reaction reveals the fundamental meaninglessness of the hurt, the injustice, or injury one has suffered. “Why me?” is the refrain most commonly heard in situations of extreme distress. This expresses rage as well as anguish at one’s ill fate. The answer is plain: actually, for no reason at all. Examples of this are the banality of evil in large-scale genocides like the Holocaust (Arendt, 1963), the randomness of surviving them. There is something intrinsically senseless about the pain, hurt, or injustice: Lives are lost or saved for all and no reason at all. Why did some go to work in the World Trade Center on 9/11 while others missed the train? Why did Frida Kahlo take that tram, which crashed so that she was impaled by a metal rod, and not the next one?—for no reason at all. Reason has nothing to do with it. That is precisely the point. We need to delink pain from the quest for meaning and move beyond, to the next stage. That is the transformation of negative into positive passions.

This is not fatalism, and even less resignation, but rather Nietzschean ethics of overturning the negative. Let us call it *amor fati*; we have to be worthy of what happens to us and rework it within an ethics of relation. Of course, repugnant and unbearable events do happen. Ethics consists, however, in reworking these events in the direction of positive relations. This is not carelessness or lack of compassion, but rather a form of lucidity, which acknowledges the meaninglessness of pain and the futility of compensation. It also reasserts that the ethical instance is not that of retaliation or compensation, but rather rests on active transformation of the negative.

This requires a double shift. First, the affect itself moves from the frozen or reactive effect of pain to proactive affirmation of its generative potential. Second, the line of questioning also changes from the quest for the origin or source to a process of elaboration of the questions that express and enhance a subject’s capacity to achieve freedom through the understanding of its limits.

What is an adequate ethical question? It is one that is capable of sustaining the subject in his/her quest for more interrelations with others (i.e., more “Life,” motion, change, and transformation). It provides the subject with a frame for interaction and change. *growth and movement. It affirms life as*

difference-at-work. An ethical question had to be adequate in relation to how much a body can take. How much can an embodied entity tolerate in the mode of interrelations and connections (i.e., how much freedom of action can we endure)? Affirmative ethics assumes, following Nietzsche, that humanity does not stem out of freedom but rather that freedom is extracted out of the awareness of limitations. Postsecular ethics is about freedom from the burden of negativity, freedom through the understanding of our bondage.

THE QUESTION OF OTHERNESS AS TRANSFORMATIVE ETHICS

The relationship to “others” is set in a different frame of reference, which redefines the question of limits. These are corporeal and materially grounded conditions; this means that they cannot be reduced to linguistic forms of mediation or representation. By moving away from the human emphasis on speech and actions to allow for events that do not yet have governing conditions, I want to defend the vital politics of life as posthuman becoming. This postsecular ethics expresses a mode of engagement that does not tie conditions of possibility to negation but rather to creation, not the dialectics of “Lack” and recognition of sameness, but the affirmation of otherness as a horizon of creative becoming. It is crucial to keep in mind the vital politics of life itself, which means external nonhuman relations as a point of reference. The “others” in question here are nonanthropomorphic and include planetary forces. This runs against the humanistic tradition of making the anthropocentric “Other” into the privileged site and inescapable horizon of otherness.

This is a point of major difference between nomadic philosophy and a number of Continental philosophers, like Jessica Benjamin (1988) in her radicalization of Frigary’s notion of “horizontal transcendence”, Lyotard in the “differed” (1983) and his notion of the “unatoned”, and Butler (2004a) in her emphasis on “precarious life.” To pursue my dialogue with Judith Butler on this point (Braidotti, 2002; Butler, 2004b), given that we express different branches of the poststructuralist tradition, let me expand this to a discussion of the role of the other’s face in our respective philosophies. On the one hand you can approach otherness as the expression of a limit—albeit a negotiable one—which calls for an always already compromised set of negotiations. This is the function of the other’s face in Levinas’ (1999) and, by extension, Derrida’s ethics. On the other hand, you can look, as I stated earlier, for the ways in which it prompts, mobilizes, and allows for flows of affirmation of values and forces, which are not yet sustained by the current conditions. That is affirmative ethics.

I should add for the sake of scholarly accuracy that Levinas’ case is complex, as there are significant resonances between his notion of passivity and Deleuze’s affirmation. Levinas’ brand of immanence, however, differs considerably from Deleuze’s life-oriented philosophy of becoming. Levinas—

like Irigaray—inscribes the totality of the “Self’s” reliance on the other as a structural necessity that transcends the “I” but remains internal to it. Deleuze’s immanence, on the other hand, firmly locates the affirmation in the exteriority, the cruel, messy outside-ness of “Life” itself. Creative chaos is not chaotic—it is the virtual formation of *all possible forms* (Deleuze, 1969). Life is not an a priori that gets individuated in single instances, but is immanent to and thus coincides with its multiple material actualizations. It is the site of birth and emergence of the new—life itself. I refer to this generative force as “zoe,” which is the opposite therefore of Agamben’s “bare life”—in that it is a creative force that constructs possible futures.

Moral reasoning locates the constitution of subjectivity in the interrelation to others, which is a form of exposure, availability, and vulnerability. This recognition entails the necessity of containing the other, the suffering, and the enjoyment of others.

I want to argue instead that an embodied and connecting containment as a moral category can also emerge from the radical redefinition of the same-other relation by the vital politics of life itself, as external and non-human forces: cells, as Franklin (2000) argues; viruses and bacteria, as Luciana Parisi (2004) points out; and earth others, as Bryld and Lykke have been arguing for a long time (1999). This posthuman ethics assumes as the point of reference not the individual, but the relation. This means openness to others, in the positive sense of affecting and being affected by others, through couples and mutually dependent correalities. Containment of the other occurs through interrelational affectivity. This displaces the grounds on which Kantian negotiations of limits can take place. The imperative not to do onto others what you would not want done to you is not rejected as much as enlarged. In affirmative ethics, the harm you do to others is immediately reflected in the harm you do to yourself, in terms of loss of *potentia*, positivity, capacity to relate, and hence freedom.

Biocentered egalitarianism breaks the expectation of mutual reciprocity, which is central not only to liberal individualism, but also to poststructuralist ethics of otherness. Accepting the impossibility of mutual recognition and replacing it with one of mutual specification and codependence is what is at stake in postsecular affirmative ethics. The ethical process of transforming negative into positive passions introduces time and motion into the frozen enclosure of seething pain. It is a postsecularist gesture of affirmation of hope, in the sense of creating the conditions for endurance and hence a sustainable future.

THE CASE OF INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

The last aspect of the postsecular ethics of affirmation I spell out is generational time-lines—in the sense of the construction of social horizons of hope (i.e., sustainable futures).

Modernity, as an ideology of progress, postulated boundless faith in the future as the ultimate destination of the human. Zygmunt Bauman quotes one of my favorite writers, Diderot, who stated that modern man is in love with posterity. Postmodernity, however, is death-bound and sets as its horizon the globalization process in terms of technological and economic interdependence. Capitalism has no built-in teleological purpose, historical logic, or structure, but is rather a self-imploding system, which would not stop at anything in order to fulfill its aim: profit. This inherently self-destructive system feeds on and thus destroys the very conditions of its survival; it is omnivorous and what it ultimately eats is the future itself.

Being nothing more than this all-consuming entropic energy, capitalism lacks the ability to create anything new: It can merely promote the recycling of spent hopes, repackaged in the rhetorical frame of the “next generation of gadgets.” Affirmative ethics expresses the desire to endure in time and thus clashes with the deadly spin of the present.

The future today is no longer the self-projection of the modernist subject: Eve and the New Jerusalem. It is a basic and rather humble act of faith in the possibility of endurance, as duration or continuity, which honors our obligation to the generations to come. It involves the virtual unfolding of the affirmative aspect of what we managed to actualize here and now. Virtual futures grow out of sustainable presents and vice versa. This is how qualitative transformations can be actualized and transmitted along the genetic/time line. Transformative postsecular ethics affirmatively takes on the future, as the shared collective imagining that goes on becoming, to effect multiple modes of interaction with heterogeneous others. Futurity is made of this. Nonlinear evolution is an ethics that moves away from the paradigm of reciprocity, the logic of recognition and installs a rhizomic relation of mutual affirmation.

By targeting those who come after us as the rightful ethical interlocutors and assessors of our own actions, we are taking seriously the implications of our own situated position. This form of intergenerational justice is crucial. This point about intergenerational fairness need not, however, be expressed or conceptualized in the social imaginary as an Oedipal narrative. To be concerned about the future need not result in linearity (i.e., in restating the unity of space and time as the horizon of subjectivity). On the contrary, nonlinear genealogical models of intergenerational decency are a way of displacing the Oedipal hierarchy.

They involve a becoming-minoritarian of not only the elderly, senior, and parental figures, but also the de-Oedipalization of the bond of the young to those who preceded them. It calls for new ways of addressing and solving intergenerational conflicts—other than envy and rivalry, joining forces across the generational divide by working together towards sustainable futures and practising an ethics of nonreciprocity in the pursuit of affirmation.

An example: The older feminists may feel the cruel pinch of aging, but some of the young ones suffer from 1970s envy. The middle-aged survivors

of the second wave may feel like war veterans, or survivors, but some of generation Y, as Iris v.d. Tuin taught me, call themselves "born again baby boomers!" So who's envying whom?

We are in *this* together, indeed. Those who go through life under the sign of the desire for change need accelerations that jolt them out of set habits; political thinkers of the postsecular era need to be visionary, prophetic, and upbeat—insofar as they are passionately committed to writing the prehistory of the future (i.e., to introduce change in the present, so as to affect multiple modes of belonging through complex and heterogeneous relations). This is the horizon of sustainable futures.

Hope is a sort of "dreaming forward"; it is an anticipatory virtue that permeates our lives and activates them. It is a powerful motivating force grounded in our collective imaginings, indeed. They express very grounded concerns for the multitude of "anybody" (*homo tantum*) who composes the human community, lest our greed and selfishness destroy or diminish it for generations to come. Given that posterity per definition can never pay us back, this gesture is perfectly gratuitous.

Against the general lethargy, the rhetoric of selfish genes, and possessive individualism on the one hand, and the dominant ideology of the melancholic lament on the other, hope rests with an affirmative ethics of sustainable futures. There is a deep and careless generosity, the ethics of nonprofit at an ontological level.

Why should one pursue this project? For no reason at all. Reason has nothing to do with this. Let us just do it for the hell of it and love of the world.

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3 Return of Men's Narratives and the Vicious Circle of Gender Play

Marek Wojtaszek

Thinking is not a cognitive means for us; it is to categorize events, order them, facilitate their use; thus we think of thinking today—tomorrow we might think differently.

Friedrich Nietzsche

It is not difference which presupposes opposition but opposition which presupposes difference, and far from resolving difference by tracing it back to a foundation, opposition betrays and distorts it.

Gilles Deleuze

... The proper task of men who intend to deconstruct phallic premises should be to speak as singular men, not as representatives of Mankind, and develop new way of thinking masculinity.

Rosi Braidotti

RETURN OF GENDERED NARRATIVES

At the twilight of postmodernism, one can observe far from unprecedented and unanticipated rebirth and activation of divergent social groups and movements, globally conceived of as "minorities," cartographically pushed to the margins of society (materialism) and ideologically interred under the monument of dominant culture (idealism): Maghrebian immigrants in France, lesbians and homosexuals in Poland, immigrants in the United States, and urban violence, to name just a few. This return of the repressed, social ideological forces appears to coincide with the resurgence of powerful conservative doctrines (neoco conservatism, essentialism, new spiritualism) and theories as a reaction to the former. These universalizing and regulatory, thus unifying and oppressive, narratives are best depicted by Jean François Lyotard in his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. He defines what he calls "meta-narratives" as systems that endeavor to explain cultural phenomena in terms of a single overarching principle, the quest for ultimate truth and order in human experience (Lyotard, 1993, p. 72). Significantly, both Lyotard and other postmodern authors (e.g., Henry