

Σπουδές Φύλου

Τάσεις/Τενσιões

στην Ελλάδα και σε άλλες Ευρωπαϊκές Χώρες

Θ.-Σ. Παυλίδου (επιμ.)

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Trends/Tensions
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Beyond Interdisciplinarity:
The New Transversal Feminist Theories

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Gender Studies as an interdisciplinary area of teaching and research has historically developed as both a very critical minded, activist, political and hence action-oriented field and as a highly theoretical one. Joan Kelly, in a foundational text, described Gender Studies in terms of a critical methodology that however also has an innovative force because it proposes creative alternatives. The span of application of these alternatives is consequently not confined only to the academic world, but it covers issues of social relevance. Thirty years later, this 'double-edged vision of feminist theory' (Kelly 1979) has become one of the defining features of the field of Gender Studies. Critique and creation are two faces of the same coin, which characterise this new and fast-moving field.

The theoretical force of gender lies precisely in its location as both an interdisciplinary research area and a transversal field of activism and political intervention. As a discourse and a practice which lies at the crossroads of some major concerns and tensions, Gender Studies is almost compelled to be theoretically up to date, in so far as the theoretical sophistication guarantees the kind of scientific credibility and legitimation that institutions require. These in turn pave the way to more concrete institutional practices, applications and results. The process of translating or applying the theoretical frameworks to various contexts would deserve a separate discussion. Suffice it to say that, the making of European Women's Studies (Griffin & Braidotti 2002) is a discursive as well as a material process. It entails the patient and thorough analysis of the different historical traditions, cultural locations and political legacies of the different women's movements across Europe.

Even more central to this process is the multilingual dimension: no European Gender Studies' specialist can ignore the overwhelming influence that English language and mostly North American sources exercise on the development of gender curricula across Europe. To try and resolve this issue by a

simple policy of translations begs the question: what gets translated into which language is a very problematic issue considering the structural injustices that mark the global publishing market and the academic world nowadays. I would plead instead for more synergy to be created between fundamental research into the historical roots and the cultural manifestations of the different gender traditions within Europe and the production of teaching material and manuals, which do justice to European diversity. If this process gets started and supported at the local, national or regional level, it may provide a web of new research, data and texts, which could then be considered for translation. This process is in itself a research project, which deserves to be monitored collectively by the gender community, and not let in the hands of commercial publishers and their academic outlets.

In this article I will survey, outline and explore some of the recent developments in gender theory, in the era known as 'the end of postmodernism'. The latter refers to both an analytical framework and a set of theoretical conventions that encompass the linguistic and semiotic turn and linguistically mediated modes of representation. Its demise has been greeted with mixed feelings in the gender community in this part of the world. Part of the ambivalence is due to the fact that, contrary to our North American counterparts, most European gender and feminist scholars never enjoyed a situation in which postmodern paradigms were dominant in our institutional and professional contexts. On the contrary, the mainstream of European universities right across this vast Continent can be said to converge on their hyper-conservative resistance to any trends or fashionable tendency blowing in from abroad. This Trans-Atlantic disconnection (Stanton 1980) deserves a far more rigorous analysis than I can give it in this essay. Suffice it to say that this fundamental uncertainty about the status and validity of the postmodernist approach makes it rather difficult to assess the situation created by the official end of postmodernism. What comes after the postmodern could be seen as one of the most challenging questions confronting us today.

Bodily materialism

Having always situated myself in that specific strand of postmodern thought that is better known as poststructuralist philosophy (Braidotti 1991, 1994), in friendly but firm opposition to the linguistically mediated paradigm of representation (Braidotti & Butler 1994; Braidotti 2002), I want to defend the

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hypothesis that what comes after postmodernism is a form of bodily neo-materialism that is supported by a monistic Spinozist political ontology, in opposition to the binary modes of thinking of the Hegelian dialectical tradition. I would also want to argue that the latter is operational not only in Lacanian psychoanalysis, with its insistence on the model of the Lack, the Law and the Signifier, but also in a great deal of deconstructive attempts to move beyond dialectics. The most blatant example of this failure to transcend dualisms can be found in queer theory's paradoxical reassertion of a sex-gender dichotomy under the cover of an allegedly fluid and dynamic vision of subjectivity as an in-between or interstitial process.¹ The implications of this turn of events for the practice of Gender Studies will be explored later on in the essay, when I will argue that a shift occurs in the interdisciplinary mix of gender, which brings to the fore themes and disciplines that till now were marginal to gender, such as for instance science studies.

Neo-materialism is indicative of the return of 'real bodies' and real materiality at the end of postmodernism. There is definitely a conservative side to this phenomenon, which has led the neoliberal thinkers (Fukuyama 2002) to celebrate 'neo-realism' and the return of fundamental moral values. The conservative end of the political spectrum today is dominated by the return of the master narratives of linear evolutionary teleology. The belief in the absolute value of capitalist market economies as the historically dominant form of human progress on the one hand. The undisputed authority of genetics on the other (Franklyn 2000) establishes a hard core of determinism at the center of our social and scientific practices. I tend to see these conservative developments as converging on an essentialist vision of human evolution, under the double hegemony of the DNA and of capitalism.

In this respect, both the figuration of the cyborgs and the cyber-imaginary that supports it can be seen and, to a certain extent, dismissed today as hegemonic modes of representation. They are powerfully active throughout the social fabric and in all the modes of cultural representation prompted by our culture at present. Claudia Springer (1991) argues that this discourse celebrating the union of humans and electronic technology is currently circulating with equal success among the scientific community as in popular culture. The work Haraway accomplished throughout the 1980s and 1990s in renew-

1. For a detailed analysis of this paradoxical failure, see Braidotti (2002).

ing the field of epistemology is of seminal importance here: the cyborg as a technologically enhanced body-machine is the dominant social and discursive figuration for the interaction between the human and the technological in postindustrial societies. It also provides a living or active, materially embedded cartography of the kind of power relations that are operative in the postindustrial social sphere. Bukatman argues that this projection of the physical self into an artificial environment feeds into a dream of terminal identity outside the body, a sort of 'cyber subject' (Bukatman 1993: 187) that feeds into the new age fantasies of cosmic redemption via technology. New age spirituality or techno-mysticism form part of this trend (Bryld & Lykke 1999). The new corporeal feminist materialism has to move beyond its infantile fascination with cyborgs and other monsters and queers.

Within the fast-moving landscape of neo-materialism, I want to point to three main points of convergence among new areas of feminist theoretical analysis. They all rest on a common premise, namely the return of discourses and practices about 'real bodies'. Methodologically, the return of 'real body' in its thick materiality challenges the linguistic turn in the sense of the postmodernist over-emphasis on textuality and the power of the signifier. This approach expresses fully the paradox of the contemporary subject, namely of a body that is invaded by technology, in bombarded by visual bits and bytes of information and experiences both pleasure and pain and despair at these fundamental invasions of his/her bodily integrity.

The first point of convergence is between bio- and information technologies. This operates at different levels: firstly, all technologies have a strong 'bio-power' effect, in that they affect the forms of human embodiment and thus mediate between bodies and social institutions and relations. They thus control access to power in terms of inclusion and exclusion from the technological process. This implies that contemporary bio-technologies neither suspend nor automatically improve power relations; they may even intensify the traditional patterns of discrimination (Eisenstein 1998; Shiva 1997; Gilroy 2002). The convergence also indicates that a shift has occurred in the political economy of advanced capitalism: classical 'bio-power' has turned into the 'informatics of domination' (Haraway 1997). The body is enmeshed in data-flows of the molecular biological, genetic and neurological kind to such an extent that bodies have become sites of information networks and the distinction nature/culture has become obsolete.

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This convergence also creates a manic-depressive social climate that alternates between over-optimism and nostalgia for an allegedly more 'natural' past. These cultural practices echo concrete material effects. Political analyses of the structure of advanced capitalism, in fact, stress the raw economics of 'life itself'. These refer to the capitalisation of the generative or germinal powers of life in pharmaceuticals, informatics, bio-medicines and health practices (Ansell Pearson 1997; Rose 2001). Similarly, analyses of labour relations in advanced capitalism stress the extent to which the vitality of the workers has become an essential prerequisite for their employability (Hardt & Negri 2000). Health, good looks, youth, a positive personality and trend-appeal constitute the 'immaterial' elements of the contemporary labour force. A striking example of this is provided by the workers in call centers that cater for the information society by processing phone inquiries from selected locations miles away from the callers' home. Denounced strongly by Arundhati Roy (2001) these 'call centers' or data outsourcing agencies are a multi billion-dollar industry that trades in cheerful human vocal labour. Environmentalists have a more critical take on the extent to which the boundaries of the marketing of living matter have shifted to the commodification of the interior of bodies. This includes all human but especially women's bodies, as well as the equally resilient productivity of animals, insects, organic seeds and plants. They are genetic material to be pirated, patented and branded for the sake of corporate profit (Shiva 1997).

Last but not least, these transformations in the material and discursive structure of 'life' challenge the Enlightenment-based faith in the self-controlling powers of scientific reason. This crisis of rationality has triggered both neo-conservative returns to an allegedly naturalised past to rescue us from our inhumane post-human future (Fukuyama 2002) and optimistic statements of faith in the rational humanistic order (Habermas 2003). In such a context, feminist theory strikes a decidedly non-nostalgic note. Haraway (1992), for instance, affirms the positive aspects of 'the promises of techno-monsters'. Hayles (1999) defends post-humanist thought as the analysis of the many contradictory ways in which the human has been subsumed into global networks of control and commodification.

This implies that the emphasis on 'life' opens a crisis about the very meaning of the generic figure of the human. Donna Haraway puts it as follows:

Our authenticity is warranted by a database for the human genome. The molecular database is held in an informational database as legally brand-

ed intellectual property in a national laboratory with the mandate to make the text publicly available for the progress of science and the advancement of industry. This is Man the taxonomic type become Man the brand. (Haraway 1997: 74)

Brian Massumi refers to this phenomenon as 'Ex-Man': 'a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human' and as such undergoing significant mutations (1998: 60). This emphasis on life marks a shift away from anthropocentrism towards a new emphasis on the inextricable entanglement of material, bio-cultural and symbolic forces in the making and the un-making of the subject. It is a sort of bio-centered egalitarianism, which, as Ansell Pearson (1997) suggests, forces a reconsideration of the concept of subjectivity in terms of 'life-and-death-forces', and also marks the emergence of the Earth as a planetary political agent. It therefore opens up the eco-philosophical dimension of the problem and inaugurates alternative ecologies of belonging. Deleuze and Guattari turn it into a new philosophy of radical immanence. What the implications of this shift are for the status of women and for the feminist agenda is an open discussion point, to which I will return later in the article.

As Deleuze and Guattari argue (1972, 1980), there is no longer a clear distinction between us and our technologies, but only degrees of in-betweenness, of complicity or promiscuity. The living body is a site of transitions and intersections, filled with dense materialities, symbiotic interconnections and unsuspected cross-fertilisations. Advanced bio-technologies have displaced the traditional 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 (Ansell Pearson 1997).

For a poststructuralist feminist philosopher raised in the conviction that 'the death of man' is a historically accomplished event, the shift of perspective known as the crisis of humanism is neither unexpected nor unwelcome. Crises need not be negative, but can also open up alternatives and deploy new potentials. As a philosophy of life, feminist theory stresses the deep, vital interconnection between the cultural, biological, social and political facets of human embodiment, rather than clear-cut distinction between them. Feminism throws open the divide between nature and culture, biology and society, pointing to the complicity and the continuities between them (Franklin, Lury & Stacey 2000).

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New trends in feminist materialism

The renewed emphasis on the materiality of corporeal bodies did not take feminists by surprise. Materialism is one of the sources of gender theory and feminist practice, from the legacy of Marxist historical materialism, to the more dynamic view of the corporeal materialism of French philosophies of difference. New developments are especially strong in four areas of contemporary feminist theory: the first is the wave of Deleuzian feminism, which emphasises immanence (Colebrook & Buchanan 2000); becomings (Grosz 1999; Gatens & Lloyd 1997, 2000; Braidotti 1994, 2002) and a new non-hierarchical political ontology (Olkowski 1999). Contemporary feminist science theory plays a variation on Deleuze's injunction to experiment with new ways of thinking. This assumes that scientific knowledge exceeds the semiotic order and acquires its own specificity and that matter is not an inert mass shaped by ideas or reflecting facts that are accessible through interpretation. The notions of representation and interpretation are critiqued if not altogether rejected.

A second significant reaction is feminist science studies, which, as I indicated earlier, has been quite separate from mainstream feminist gender theory in the humanities and social sciences. That interdisciplinary mix is changing nowadays and, on the ruins of the postmodernist linguistic turn a new generation of feminist theorists (Mac Cormack 2000) is looking at the techno-sciences as a new epistemological paradigm (Wilson 1998; Franklin 2000). They refer to a different feminist genealogical line, which bypasses high postmodernist feminist theory—and hence psychoanalytic and semiotic criticism—and emphasises instead the epistemological tradition. The key figures are Stengers (1997) and Margulis and Sagan (1995), but also Fox-Keller (1992) and Harding (1991). In this tradition, as in many others, Haraway provides both a focal point and a measure of consensus and cohesion.

The third is the new 'micro-political' forms of feminist theory that is emerging at present, combining science studies with references to Guattari's notion of transversal subjectivity as well as to Hardt and Negri's critique of globalisation (Balsamo 1996; Parisi 2004). This constitutes a new departure from classical Deleuzian feminist emphasis on immanence and becomings and thus it is a genuine new wave. It also expresses, however, strong continuity with the second radical feminist wave in the mixture of critique and creativity

it displays. The micro-political feminists emphasise the role techno-sciences can play as tools by which to attack advanced capitalism.

The fourth is a change within feminist cultural studies away from classical notions of interpretations and semiotics. Methodologically, the emergence of life itself as a subject of investigation highlights the limits of social constructivism as a method to account for the complex, 'hybrid' structure of contemporary technological culture. A phenomenon such as the environmental crisis, linked to the technological development and to the panic-stricken social imaginary that sustains it (Braidotti 2002), cannot be dealt with in the conventional language and methodology of the social sciences. It is a transversal phenomenon that calls into question a cluster of factors and of multiple effects and demands that we develop scientific thinking in a transversal manner, at the intersection of different domains. More importantly, it stresses that we need to learn to think in terms of processes and interrelations.

This methodological shift also poses a challenge to feminist theory and its century-old history as a social constructivist movement. Wilson (1998) for instance, attacks this historical legacy in terms of 'naturalised anti-essentialism', which is a telling paradox. She argues that feminist theory runs the risk of missing the point of 'bio-discourses' altogether, by continuing to assume that biologism is intrinsically regressive and politically reactionary. According to Wilson, this blind faith in social constructionism is one of the least useful legacies of Marxist theory and needs to be reviewed in the light of contemporary developments in genetics, molecular biology, neurology and artificial intelligence. The new bio-technological discourses bring to the fore the material foundations of the embodied self, including its biological and genetic material. This means that the Kuhnian paradigm of science as a human construction sanctioned by the consensus of the community, which has been so important for early feminist epistemology, needs to be revised. As the Harding-Haraway debate has shown, scientific objectivity cannot be reduced to the status of a mere social convention. At the same time, radical epistemologies such as feminism, environmentalism, race studies and poststructuralist philosophy's critique of reason have also been very influential in rejecting the idea of science as an allegedly purer and more objective expression of rationality. It is rather the case now that the practice of science criticism and the philosophy of science become ontological and political questions. They require an interrogation from many components: ontology, epistemology, ethics, politics and the-

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ology. A more hybrid and dynamic approach is needed; one that goes beyond the science and the culture wars. A new alliance is needed between feminist theory, cultural studies and science studies. More than ever we see also the need for new transversal symbiotic connections between the humanities and science. A new hybrid mixture, or parasitic combination of the two that can co-participate in the production of change. Parisi (2004) argues that the new science studies approach proposes an ecology of scientific practices. This assumes that scientific knowledge exceeds the semantic order, as the scientific experiment is a perceptive portal towards the unknown. There is an affective rather than paradigmatic method of relating science to the humanities. The link between humanities and sciences is provided by the 'mixed semiotics', or the 'machinic assemblages' of Deleuze and Guattari (Parisi 2004). The starting point is to approach the question beyond the nature-culture divide, which means that we need to change our habitual perception of bodies/nature/femininity beyond the essentialism/constructivism impasse.

Beyond bio-power: the micro-politics of life

Poststructuralist philosophy has developed specific reflections on the living human body and on embodied subjectivity as a form of bodily materialism. In his unfinished magnum opus *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault (1976) targets the notion of 'life' as one of its central concepts and attempts an analysis of this regime in terms of 'bio-power'. Foucault stresses the extent to which governmentality implies both imposed and self-implemented disciplines of control, more specifically the regimes of modern government need to simultaneously include and control the biological, generative, living forces of the very people (*demos*) who constitute the social sphere (*polis*) of democratic regimes. According to Foucault, ever since modernity the aim of political power has been to control and thus govern the individual as representative of the species. This is shown by relatively recent phenomena such as population statistics, the control of reproductive and sexual behaviour, public health, mental as well as physical, and the gradual elimination of anomalies, defects and malfunctions among the population. A political technology of disciplining the bodies of the population has come into being, which takes the individual as a stand-in for the perpetuation of the species. According to Foucault regimes of 'bio-power' aim to include as fully controlled elements

the very vital forces that, per definition, escape political control. Foucauldian feminists (Braidotti 1991; MacNay 1992) have added a gender dimension to this scheme of thought. The maternal feminine and hence the woman's body is a central player in this new negotiation of the boundaries between the powers of life (as *bios/zoe*) and the political economy of the species in bio-power and its regimes of surveillance. Women reproduce the future and consequently are under tighter and more pervasive technologies of control, discipline and punishment. They also embody a 'sensible transcendental' approach, which Irigaray praises as a strategy of empowerment. The fact that Foucault, in his chronic androcentrism, fails to see this obvious point while discussing the reproduction of the species reflects poorly upon his work. Deleuze and Guattari through their notion of immanence, multiple becomings and the virtual, travel much further down this road (more on them in the next session).

For Foucault the political status of the individual as responsible for the survival of the species, that is, as an evolutionary and genetic unit, has been redefined by the post-nuclear predicament that concretises the possibility of species extinction. Hence Foucault's famous formulation:

For millennia man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question. (Foucault 1976: 188)

The paradox of bio-political regimes is therefore that they unfold onto the question of death in the sense of elimination, exclusion and ever worse, extermination or extinction. The politics of bio-power affect those who are allowed to survive as well as those who are doomed to perish. It is a rather brutal regime of gradual, all pervasive selection, which takes the form of distributing and controlling the forms of entitlement to 'life' understood as survival and perpetuation. As such, bio-power provides the grounding for a new political ontology.

A new generation of political thinkers has taken over from where Foucault left off. For instance, Nicholas Rose (2001) suggests that bio-politics has become by now the dominant regime of control of bodies through a system of integrated scientific discourses and social mechanisms. As a consequence, argues Rose, Foucault's analysis needs to be updated nowadays and reinscribed

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into the political economy of risk management and security enforcement, which requires a responsible bio-citizen as the basic unit of reference. Rose defines this shift to a new 'etho-politics' as a sort of generalised and largely self-implementing form of bio-political citizenship.

Contemporary capitalism is bio-digital and techno-biological: it is about controlling all that lives so as to transform it in its very being. The contemporary labour market does not only use up 'bios' in the sense of the strength of living matter, the vitality and docility of living bodies—it goes even further. What is now required of workers is what used to be called their 'souls'—the affectivity in the care sector, the sense of motivation and dedication to their jobs on the part of people whose work conditions are 'flexible' and exploitative; the good looks and health and youth of the workers.

Feminists following in these footsteps are setting new priorities. Whereas work inspired by Foucault remains within the frame of Kantian responsibility and rational judgment, new reflections on the vitality of life following Deleuze and Guattari call for a new political analysis, based on a radical revision of the very notion of life (Colebrook 2004). I will explore these ongoing developments in more details in the next section.

Eco-philosophies of multiple belongings

In his work on chaosmosis Guattari proposes an ecological political theory. He stresses that our world is incapable of absorbing the techno-mutations that are currently shaking it. As the terms of reference break down one by one, a vertiginous race towards radical renewal is the only positive alternative:

An ecology of the virtual is just as pressing as ecologies of the visible world. (Guattari 1995: 91)

This qualitative step forward is necessary if we want subjectivity to escape the regime of bio-power. This is defined in terms of capitalism as schizophrenia as a system that enforces self-withdrawal, the infantilisation through the media and the denial of alterity. Guattari's 'virtual ecology' aims at engendering the conditions for the creation and the development of subversive and unprecedented formations of subjectivity. It is a political ecology, also known as ecosophy, which aims at crossing transversally the many layers of the subject and multiple subjects, from interiority to exteriority and everything in

between. These are the becomings, which he also theorised with Deleuze, defined as nuclei of differentiation and singularisation.

Guattari proposes an analysis of eco-philosophical complexity in four dimensions: instead of the libido, the notion of material and semiotic fluxes of energy. Instead of the realm of the linguistic signifier, the concrete and abstract machinic entities (or phylums); instead of the unconscious: virtual universes of value and in place of the self-finite existential territories. Again, the point of such a distinction is to create transversal connections across the lines, in a creative process of transversality.

Luciana Parisi suggests (Parisi 2004) that Guattari's scheme of the complex ecologies provides an answer to the question of the transversal interconnections among these lines. His answer is a mixed semiotics that combines the virtual (indeterminate) and the actual domains. The non-semiotic codes (the DNA or all genetic material) intersect with semiotic a-signification, which is a complex assemblage of affects, embodied practices and other performances that include but are not confined to the linguistic.

Parisi argues that a similar case is made quite powerfully by the new epistemology of Margulis, through the concept of endosymbiosis, which, like autopoiesis, indicates a creative form of evolution. It defines the vitality of matter as an ecology of differentiation, which means that the genetic material is exposed to processes of becoming. This questions any ontological foundation for difference while avoiding social constructivism. The assumption of Spinozist monism underscores this project and defines natureculture as a continuum that evolves through variations, or differentiations. Deleuze and Guattari theorise them in terms of transversal assemblages.

The punch line of this dense argument is twofold: the first point is that difference emerges as pure production of becoming molecular and that the transitions or stratifications are internal to the single process of formation or of assemblage. They are intensive or affective variations that produce semiotic and a-semiotic practices. This is not about dismissing semiotics or the linguistic turn, but rather an attempt at using it more rigorously, within the domains of its strict application (Massumi 2002). It is also important to connect it transversally to other discourses. The second key point is that primacy is given to the relation over the terms. Parisi expresses this in Guattari's language as 'schizogenesis' —or the affective being of the middle, the interconnection, and the relation. This is the space-time where the differentiation occurs and with it the modifications. These variations

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The point is to rethink evolution in a non-deterministic but also a non-anthropocentric manner. In a response to the divinely ordained evolutionary teleology of T. de Chardin, the emphasis falls instead on the quest for a more adequate understanding of the topology and the ethology of forces involved in chaosmosis defined as the radical immanence of life as a complex system. Central to this non-essentialistic vision of vitalism is the idea of affinity among different forces, in a set of connective disjunctions, which are not a synthesis, but a recomposition. This gives use to what Ansell Pearson calls: 'bio-centered egalitarianism' as a post-humanist ethics that traces transversal connections between the impasse of essentialism and of social constructivism. Bio-power is bio-piracy (Shiva 1997). Traffic in all that lives and breeds generate global profit; in a world order governed by 'information societies' this trade in *bios/zoe* is material and symbolic, concrete and discursive.

Deleuze and Guattari are interested in an ecological analysis of subjectivity as a transversal event. The logic of composition of this collectivity is not the paranoid political economy of dominant scientific communities, which constitute themselves by inventing a necessarily excluded lay and hostile 'outside', but is rather based on shared affectivity, a strong sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is not a pathology of paranoia and negativity, but an affirmative, creative bond. This goes for scientific communities, as for any other aspect of social life.

This kind of transversal belonging is one of the sites of becoming, which is an outward-bound, collectively sustained practice. The question that is raised therefore is not what essential identity as scientist it confirms, but rather what it makes us capable of, what mode of empowerment it enacts.

Multiple forms of accountability

We cannot base theoretical or discursive practices along one or a binary model of action. Activism needs to reflect the multi-faceted structure of non-unitary subjectivity. Contemporary feminist theorists are a prime example of this: they have built an impressive academic curriculum, with a strong interdisciplinary span. Many are recognised as advisors to the EU on matters related to women, science and society; several are members of editorial boards for a range of

scholarly publications in gender, cultural, political studies and philosophy of science. Feminism and the question of women in science is a central concern for all, but many have also been lifelong militants in left-wing political groups, in human rights organisations, in movements for the legalisation of drugs, abortion, the defense of the environment, the rights of migrants and illegal workers. Many have invested in new forms of spiritual practice, ranging from Buddhism to various types of ethics of care. Many feminists are polyglots with multiple cultural allegiances: they are as nomadic as they are situated. Their transversality translates into multiple forms of conceptual literacy and the capacity to combine homegrown theories with Anglo-American paradigms of thought. Being positioned in-between many theoretical cultures, they function as actors in knowledge-transfer practices and also as conceptual translators.

A great deal of this new vitality is due to the coming of age of a new generation of feminist scholars, who call themselves 'the third wave' (Henry 2004) and are actively pursuing a reassessment of the feminist agenda and its canon. This new generation is both self-aware and very articulate about its aims and priorities.

Central to contemporary feminist thought is a revision of the secular legacy of European feminism. Secularism could indicate a peaceful ecology, an art of coexistence, not a hegemonic norm like in France today. The question is not to impose secularism by reducing religion to a private matter, but to devise a form of political ecology that allows for diverging forces to coexist. It is also a question of producing the processes of becoming, not of reducing the becoming to an inner source and a private affair: it is about the becoming-world of subjects, not of mere reference to otherworldly matters. Contemporary feminist theory is situated, but global, accountable, but also flowing. This transversal approach radicalises the premises of postmodern feminism.

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