

THE FUTURE OF FLESH:
A CULTURAL SURVEY
OF THE BODY

Edited by

*Zoe Detsi-Diamanti,
Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou,
and
Effie Yiannopoulou*

palgrave
macmillan

META(L) FLESH

Rosi Braidotti

INTRODUCTION

Defining the Parameters

A commitment to critical theory may be seen as an addiction like any other. Contrary to most, however, it meets with a relatively high level of social approval. It is even tinged with a touch of intellectual prestige, which is the kind of prerogative mostly reserved nowadays for nonprofit activities. One such is philosophy, commonly understood as the gratuitous display of the human predisposition for mental restlessness. Intelligence, after all, is that peculiar human talent that can be described as a practice of suspicion of and chronic discontent with the obvious and the banal. Critical theory is a stubborn and proud addiction to this practice.

The challenges are not slight. If the only constant at the dawn of the third millennium is change, then, how to think about processes, rather than concepts, is a rude necessity that stares us in our critical eyes. It's difficult—accustomed as we are to thinking within the protocols of theoretical reason and the conventions that are the norm in social and political thought. In spite of the sustained efforts of many radical critics, the mental habit of linearity and objectivity persists in its hegemonic hold over our thinking. Thinking through flows and interconnections remains a difficult challenge, although most of us already inhabit a social world structured by flows and webs of connection. It is difficult to change one's acquired habits—they are so addictive!

An addiction is a sediment habit that is structurally necessary to one's survival. It involves modes of relation to the external objects or activities that constitute the habit, and therefore it constructs moods of positive reliance upon, or empathic resonance with, them. This need not be an entirely anthropocentric exercise. For example, critical theorists may value some of their books more highly than some of their human siblings, but this reliance upon language, as well as to writing technologies—from the pencil to the palm computer—is both intense and expansive. This type of addictive activity spins the web of restless meanderings on the part of questioning bodily

entities known as subjects. Yet it also stabilizes their patterns of motion, expansion, and stillness in a regular sequence that can be sustainable, or at least temporarily so. Such is the power of thought.

Feminism is critical theory at its most paradigmatic, that is to say additive. It shares with contemporary philosophies the critique of the delusions of grandeur of the subject that insists on believing that it coincides with consciousness, thus rationalizing *His* logocentrism. Feminist theory also embraces enthusiastically the call for more conceptual creativity, more imagination and courage in designing adequate and informed cartographies of the present. One of the specific aims of feminist practice is to overthrow the pejorative connotations that are built into the notion of difference and also into the dialectics of self and other. This faith in the possibility of such transmutations of values leads one to reassert the positivity of difference defined as the project enabling a collective reappraisal of the singularity of each subject in his/her complexity. In other words, the subject of feminism is not *Woman* as the complementary and specular other of *Man* but rather a complex and multilayered embodied subject that has taken her distance from the institutions of femininity and of masculinity, unhinging them both. "She" no longer coincides with the disempowered projections of a dominant subject who reflects the unwanted aspects of his masculinity by casting them upon her in a universalistic posture of appropriation. She, in fact, may no longer be a she at all, but rather the subject of quite another story: a subject-in-process, a mutant, the other of the Other, a promising monster,¹ a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis. In short, a virtual feminine. The feminist subject of knowledge is intensive, multiple, and it functions in a net of interconnections. It is rhizomatic, which means it is non-unitary, nomadic, nonlinear, weblike, embodied, and therefore perfectly artificial. As an artifact this subject is machinic, complex, and thus endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness in the impersonal mode. It is abstract and perfectly, operationally, real. One of the main fields in which it operates is the metaphysically founded institution of sexual difference, which is not, however, immune from the flows of transformation that define our historicity.

This "intensive" reading of feminist theory expresses a non-unitary, nomadic subject that is opposed to classical humanism, or liberal notions of the individual, but also to facile postmodern celebrations of fragmentation for its own sake. In opposition to the urge to complete the loss of specification or marking of the subject, this position expresses also my desire to defend the relevance of that historically obsolete institution known as the "feminine." My position is aligned with a philosophical vision of materialism defined as the mindless vitality of embodied matter or enfolded locations in a fundamentally restless mode.

Politics begins with our passions. Feminism, like all critical theories, can express affirmative forces and thus liberate in those who partake of it a yearning for freedom, dignity, justice, lightness, and joyfulness. These values can

also be translated both into dogmatic gloom and into rational beliefs and policies. They form in any case a substratum of affect that activates the movement in the first place. One must avoid the deadly serious revolutionary zeal of *dogma* and *doxa* joining forces within the gravitational pull of a new normative order. If politics begins with our passions, then what I yearn for is the gay knowledge of an affirmative critical movement: I want to put the "active" back into activism.

The embodied structure of the subject is a key term understood as a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic, and the material social conditions. The body is an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed; it is a cultural construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous, and affective or unconscious nature. This vision of the body contains sexuality as a process and as a constitutive element.

Being embodied means being in and of sexualized matter. This sexual fiber is intrinsically and multiply connected to social and political relations; it is anything but an individualistic entity. Sexuality is simultaneously the most intimate and the most external, socially driven, power-drenched practice of the self. As a social, symbolic, material, and semiotic institution, sexuality is singled out as the primary location of power in a complex manner that encompasses both macro and micro relations. Sexual difference, the sexualized bipolarity, is another word for power in both the negative or repressive (*potestas*) and the positive or empowering (*potentia*) meaning of the term.

Bodies-in-Space

Even the most convinced social constructivists today argue that the performances of bodies cannot be ascribed exclusively to the social codes or to symbolic and imaginary orders—nor can they be read back into the Holy Scriptures of the DNA Scrolls. Both "nature" and "the body" are slippery categories—they tend to slide toward essentialism; get caught into positivist reductions, or in their opposite: new-age naive celebrations. In the age of the politics of biodiversity, the interdependence of the natural and the social needs to be explored outside classical, dualistic habits of thought. I prefer a deeply embedded vision of the embodied subject. In the light of contemporary genetics and molecular biology, it is more than feasible to speak of the body as a complex system of self-sustaining forces. The DNA and the cells communicate effectively with each other, transferring vital information. In terms of biodiversity, we humans are actively and destructively involved in manipulating our environment. Neurosciences have increased our understanding of memory and the extent to which the storage and retrieval of information is essential to the progress of the self. This is evidence that can no longer be ignored by critical, Left-leaning intellectuals. Nor need it be left to the delusions of grandeur of professional scientists and their industrial, financial backers.

The body remains a bundle of contradictions: it is a zoological entity, a genetic data bank, while it also remains a biosocial entity, that is to say a slab of codified, personalized memories. As such, it is part animal and part machine; however, the dualistic opposition of the two, which our culture has adopted since the eighteenth century as the dominant model, is inadequate today. Contemporary science and technology in fact have reached right into the most intimate layers of the living organism and the structures of the self, dissolving boundaries that had been established by centuries of humanistic thinking. This means that we can now think of the body as an entity that inhabits different time zones simultaneously, and is animated by different speeds and a variety of internal and external clocks that do not necessarily coincide. It's a body in process.

I am defending here a radically materialist, antiessentialist vitalism attuned to the technological era, which could not be further removed from the illusion of wilful disembodiment that is promised by the contemporary technological culture or cyborg imaginary. Deleuze's enflashed, vitalistic but not essentialistic vision of the subject is a self-sustainable one, which owes a great deal to the project of an ecology of the self. As I argued earlier,² the rhythm, speed and sequencing of the affects as well as the selection of the forces are crucial to the process of becoming. It is the pattern of reoccurrence of these changes that marks the successive steps in the process, thus allowing for the actualization of forces that are apt to frame and thus express the singularity of the subject. What I want to argue, however, is that thinking through the body and not in a flight from it means confronting boundaries and limitations.

The subject, in my view, lies at the intersections with external, relational forces. It's about assemblages. Encountering them is almost a matter for geography: it's a question of orientations, points of entry and exit, a constant unfolding. In this field of transformative forces, sustainability is a very concrete practice—not the abstract ideal that some of our development and social-planning specialists often reduce it to. It is a basic concept about the embodied and embedded nature of the subject. The sensibility to and availability for changes or transformation are directly proportional to the subject's ability to sustain the shifts without cracking. The border, the framing, or containing practices are crucial to the whole operation, one that aims at affirmative and not dissipative processes of becoming—joyful-becoming (*potentia*)—as a radically ontological force of empowerment.

Genevieve Lloyd's remarkable study of Spinoza is helpful in explaining how such a vitalistic and positive vision of the subject is linked to an ethics of passion that aims at joy and not at destruction. If this is the case, the composition of the forces that propel the subject, the rhythm, speed, and sequencing of the affects as well as the selection of the constitutive elements are the key processes. It is the orchestrated repetition and reoccurrence of these changes that marks the steps in the process of becoming-intensive. In other words, the actualization of a field of forces, argues Lloyd, is the effect of an adequate dosage, while it is also, and simultaneously, the prerequisite for sustaining those same forces.

Lloyd argues that Spinoza's treatment of the mind as part of nature is a source of inspiration for contemporary environmental ethics. Especially in Deleuze's rendition, Spinozist monism acts: "As a basis for developing a broader concept of ethology, a study of relations of individual and collective and being affected."³ Lloyd carefully points out the difficulties involved in approaching Spinoza's concept of ethics as "the collective powers and affinities of bodies,"⁴ except in terms of the ethology proposed by Deleuze. Both thinkers stand at odds with the mainstream of Western philosophy. I do think it important, however, to stress that sustainability is not so much about animal ethics or deep ecology as it is about decentering anthropocentrism. The notion of sustainability as a concept in the social and human sciences (and thus not only in the field of development and economics) attempts to reach a dual aim. On one hand it emphasizes the importance of change, transformation, and empowering growth. On the other, however, it combines these factors with an ethical concern for enduring and balanced models and speeds of transformation. As an ethical criterion, sustainability provides a differential answer to Deleuze's question: "how much can a body take?" As such, it paves the way for a Spinozist, positive ethics of forces and changes. The ultimate implication is a displacement of the human in the new, complex compound that is nomadic subjectivity. The notion of sustainability brings together ethical, epistemological, and political concerns under the cover of a non-unitary vision of the subject. In so doing, I intend both to respond to the anti-post-structuralist critics who consider the unitary subject as the necessary precondition for moral and political agency and also wish to expound further on the ethical underpinnings of philosophical nomadism.

Thinking the unity of body and mind with Spinoza, Deleuze stresses the power (*potentia*) of affects (*affectus*). Starting from the assumption that the property of substance is to express itself, the term "expression" implies "dynamic articulation"⁵ and not merely passive reflection.

Affectus refers to the passage from one state to another in the affected body—the increase or decrease in its powers of acting.⁶

This "power of acting" is expressed by Spinoza in terms of achieving freedom through an adequate understanding of our passions and, consequently, of our bondage. Coming into possession of freedom requires the understanding of affects or passions by a mind that is always already embodied. The desire to reach an adequate understanding of one's *potentia* is the human being's fundamental desire or *conatus*.

Reason is affective, embodied, dynamic; understanding the passions is our way of experiencing them and making them work in our favor. In this respect Spinoza argues that desires arise from our passions. Because of this, they can never be excessive—given that affectivity is the power that activates our body and makes it want to act. Human nature has, for Spinoza, inbuilt control mechanisms that prevent it from becoming self-destructive. The human being's inbuilt tendency is toward joy and self-expression, not toward

implosion. This fundamental positivity is the key to Deleuze's attachment to Spinoza. Clearly, this is a very nonmoralistic understanding of ethics, which focuses on the subject's powers to act and to express their dynamic and positive essence. It is an ethology, that is, a field of composition of forces.

I would synthesize Lloyd and Deleuze's reappraisal of Spinoza into the concept of a sustainable self that aims at endurance. Endurance has a temporal dimension: it has to do with lasting in time—hence duration and self-perpetuation (traces of Bergson here). But it also has a spatial side to do with the space of the body as an enfolded field of actualization of passions or forces. It involves affectivity and joy (traces of Spinoza), as in the capacity for being affected by these forces, to the point of pain or extreme pleasure—which comes to the same; it means putting up with and tolerating hardship and physical pain. Apart from providing the key to an etiology of forces, endurance is also an ethical principle of affirmation of the positivity of the intensive subject, its joyful affirmation as *potentia*. The subject is a spatiotemporal compound that frames the boundaries of processes of becoming. This works by transforming negative passions into positive passions through the power of an understanding that is no longer indexed upon a phallogocentric set of standards but is rather unhinged and affective.

This sort of turning of the tide of negativity is the transformative process of achieving freedom of understanding, through the awareness of our limits, of our bondage. This results in the freedom to affirm one's *potentia* or joy through encounters and minglings with other bodies, entities, beings, and forces. And yet, the indicators are not all positive. Millions of women throughout the advanced world are on Prozac or other mood-enhancement drugs. The hidden epidemic of anorexia-bulimia continues to strike one-third of the females in the opulent world. Killer-diseases today don't include only the great exterminators, such as cancer and AIDS, but also the return of traditional diseases that we thought we had conquered, such as malaria and tuberculosis. Our immunity system has readjusted to the antibiotics and we're vulnerable again. There is no question that what we still go on calling—somewhat nostalgically—"our bodies, ourselves" are abstract technological constructs fully immersed in advanced psychopharmacology chemical industry, bioscience, and the electronic media. What is equally clear for me is that we need to be vigilant. The techno-hype is over and we need to assess more lucidly the price that we are paying for being so "high tech." We got our prosthetic promises of perfectibility. Now, let's hand over our pound of flesh, shall we?

Bodies-in-Time

From the spatial angle, a body is an enfolded mass of forces with specific qualities, relations, speeds, and intensities, which is to say that a body is intelligent matter endowed with the capacity to be affected and to affect and thus to interrelate. Temporally speaking, on the other hand, a body is an enfolded memory, that is, an organism that endures and lasts—albeit

temporarily—by undergoing constant internal modifications following the encounter with other bodies and forces. The key terms are affectivity and interrelation. A body is an entity that yearns for, and thus actively desires, encounters and interrelations with others.

This nomadic vision of desire as the positive longing for inner connections goes beyond the psychoanalytic idea of desire as lack, but it also avoids the normative mode in which it is often defined in philosophical thought. Affectivity is the heart of the subject and this desire to be moved by others is external: it happens in encounters with different bodies and forces, which propel the subject forward toward a dynamic horizon of shifting and multiple encounters.

Being-in-time means essentially being or subject of/in memories. Remembering is about repetition and the retrieval of information. In the human subject, such information is stored throughout the physical experimental structure of the embodied self and not only in the “black box” of the psyche. It’s the whole body that functions as a slab of enfleshed genealogy. Remembering requires composition, selection, and dosage. Like a choreography of flows or intensities that require adequate framing in order to compose into a form of their own, memories coalesce through empathy and cohesion between their constitutive elements. Memories materialize like a quest for temporary moments, when an affective balance can be sustained, before the forces dissolve again and move on. And it goes on, never equal to itself but faithful enough to itself to endure and to pass on.

Memory is fluid and flowing, it opens up unexpected or virtual possibilities, and it is transgressive in that it works against the programmes of the dominant memory-system. This continuous memory is, however, not necessarily or inevitably linked to “real” experience. Against the authority of “experience” and the extent to which the appeal to experience both confirms and perpetuates the belief in steady and unitary identity, I would rather link memory to the imagination.

The imaginative, affective force of remembrance—that which returns and is remembered/repeated—is the propelling force in this idea. When you remember in the intensive or minority-mode, in fact, you open up spaces of movement, of de-territorialization, which actualize virtual possibilities that had been frozen in the image of the past.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In-Between What’s Between Bodies and Machines

The archetypical site of in-between-ness, or interactivity, has historically been the female body. Psychoanalysis shows that the female body is the screen where male fantasies and castration fears have been projected and performed. As such, it has been metonymically displaced and replaced over and over again. The radical edge of Lacanian politics consists in exploring this reduction of the feminine (imaginary) to women (empirical) and the masculine

to men, stressing instead the instability of any subject and the impossibility of being anchored to the imaginary and binary institutions of masculinity and femininity. Exposing this imposture is Lacan's political gesture. What can be done about changing any of it, however, is an off-limits question for psychoanalysis. Not so for feminism, of course.⁷ The female body therefore becomes the site for feminist reinscriptions and symbolic reappropriations of woman's subjectivity.

The symbolic being firmly grounded on material foundations, the female body is also the site of productive and reproductive labor all over the world. Women are the great industrial robots and agricultural workers of the earth. As the most underpaid workers, their intermedial function is to create surplus value. Thus, women, like machines, are great conductors and connectors; their circulation, and the circulation of the goods they produce and reproduce, literally makes the world go round. It is no coincidence then that the technological other holds a strong link to the feminine in its functionality and availability for usage. In high modernity the mechanic body double, the technological artifact, is sexualized in the feminine mode and is eroticized accordingly. The woman's body functioned as the site of inscription of the artificial or mechanical other, as in *Metropolis* and *L'Ève future*. This followed from the principle of functionalism. In the modernist mode, tasks that are usually performed by women, animals, or others are delegated to the machines. This is the case of vacuum cleaners, household appliances, and the technologies that replace basic motion functions, such as bicycles and cars.

The technological artifact as a zone of transition is libidinally charged in that it represents a connection, a link or an in-between. Machines make connections: cogs and spikes and tubes penetrate each other with fierce and mindless energy. To the extent that it mimes the workings of sexual energy, the technological other fulfils a libidinal function. Techno-bodies question the boundary between the functional and the gratuitous, productivity and waste, moderation and excess. Gratuitousness, or the principle of nonprofit, is central to the erotic power of the machine. Historically, automata fulfilled a decorative function, which was explored and exploited in clockwork machinery, music boxes, street organs, "tableaux vivants" of all sorts, and mechanical dolls and toys. Like freaks, automata are for display and delight of children of all ages. Anthropomorphic machines, being eroticized as objects of imaginary projection and desire, titillate our sexual curiosity and trigger all kinds of questions about sexuality and procreation.

With contemporary technologies there is a lot that changes: digital and electronic technologies intersect and intermingle with the flesh in multiple, intimate ways that transfer the prosthetic function into the body. Video recorders, electronic toothbrushes, frozen embryos and IVF, breast implants, telefax, phone chat-lines, and so on, bring this kind of technological others right within the parameters of the embodied self. This could be described as a form of vampirism, or Gothic takeover of the human body by advanced technologies. A perversely fruitful alliance with technology has emerged,

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which stresses the proximity and familiarity of the relation between the human and the technological universe.⁸

Consequently, it is no longer possible to speak about simple in-between spaces, about spaces between bodies and technologies—nor of a simple delegation process. It is rather a case of degrees of both delegations and in-between-ness.⁹ For instance, the maternal function, traditionally a task that was socially delegated to and performed by embodied female agents, has nowadays become successfully assimilated by advanced technologies. The techno-doctors and their incubators, genetic engineering, and the sperm banks and their donors and inserters are the sites of human reproduction. Women are very much participants in this new social consensus about technology-mediated reproduction and its commercial spin-offs, all the more so because their body is no longer the sole theater where the game of filiation is played.

In our cyber-universe the link between the flesh and the machine is symbiotic, creating a bond of mutual dependence. Paradoxically, the corporeal site of subjectivity is simultaneously denied, in a fantasy of escape, and strengthened or reinforced.¹⁰ The corollary of this is that technology today is no longer associated with a specific sex—let alone the feminine, as it was in modernity, but rather neutralized as a figure of mixity, hybridity, inter-connectiveness. It lies in a sexually undecided position, an in-between state such as transsexuality; it is a queering device. If the machine is prosthetic and trans-gendered and the maternal has become mechanized, the embodied female agent is unhinged from its classical frame of sexual difference, floating into a sort of undifferentiated process of becoming-other.

Hybridity is the capacity to blur categorical distinctions or constitutive boundaries. The dividing line between masculine and feminine is one of the major socio-symbolic boundaries currently under reconstruction, as Lyotard argued. Equally prominent nowadays is the relocation of the distinction between different species—the human, the animal, the organic other, the inorganic other, the technological. The blurring of these categorical divides between self and others creates a sort of heteroglossia of the species, a colossal hybridization. Technology is at the heart of this process that combines monsters, animals, insects, and machines into a transversal posthuman takeover of what we used to call “the subject.” To say that this takeover transforms identities and sexualities is an understatement at best: the very political ontology of otherness is dislocated in the process.

This raises a number of crucial questions. If the female body is a site of scrambling of the code of femininity, while the technological other is the site of schizoid transsexuality and hybrid in-between-ness, what will the consequences be for the socio-symbolic organizations of our culture? Just consider the kind of schizoid combinations that proliferate in our postindustrial landscapes: machinic takeover of the maternal function; feminism without women; reproduction without uteruses; sperm banks without penises; money without cash; beer without alcohol; communication without contact; displacement without movement. These contaminations are virtual only in

the sense that they concretize and materialize yet unseen possibilities. They are ways of *literalizing* what techno-bodies are capable of and thus confront us with this challenge in an embodied and embedded manner. The virtual has firm roots, foundations, and spin-offs; it is a material event. Techno-babes and cyber-babies proliferate, just as Western demographics plummet.

Through these paradoxes, in late postmodernity, the body remains a privileged site of transformation and reinscription of the natural through reincorporation of the technological. It does fall within a political economics of representation that is no longer specular but rather *spectral*. The eternal return of the never-dead images. Quest for adequate figurations of these mutant subject-positions. The reinvention of a post-naturalistic natural order lies at the heart of our technological universe. Susan Squier sums it up in three key images: the extrauterine fetus, the surrogate mother, and the pregnant man. On the other hand, Donna Haraway crystallizes the process of the reinvention of nature in the mirror images of the female man,¹¹ the Onco mouse and the figuration of the critical thinker as modest witness. These reconfigurations of a naturalized techno-world, following from the impact of advanced technologies, are contemporary variations on the theme of recombined spectral subjectivity.

Biocentered Egalitarianism

If contemporary techno-bodies can be defined as complex systems of self-sustaining forces, it is therefore important to rethink the subject from the assumption of a convergence between biotechnologies and information technologies.¹²

The techno-bodies of late postindustrial societies are embedded in complex fields of information, which engender both their explosion into sets of regulatory social practices (dieting, medical control, and pharmaceutical interventions), as well as their implosion as the fetishized and obsessive object of individual concern and care (self-management or all-out prevention of anything that moves). The political economy changes accordingly: biopower¹³ constructs the body as a multilayered entity situated over a multiple and potentially contradictory set of variables. The "informatics of domination" or spectral economy¹⁴ enmeshes the body in data-flows of the semiotic, genetic, and neurological kind, which redefines it as an integrated site of information networks. A working image, it processes and reactivates its own visual archive. The body is like a sensor, a messenger carrying thousands of communication systems: cardiovascular, respiratory, visual, acoustic, tactile, olfactory, hormonal, psychic, emotional, erotic, and so on. Coordinated by an inimitable circuit of information transmission, the body is a living recording system, capable of storing and then retrieving the necessary information and to process it at such speed that it seems to react "instinctively." Fundamentally prone to pleasure, the embodied subject tends toward the recollection and repetition of experiences that pleasure has "fixed" psychically and sensually upon the subject. To remember, after all, is to repeat, and

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repetition tends to favor that which gave joy and avoid that which gave pain. The body is not only multifunctional but also in some ways multilingual: it speaks through temperature, motion, speed, emotions, excitement that affects the cardiac rhythm, and the likes. It is a piece of meat activated by electric waves of desire, a script written by the unfolding of genetic encoding, a text composed by the enfolding of external prompts. Neither a sacralized inner sanctum nor a socially shaped entity, the enfleshed nomadic subject is rather an "in-between": it is a folding-in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding outward of affects. It is a mobile entity, an enfleshed sort of memory that repeats; capable of lasting through sets of discontinuous variations while remaining faithful to itself in its radical immanence. This vision of the body is central to the corporeal materialism of nomadic subjectivity. It combines an interest in the antiessentialist notion of embodiment, and hence attention to techno-cultural factors, with renewed emphasis on vitalism, or the very concept of "Life itself."

It is very difficult to find a twenty-first-century word to describe adequately, that is to say, lucidly, secularly, fairly and with a sense of social justice, what is commonly referred to as "life." Life is half animal: *zoe* (zoology, zoophilic, zoo); and half discursive: *bios* (biology). *Zoe*, of course, is the poor half of a couple that foregrounds *bios* defined as intelligent life. Centuries of Christian indoctrination have left a deep mark here. The relationship to animal life, to *zoe*, rather than *bios*, constitutes one of those qualitative distinctions upon which Western reason erected its empire. *Bios* is holy, *zoe* quite gritty. That they intersect in the human body turns the physical self into a contested space, that is, a political arena. The mind-body dualism has historically functioned as a shortcut through the complexities of this in-between contested zone. I believe that one of the most persistent and unhelpful fictions that is being told about human "life" is its alleged self-evidence, its implicit worth. *Zoe* is always second-best and the idea of life carrying on independently of, even regardless of and at times in spite of, rational control is the dubious privilege attributed to the nonhumans. This covers all of the animal kingdoms as well as the classical "others" of metaphysically based visions of the subject, namely the sexual other (woman) the ethnic other (the native). In the old regime, this used to be called "Nature."

The point here is that, traditionally, the self-reflexive control over life is reserved for the humans, whereas the mere unfolding of biological sequences is for the nonhumans, given that the concept of "the human" has been colonized by phallogocentrism and has come to be identified with male, white, heterosexual, Christian, property-owning, standard-language-speaking citizens. However, since Darwin and evolutionary theory, the rest, comprising the nonhuman *zoe*, has grown to encompass increasingly large and central zones of the human. Contemporary scientific practices have forced us to touch the bottom of some inhumanity that connects to the human precisely in the immanence of its bodily materialism. With the collapse of the qualitative divide between the human and His (the gender is no coincidence) others, the deep vitality of the embodied self has resurfaced from under

the crust of the old metaphysical vision of the subject. A metamorphosis, which is no metaphor—but something closer to a metabolic mutation. This is the bottom line. This obscenity, this life in me, is intrinsic to my being and yet so much “itself,” that it is independent of the will, the demands and expectations of the sovereign consciousness. This *zoe* makes me tick and yet escapes the control of the supervision of the Self. *Zoe* carries on relentlessly and gets cast out of the holy precinct of the “me” that demands control and fails to obtain it. It thus ends up being experienced as an alien other. This potency (*potentia*) of Life is experienced as “other” by a mind that cannot do anything else but fold upon itself in narcissism and paranoia, the two pillars on which the West was won. Consciousness goes patrolling its own constitutive borders as if it were in charge of them. Life is experienced as inhuman, but only because it is all too human; obscene, because it lives mindlessly on. This scandal, this wonder, this *zoe*, that is to say an idea of Life that is more than *bios* and supremely indifferent to *logos*, this piece of flesh called my “body,” this aching meat called my “self,” expresses the abject/divine potency of a Life that consciousness lives in fear of. Nomadic subjectivity is, by contrast, in love with *zoe*. It’s about the posthuman as becoming-animal, becoming-other, becoming-insect—trespassing all metaphysically grounded boundaries. Ultimately becoming imperceptible and fading, death being just another time sequence within the spectral economy of techno-bodies.

The significant thing about posthuman bodies is not so much that they occupy the spaces in between what is between the human, the animal, and the machines, that is to say, a dense materiality. Posthuman bodies are also surprisingly generative, in that they stubbornly and relentlessly reproduce themselves. The terms of their reproduction are slightly offbeat by good old human standards in that they involve animal, insect, and inorganic models. In fact they represent a whole array of possible alternative morphologies and “other” sexual and reproductive systems. The model is that of viral proliferation—a lapse in our immunity system. The paradigm of cancerous proliferation of cells is mentioned as an example of this mindless self-duplicating capacity of generative/life.

This marks a shift in terms of a new political paradigm: we are at the end of the post-nuclear model of embodied subjectivity and we have entered the “viral” or “parasitic” mode. This is a graphic way of explaining the extent to which today’s body is immersed in a set of technologically mediated practices of prosthetic extension. It expresses in fact the coextensivity of the body with its environment or territory. A body is a portion of forces life-bound to the environment that feeds it. All organisms are collective and interdependent. Parasites and viruses are hetero-directed: they need other organisms. Admittedly, they relate to them as incubators or hosts, releasing their genetically encoded message with evident glee. This expresses a selfish cruelty that horror movies capture perfectly, but it is a mere detail in a much broader picture. The virus/parasite constitutes a model of a symbiotic relationship that defeat binary oppositions. It is a simulacrum that duplicates itself to infinity

without any representational pretensions. As such, it is an inspiring model for a nomadic eco-philosophy.

Modes of In-Between-ness

The key word is indeed contaminations. The spaces between ourselves and our technologies are a site of transition, filled with dense materialities, of symbiotic interconnections, and unsuspected mutual cross-fertilizations. There is no longer a space between us and the technological artifacts that we delegate to. There are only degrees of in-between-ness, of complicity, or promiscuity. The age of prosthetics has displaced the form of anthropocentric delegation or consensual mediation, to which we had become accustomed in industrial modernity. A new form of viral or contaminating intimacy has taken its place.¹⁵

A social reaction of panic often accompanies these transformations, triggering either neoconservative returns to an allegedly naturalized past, which should rescue us from our inhumane posthuman future¹⁶ or restore us to a humanistic faith in the decency of the rational order.¹⁷ I situate myself elsewhere, in transition and on the side of Haraway,¹⁸ in affirming the positive aspects of "the promises of monsters." I am accustomed to a posthuman condition that has already taken firm roots here and now.¹⁹ (In this approach I recognize the legacy of that tradition of bodily materialist philosophies of the subject, which I call my own.)

I also want to challenge some of the self-destructive or nihilistic tendencies of our cyber-universe. Nomadism is an antiessentialist vitalistic philosophy that calls for rethinking human embodiment in a manner that is coextensive with our complex technological habitat and in tune with our techno-habits. Deleuze shows that both the established ideas of the organic and those of the mechanical world are equally inadequate and often result in the humanistic vision of assembled parts working together to create a harmonious and well-functioning whole. In opposition to this holistic view of the mechanical world, Deleuze defends a molecular, machinic one, which is about becomings, without ultimate purpose or finality.

The "machine" in the abstract sense proposed by Deleuze bears a privileged bond with the process of becoming-imperceptible, in the sense of an empirical transcendental capacity by the subject for dissolution into and merging with his/her environment.²⁰ The merger of the human with the technological, or the machinic, environment, not unlike the symbiotic relationship between the animal and its habitat, results in a new compound, a new kind of open whole. This is neither a holistic fusion nor a Christian form of transcendence—it rather marks the materialist plane of radical immanence. This in-between-ness is best addressed not as biology, and certainly not as bioethics, but as an ethology of forces; an ethics of mutual interdependence and of sustainable interactions. Bodies have become techno-cultural constructs immersed in networks of interconnections and thus of self-contradictory and conflicting power relations.

The culture of advanced capitalism—always loath to miss a good opportunity when it raises its ugly head—tends to react to the new techno-bodies of the cyber-world according to a predictable manic-depressive double-pull: on the one hand, hype, and on the other, nostalgia. And in between, *Prozac Nation*. Speaking from a different field of addiction—to critical theory—I would plea for a form of neo-materialist appreciation for the embodied intelligence of critical questioning entities known as subjects. Rethinking the embodied structure of human subjectivity requires an ethics of lucidity, as well as powers of innovation and creativity. It need not refer to the paradigms of human nature in terms of any of the traditional brands of essentialism: biological, psychic, genetic, or historical.

This nomadic evolutionary thought contrasts openly with contemporary evolutionary psychology or genetic neo-determinism. What implodes under the strain and the velocity of this change is the perspective of anthropocentrism that is built in so much evolutionary, biological, scientific, and philosophical thought. Radically immanent philosophical nomadism, on the other hand, sponsors a posthuman subject that is impacted upon and thus composed of external forces, of the nonhuman, whether of inorganic or technological kind. It is territorially based and thus environmentally bound. This subject is non-unitary because it is relocated across a number of cultural, social and technological fields and practices. It also remains involved in the pursuit of active processes of becoming, through the creation of sustainable mixes and compositions of forces and affects.

This is as far removed from the advanced capitalist hype about technology as can be. The latter constitutes an all-pervasive master-narrative of flight from the human embodied self into the fake transcendence of a machine aiming at short-term profit, with the aims of advanced capitalism and its belligerent economy. This strikes me as a molar, oedipalizing, despotic, and profit-minded approach. It is against this form of techno-domination that I want to argue for a more empowering, and hence more dissipative, eroticized and flowing interaction between the human and the biotechnological. An evolution of the non-teleological, but rather the nomadological kind, as my friend Kathy Acker said.

QUESTIONS OF ETHICAL VALUES

Moods of In-Between-ness

What forms of symbolic mediation become possible and even necessary under the impact of the new prosthetic bodies we have come to inhabit? The advanced technologies enable a short-circuiting of traditional social roles and a great deal of experimentation with alternatives. They introduce a mild form of schizophrenia, in that they induce a multiplication and splintering of possible roles and time-sequences within each subject. What sort of ethical subjectivity does this shift of perspective call for? In reproductive technologies, for instance, you may donate the sperm, or rent out the uterus, but may

not want to either claim or raise the baby. On Internet, one may say or act in ways that conflict with one's everyday behavior in the three-dimensional world.²¹ Military Techno-bodies freeze our senses. The key question is precisely the extent to which new forms of technological embodiment displace or replace the symbolic function. What are the limits of these symbolic dislocations? In the spectral economy of contemporary Techno-bodies, in the age of suicide-bombers, one may delegate a great deal of crucial and even vital functions to others, but, when it comes to it, can someone else die in your place? What kind of symbolic delegation is this?

It becomes important to assess what kind and degree of symbolic displacement occurs through these new configurations of in-between locations of technologically mediated bodies. In order to know the difference, we need a system of ethical evaluation of the forces or investments that are being made of these technologies. Of special concern to me is the affirmative dimension of this ethical question, namely, how to move beyond the aporia of deconstruction, or a post-Lacanian exacerbation of the guilt and aggression that fuel the phallic symbolic. How can we grab the historic chance to create the new and thus avoid flat repetitions of the same, through the disguise of quantitative cumulation of changes?

One of the many positive side effects of dependency on feminist ethics is that one gets used to time loops, or a permanent state of jetlag. A feminist critical position assumes the dislocation of the linearity of time and hence the necessity to inhabit different and even potentially contradictory time zones at the same time: a sort of trip through chrono-topia. On the theoretical level, feminists have developed critiques of ideologies, revisions of the symbolic, and a vast array of counter-models and paradigms to configure the shifts of subjectivity actually in progress in our globalized world. Those who were still hoping to use such immense creativity to correct the mistakes of the patriarchal order soon realized they would run out of time before they could reach their aim. One of the possible figurations of oppression is being systematically behind: living in one time zone behind the times—like reading yesterday's paper. It is not so much being second-best as being minus-one.

I can give a concrete example from my own politics of location as a privileged twenty-first century subject in a cutting-edge university setting, engaged in critical theory. The point is that "I" is not only "there" and not even "that." I am not one, because I am socio-symbolically signified as a woman, but also because I claim back my not-oneness as a political location. So there is a part of me that is too well aware of the persisting patterns of marginalization and exclusion of women in the world today. Were I to put this awareness aside, I would make a functional subject of advanced capitalism and a worthy one, being myself an institutional manager of female emancipation. Yet I will not. Choosing to resist this monological reduction, I acknowledge instead the multiplication of my possible locations, which are not only spatial but also temporal. My memories splinter and proliferate accordingly, bringing in data that may or may not relate directly to my lived experience but are integral to my consciousness.

Whenever I fail to forget the continuing patterns of marginalization of women, I simply "forget to forget," which does not mean that I fall into a stupor, but rather that I am zigzagging across different time sequences. Forgetting to forget the imperative of one-way time travel, I inhabit my critical consciousness as a time machine that allows me to travel across different realities, or spatiotemporal coordinates. Being a critical female subject, inscribed asymmetrically into the power relations of advanced capitalism, splits me temporarily. Attempting to reconcile the pieces would be madness: better to settle into the everyday schizophrenia of late postmodernity, also known as early global techno-culture. I call this a form of active resistance, understood as a strategy to deal with the typical schizophrenia of our times.

Schizophrenia means the co-occurrence of internally contradictory and even incompatible trends and time zones. And the status of women is a powerful indicator of these. These are historical times that see the return of the most primitive forms of naturalization of the status of women, alongside high technological celebration about the death of the naturalized order. Women with Burkha next to Dolly the sheep (now mummified and in a museum). Times when geopolitical wars are being justified in the light of the backward status of women in non-Christian cultures. More than ever, sexual difference is exacerbated and polarized. Gender roles and stereotypes, far from being effaced, are strengthened in the new militarized world order. Hence, the status of women is both central to and paradoxically multiplied across the social and political agenda. In such a context, the feminist awareness of internal discrepancies, or differences within the subject, becomes quite a vantage viewpoint. Feminist reappropriations of feminine specificity strike a dissonant note in this framework to mark forms of political resistance: a multiplicity of possible strategies, internally contradictory, paradoxical, and nonlinear. They may not be one united party, but a kind of a kaleidoscope of maybe potentially contradictory strategies.

This claim to feminist specificity is not a way of blocking nomadic subjectivization but rather of actualizing it. Very much a child of my schizoid times, I believe we need visions and practices of complex and multiple differences as an antidote to the fortifying of unitary identities that is happening through the global world order these days: a resurgence of many specular forms of fundamentalism. While fundamentalism is about claiming as authentic an identity others taught you to despise, feminism is about suspending belief in all authentic identities. We need a weblike approach, a zigzagging pattern that cuts across the paradoxes, the asymmetrical locations, and the revival of brutal power relations that underscore them, because not *one* linear or progressive political line can account for them all. If power relations are not linear, nor is resistance.

Positively So

This posthumanist vision of embodiment combines a nonessentialist form of bodily materialism with a commitment to change and transformation. In

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feminist theory, this combination enacts and supports the methodological and political strategy of "the politics of location." It also fosters a philosophical style of critical thinking, which refuses to equate criticism with negativity and leaves ample room to the imagination and to conceptual creativity. This style is exemplified by the notion of "becoming," in the sustainable sense I have defended in this essay. It raises the need of creating adequate figurations for this positive, dynamic, and accountable vision of the thinking subject. Philosophy is linked to positive affects.

Affirming positive political passions is the key to generating affirmative affects. This expresses a nomadic kind of loyalty, not so much to what one is, or could be, as to what one would have been. This is a new form of activism, which takes seriously the active force of affects understood as affirmative ethical inputs. I call them positive processes of becoming, which are neither abstract nor disengaged from concrete material and historical situations. They are processes of actualization or materialization of qualitative shifts that occur across a number of interrelations or in-between spaces: between different species: human/nonhuman actors; different categories: masculine/feminine or European/native; and between different forces: negative/positive or reactive/active.

How can we establish ethical categorical distinctions between different types of becoming? Deleuze and Guattari argue that processes of becoming are collective, so that one can only know them by getting involved in them.²² Moreover, they are non-teleologically ordained processes of transformation, which means that none is truly in charge of them. No one is in charge of the course of historical developments—*pace*. Hegel and his Marxist disciples, down to Toni Negri,²³ do not seem able to kick off the addiction to totalizing master-plans. The only way to make sense of the schizoid economy of our times is by thinking in a nonlinear and yet rigorous and sustainable manner about accelerations, speed, and movement, that is to say, processes of becoming. We need to think about them not merely in quantitative terms but also as qualitative or ethical distinctions.²⁴

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the molar or sedentary and the molecular or nomadic distinction must not be reset in a dialectical opposition: they are neither opposites nor mutually exclusive. They represent an ethical indexation system that can help us organize qualitative distinctions among the different forces that are invested in and circulating across social processes. Molar is reactive or negative, molecular is active or affirmative. There is no becoming in the molar mode: the center is static. By extension, terms such as nomadic or molecular are ways of introducing qualitative ethical distinctions into this script by stressing the positive or active forces involved in the processes of transformations. This in turn is a way of demarcating them from general processes of change that, being central to the political economy of advanced capitalism, are a-moral, generally profit-driven, if not downright immoral. Therefore, molecular/sedentary and molar/nomadic are not empirical categories. They are not quantitative pluralities but qualitative multiplicities, or lines that cut across existing categories. The point is not to opt

for one of these and adopt them fully, but rather to engage with the affective forces they express. In other words, radical politics in the third millennium can be both emancipatory and sedentary, and radical or nomadic; the logic is not that of either/or, but rather of and/and. Ethical balance is just a matter of creating the condition for synchronicity among parallel forces and frames so that we can sustain affirmative processes of change.

We can translate this in terms of the time sequence, by arguing that there are qualitative differences between different forms of becoming. If we start from the assumption that consumerism is the logic behind the enforced accelerations of our times, then we could argue that capitalism steals the present. We are always behind, that is, oppressed, and the next generation of gadgets is still to come. You may have Microsoft Windows 2000, but forget it, you should already have 2003, or maybe it should be 2020? *Matrix 2* is out—but number 3? The next instalment of *Harry Potter* is about to come out, but there are several more coming and who knows if we will live to read them. *Lord of the Rings* is also tantalizingly slow in actualizing itself. They have succeeded in stealing our present: we all live in a state of regulated frustration and suspended animation, addicted to logos and gadgets to consume. In such a context, the time travel of consciousness that I mentioned before acquires another aspect, which leads me to Deleuze's idea of the "becoming-imperceptible." Let us think back to the simultaneity of different time zones that a third-millennium feminist inhabits. Emancipatory feminist politics looks toward the past in so far as it attempts to correct it. Like Benjamin's angel of history, it stresses the need to catch up and bring women into full citizenship rights. We need to give women the vote, and not only in non-Christian lands, but, till a few years ago, also in countries such as Switzerland. It is progressive but backward looking. You could argue therefore that these processes of becoming are limited in the new perspectives they can unfold. The best you can do is to catch on, and hence risk a flat repetition of the aspects of linear history that, for better or for worse, have already happened before. The process of becoming—becoming-minoritarian, -woman, -animal—is a way of marking off ethical distinctions that liberate the subject from the sedentary risk of flat repetition by introducing a different velocity or affective speed into this process. Taking the risk of repetition—the awareness of the inevitability of vicious circles—is the only way to break out of the molar or sedentary mode. Repetition with a difference is a feminist strategy of resisting the gravitational pull of the same—flat mimesis without difference—in order to inject healthy doses of disruption or unpredictability into the process.

This process of speeding up detaches the present from its backward-looking tendencies and introduces another time sequence that actively creates the future by innovating on the past. In my view, this is the "event" that Deleuze theorizes as the "becoming-imperceptible," marking the eruption of the future into the present. It is like a floodgate of creative forces that makes it possible to actually be fully inserted into the here and now, defined as the unfolding of potentials but also the enfolding of qualitative shifts or

relocations within the subject. The paradoxical price to pay for that is some sort of death of one's ego, or social identity, or all the identity labels that are socially enforced and thus institutionalized, such as being woman, white, European, and so on. The process of becoming thus results in the death of the ego in favor of a proliferation of generative possibilities of an altogether different kind. Carried by one's affirmative passions—or life-enhancing addictions—one can undergo sustainable processes of un/enfolding or becoming. These entail, paradoxically and productively, the evanescence of the self. Ultimately, all one has is what one is propelled by and not in charge of, namely, one's affects. One is constructed in these transitions and through these encounters: one *is* not, one *becomes* a series of not-ones, to the infinite power.

We could rethink this with various brands of secular spirituality. I prefer to think of becoming as the necessary death of the self, understood as the social clearing house of conventions, a by-product of *potestas*, or institutionalization processes. The dislocation of the social self brings the subject to some point of evanescence, which may cost one's immediate social identity, but in return one undergoes a qualitative leap toward an enlarged and empowered sense of what one is indeed capable of becoming. It is a qualitative leap toward a sustainable future. It is as an eruption of the future: an event, but it has the paradoxical quality of something that takes place between the "no longer" and the "not yet." By disrupting the time sequence, the event makes it impossible to identify with and hence name any substantive content. The event is an act or occurrence for which there is no immediate representation. Becoming is the path and the record of this event. It is impossible to locate the act of becoming either in relation to the past or in relation to the future as we know it. In that state the individual that desired it is already gone and the one who would welcome it is not yet here. Such is the paradox of subjectivity at the height of its process of becoming other than itself. Alive.

This is the process of becoming-imperceptible as the redefinition of spaces of interrelation and of the time frame that accompanies them. Loyal to my habits, I see it as the other, the nomadic face of politics: the eruption of a "virtual feminine" as a singular universal that accomplishes a qualitative leap toward the affirmation of positivity. No longer the Molar "Woman," not yet the singular universal in its fullness, it is the site of a qualitative transformation—the non-place where the "no longer" and the "not yet" reverse into each other, unfolding-out and enfolding-in their respective "outsides." This short-circuits linear time and causes a creative conflagration. It propels a leap of faith in the world and as such it is an act that has no place; it cannot be understood apart from the transformation it produces; becoming is a way of configuring the leap itself, the actual process of transmutation of values that will propel us out of the void of critical negativity into the paradoxically generative void of full affirmation. It is a seduction into life that breaks from the spectral economy. At that point of becoming, all a subject can do is mark her/his assent and respectfully merge with it. Some call it adoration, but that would be altogether another trip.

NOTES

1. Haraway 1992.
2. Braidotti 1992.
3. Lloyd 18.
4. Ibid. 23.
5. Ibid. 31.
6. Ibid. 72.
7. Irigaray 1974, 1977, 1984.
8. Bukatman.
9. Sobchack.
10. Springer.
11. Haraway 1997.
12. Halberstam and Livingston.
13. Foucault.
14. Haraway 1997.
15. Ansell.
16. Fukuyama.
17. Habermas.
18. Haraway 1992.
19. Hayles.
20. Patton.
21. Hayles.
22. Deleuze and Guattari 1972, 1980.
23. Hardt and Negri.
24. Massumi.

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