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10

Feminist Philosophies

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If as late as the mid-1980s the critical overviews, anthologies and reference texts dealing with feminist philosophy were so few as to constitute collectors' items, by the dawn of the new millennium the feminist philosophical community could pride itself on monumental reference works such as *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, edited by professional philosophers of the calibre of Allison Jaggar and Iris Young (1998). As Linda Alcoff put it: 'There is now a generation of fully mature thinkers, a considerable body of work, fully developed sub-areas, and even a bit of recognition. Jürgen Habermas has to respond to Nancy Fraser, Jacques Derrida to Judith Butler and John Rawls to Susan Moller Okin' (2000: 841). It is therefore quite a daunting task to try to sum up the state of this field, considering its vitality, diversity and dynamism.

The very question of the criteria of organization and classification of the different schools of feminist philosophy is so complex that it would deserve a study apart. It is effectively a philosophical issue in itself, which deals with the problems of the indexation and canonization of a rich and varied tradition. For instance, nationally oriented systems of indexation are often used to make sense of this wide field of feminist knowledge production. I did so myself (Braidotti 1994) by drawing an operational distinction between the German-inspired, the French-oriented, the Anglo-American and other traditions within the field broadly known as 'Continental' philosophy. More recently, Claire Colebrook (2000) has made a robust claim for a distinctive Australian

tradition of feminist philosophy. This principle of organization offers the clear advantage of highlighting relatively less-known traditions of feminist thought, especially non-European ones and, thus, can contribute to a less ethnocentric approach: the section in Jaggar and Young's *Companion* (1998) entitled 'Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe' illustrates the strategy. It is also useful to bring to our attention philosophical movements that occur in languages other than dominant standard English (Nagl-Docekal and Klingner 2000). None the less, I have grown dissatisfied with this nationalistic system of indexation which is not the best way to comprehend and organize the vitality of feminist philosophy. Especially in the context of the contemporary world where nationalism and xenophobia are on the rise, I would prefer to avoid such an approach and to 'nomadize' instead the different categories, so as not to compartmentalize them excessively. To 'nomadize' categories of thought means to dislodge them from their often implicit attachment to the humanistic vision concerning the autonomous, liberal individual so as to open them towards other modes of thinking about the structures of the self and the inter-relation to others.

Ever mindful of Mary Eagleton's lesson on the importance of situating our narratives (Eagleton 1996), I would stress the messy, ad hoc and often simply erratic nature of a great deal of the formidable developments that have made feminist philosophy in the past thirty years. Emphasizing the non-linearity of this process is not a way of diminishing its value or significance, but rather it is a way to give back to the philosophical enterprise its adventurous and partial nature, writing it back into women's own experience. Some common features can in fact be detected and it is to these that I will turn first, to establish a sort of indexical system.

The Bond to the Women's Movement

The foundational value of Simone de Beauvoir's work (1953) for feminist philosophy cannot be overstressed. Not only did Beauvoir's phenomenological approach emphasize the need to think through existence and experience but she also stressed the structural value and the structurally discriminatory force of the concept of 'difference'. Beauvoir calls for a Hegelian-inspired overcoming of the dialectic of domination which elevates the Self or the Same to the rank of a sovereign subject and reduces the other/s to a hierarchically inferior cat-

egory. In order to overthrow this dialectical scheme, Beauvoir posits as a necessary condition a bond of solidarity between herself and all other women, which lays the philosophical foundations for the feminist theory of political sisterhood. Moreover, Beauvoir brings to the fore the fake universalism of philosophical thinking which has passed off reason as a generic human trait, while allowing it to be colonized by masculinity, in dialectical opposition to his 'others'.

Feminist theories start from the assumption that 'the personal is the political' and that all theories about women and gender need to be checked against real-life experiences. This appeal to 'the politics of experience' originated in the 1960s from Marxist epistemology: it means that you have to trust the evidence of real-life women, that real-life conditions are the most important indicator of the status of women. The appeal to 'experience' plays a foundational role also in terms of the feminist critique of what was first called bourgeois-patriarchal ideology (in the Marxist phase) and, later on, under the influence of psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, the phallogocentric regime. *A Constitute Glossary of Feminist Theory* (Andermahr et al. 1997) provides a useful introduction to these key feminist concepts. Following Beauvoir, the anchoring point and ground of validation for feminist philosophy remains the politics of location and experience with a privileged bond to the embodied self. Adrienne Rich (1985) re-examines this idea and redefines it in the light of new evidence brought into feminism by women of colour and lesbians. By emphasizing the differences that exist among women, especially on the grounds of race and sexual orientation, Rich diversifies the foundational category of 'experience' and proposes to replace it with a more complex framework of analysis where diversity and multiple power locations play a central role. The materialism of the early appeals to 'real life' is made more complex. With the politics of locations, a feminist critique of power is offered that confronts the many power differences and is based on accountability for our locations. This in turn means that 'we women' are all in it, though in very dissymmetrical and uneven ways.

In fact, a 'location' is not a self-appointed and self-designed subject position. It is a collectively shared and constructed, jointly occupied spatio-temporal territory. Consequently, the politics of location refers to a process of consciousness-raising that requires a political awakening (Grewal and Kaplan 1994) and hence the intervention of others. Politics of locations are cartographies of power which rest on a form of self-criticism, a critical, genealogical self-narrative: they are relational and outside-directed. This means that 'embodied' accounts

illuminate and transform our knowledge of ourselves and of the world. Thus, black women's texts and experiences make white women see the limitations of our locations, truths and discourses. Feminist knowledge is an interactive process that brings out aspects of our existence, especially our own implication with power, that we had not noticed before. It estranges us from the familiar, the intimate, the known and casts an external light upon it; in Foucault's language, it is micro-politics, and it starts with the embodied self. Feminists, however, knew this well before either psychoanalysis or post-structuralism theorized it in its philosophy.

Thus, feminist theory is about multiple and potentially contradictory locations and differences among, but also within, different women (Braidotti 1994). To account for them, locations are approached as geo-political, but also temporal zones, related to self-reflexivity, consciousness, self-narrative and memory. Feminism, especially under the impact of Foucault's post-structuralist philosophy (Diamond and Quinby 1988), is not about restoring another dominant memory but rather about installing a counter-memory, or an embedded and embodied genealogy. Accordingly, I see feminist philosophy as the activity aimed at articulating the questions of individual gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity, the production of knowledge, diversity, alternative representations of subjectivity and epistemological legitimation (Braidotti 2002).

The politics of locations is an affirmative approach to the issue of subjectivity in so far as it looks at the workings of power in terms of the complexity and multiplicity of the relations that structure it. In order to achieve this, feminist philosophy has, from the start, rejected the dualistic modes of thought (Lloyd 1984; Irigaray 1985; Cixous and Clement 1986). Instead of thinking in oppositional terms, it stresses the simultaneity of potentially contradictory axes of oppression. This emphasis on diversity among women, coupled with the practice of accountability for one's locations as a critique of power differentials, leads to the necessity of creating alternative forms of theoretical representation. Hence the importance of what I call 'figurations' of alternative feminist subjectivity, like the womanist or the lesbian or the cyborg or the inappropriate(d) other or the nomadic feminist or other possibilities. They differ from classical 'metaphors' precisely in calling into play a sense of accountability for one's locations. They express materially embedded cartographies and as such are self-reflexive and not parasitic upon a process of metaphorization of 'others'. Moreover, self-reflexivity is not an individual activity but an interactive process

which relies upon a social network of exchanges. The figurations that emerge from this process act as the spotlight that illuminates aspects of one's practice which were blind spots before. By extension, new figurations of the subject (nomadic, cyborg, black and so on) function like conceptual *personae*.

Feminist theory has worked very hard in the past twenty years to build on these foundations and to formulate its philosophical tradition. In the following sections in this chapter, I will analyse some dominant frameworks for feminist philosophies, following Harding's threefold classification of different feminist epistemologies (Harding 1986, 1991). Let it be clearly understood from the start, however, that these three trends are neither dialectically linked, nor are they hierarchically rated. This means that they are not mutually exclusive: rather, they represent approaches, moments or positions which can coexist, even within the same individual thinkers. The main purpose of drawing categorical distinctions between them, therefore, is to elucidate each category and explore its implications.

Feminist Empiricism

This approach, be it quantitative or qualitative, pays its dues to social constructivism and it assumes that the practice of institutional philosophy disproportionately represents men's interests, needs and expectations. It consequently aims at repairing the under-representation of women at all levels of research, teaching, implementation, policy-making and dissemination of data and information. This policy of equal opportunities for women has been officially adopted by all major professional organizations for feminist philosophy, from the European Network of Women Philosophers to the Society for Women in Philosophy, the women's caucus in the Society for Phenomenology and Existentialist Philosophy and to specific branches of the International Philosophical Association. This empirical or equity-minded approach to philosophy sides resolutely with scientific rationality and objectivity, without questioning any of its tenets, including the distinction knower/known. In fact, it takes these principles of rationality and objectivity so seriously that it applies them to the analysis of the practice of philosophy itself. It argues, therefore, that gender bias and discrimination against women is a failure of scientific rationality. In other words, gender biased or downright sexist scientific practices make for bad science and, thus, they constitute a fault in the proper, objective

use of scientific objectivity (Lloyd 1984; Harding 1986). The masculinist bias is, from this perspective, a form of irrationality, an error of judgement that needs to be eliminated in order to produce a type of scientific practice that would be truly worthy of the ideals of objectivity and rationality. Proper scientific objectivity can and must be restored by fighting male domination of the use of reason.

I see two problems with this approach. First, it tends to remain restricted to repair work, that is to say in mending the gender gap in philosophy. This is undeniably important considering the persistence of factors of inequality and of discrimination against women. However, in the long term an equity-minded approach runs into structural difficulties. More complex strategies and frameworks of analysis are needed in order to tackle the continuing issue of male domination of philosophical knowledge. Issues of power and identity need to be raised and a challenge needs to be mounted against the conceptual framework of what we have learnt to recognize as 'scientific objectivity'. Secondly, most equity-minded projects tend to essentialize the category of 'women', flattening out the wide and widening range of differences among women. Diversity is underplayed in the name of an overarching, allegedly universal principle of equity of equality, which often begs the very question it asks, namely: 'equal to whom?' (Irigaray 1985).

Standpoint Feminist Theory

The largest area of feminist philosophical reflection is the 'standpoint feminism' school. This is an attempt to combine the politics of location with a more scientific methodology. Harding's 'standpoint feminism' (1986) argues that women's experience provides a good starting-point for the elaboration of new paradigms of knowledge. Although feminists like Nancy Hartsock (1983) kept this theory closely related to the Marxist idea that 'the oppressed know better', most did not. Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), for instance, relies on the object-relation theory of psychoanalysis in order to demonstrate how power differences work in the production of Western philosophical assumptions about rationality and the universality of reason. Keller raises issues of identity and identity-formation and singles them out as crucial to the whole discussion on feminism and science. Object-relation theory is a very influential school of psychoanalysis which emerged from the Anglo-American tradition and, thus, differs considerably from the

French Lacanian school. It emphasizes both the contextual factors and the social framework and their impact upon the formation of the subject and the process of socialization. Less preoccupied with symbolic and imaginary structures than on concrete social relations, this psychoanalytic tradition, inspired mostly by Winnicott's work, stresses inter-subjectivity and the importance of transitional spaces. Because of this emphasis on interpersonal exchanges, object-relation psychoanalytic theory allows for empirical analyses of patterns of domination and exclusion (Benjamin 1988), as well as for a critique of their privileged bond with masculinity and also for feminist resistance to them.

In a more sociological version, this school of thought finds in Nancy Chodorow's theory of parenting a concrete strategy by which men's role in child-rearing is proposed as the antidote to the bond that patriarchal societies encourage between masculinity and violence. Chodorow (1978) and other object-relation theorists have challenged the masculine bias of science not merely as an accidental or a statistical instance but rather as a structural element in scientific practice. In other words, science is masculine not only because it is empirically dominated by men but because it also implies a male subject and object of science at each and every step of the making of science. The masculine bias that is built into the practice of science reflects the codes of behaviour that are operational in society as a whole. Here, psychoanalytic studies of the psycho-sexual development of individuals cast an important light on the ways in which masculinity comes to be identified with autonomy and femininity with dependence (Benjamin 1988). In turn, this encourages men's access to the use of rationality, the well-defined rules and protocols of scientific objectivity and an inquisitive spirit that results in experimentation. In the female, inscurities and lack of assertiveness are implemented instead.

Difference-minded or standpoint feminism covers a variety of methods which have in common a critique of empirically minded gender equity. The grounds on which 'difference' is defended as a positive value, and not merely as a signifier of inferiority or oppression, vary greatly. While most feminist philosophers tend to be sceptical of specific female or feminine ways of knowing (Code 1991), most emphasize the potential represented by the yet-untapped resources of women's cognitive, intellectual and other experiences. In particular, this gender approach stresses the positive contribution that women and other socially marginal groups can make to the production of scientific knowledge. It assumes that positions of social marginality are ideal sources of knowledge in so far as they do not defend any vested

interests and thus end up being more objective and more impartial. Women's ethical powers and sense of moral responsibility, including a willful rejection of competitiveness and aggression, have also been quoted as a positive source of difference (Gilligan 1982).

In terms of its relationship to the discipline of philosophy, this approach is far more critical than the previous, empiricist one. Scientific objectivity is challenged from without and a more radical critique is offered of the ways in which rationality and objectivity are implemented as a human, a social and a scientific ideal. The assumption behind this critique is that women's socially induced 'difference' is, in fact, a capital, a human and scientific resource that needs to be infused into what our culture has codified as science. The aim here is the enlargement of the notions of rationality and objectivity, in order to make them less discriminatory and more inclusive. A very important element in this approach is the critique of power relations and the relationships of domination and exclusion which operate within the actual practice of philosophy. We are a long way in this view from the unquestioned acceptance of scientific concepts of the empirical tradition. Moreover, by emphasizing the importance of social and cultural mediations, feminist standpoint approaches also stress the degree to which the positionality of the individual thinkers – in terms of gender, class, age, race, religion – affects the kind of projects s/he is likely to engage in. This is not to be confused with a relativistic position but rather with a systematic attention to power relations. A concrete example of feminist standpoint strategies is the re-reading of the philosophical canon by feminist philosophers. This entails a lively dialogue with the history of philosophy and was initiated by Genevieve Lloyd in the 1980s and pursued today in a full-scale attack on the exclusiveness and male domination of the history of philosophy. As Alcoff (2000) points out, Nancy Tuana's editorial series for Pennsylvania State University Press on the philosophical canon is exemplary of this trend.

Feminist Postmodernism

The critique of the essentialism implicit in standpoint gender theory is the starting-point for the more deconstructive approach. Whether it is based on a postmodernist, post-structuralist, post-colonial or, more recently, post-feminist approach, this gender method fundamentally challenges the possibility of speaking in one unified voice about women. The focus is entirely on issues of diversity and differences

among women. By crossing questions of gender with a critique of the eurocentric bias in science, this approach questions the idea that science and scientific knowledge can be truly universal (Spivak 1987). Instead, feminist postmodernism tends to see such knowledge as an expression of Western culture and of its drive to mastery. Whereas empirical philosophies efface differences and standpoint feminism enhances them, a postmodernist approach takes off from them in order to transform them into stepping-stones towards cross-border or trans-versal alliances. As a strategy, this approach tends, therefore, to emphasize differences among women, in terms of class, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation but also of age, thus targeting especially the needs and aspirations of the next generations.

Neither relativistic nor a form of sceptical suspension of belief in values, deconstruction is the simultaneous recognition of the ubiquity of power and hence its non-linear structure, as well as the necessity of resistance in an equally non-linear manner. In a postmodernist framework, philosophical thought is taken not only as an attempt to explore and analyse but also as a way to control and normalize. Scientific discourse is embedded in a network of power relations aimed at disciplining nature, its resources and the many 'others' that are different from an implicit norm of scientific subjectivity. This norm equates science with masculinity and both with white, eurocentric premises. The recognition of the normativity of science and of the partiality of scientific statements as well as their necessary contingency has nothing to do with relativism. Rather, it has to do with a critique of falsely universal pretensions and with the desire to pluralize the options, paradigms and practices within Western reason, in keeping with the basic tenets of deconstructionism (Holland 1997).

In what I consider to be a radical critique of dualistic thinking, post-modernist approaches emphasize the extent to which power is a process of formation of pejorative 'others'. Here 'difference' plays a constitutive, if negative, role. 'Difference' has been colonized by power relations that reduce it to inferiority; further, it has resulted in passing off differences as 'natural', which has made entire categories of beings into devalued and therefore disposable others. Discourse, as Michel Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), is about the political currency that is attributed to certain meanings, or systems of meaning, in such a way as to invest them with scientific legitimacy: there is nothing neutral or given about it. Thus, a deconstructivist approach to the analysis of power and discourse highlights the links that exist between scientific truth and discursive currency or power relations. As

such, it primarily aims at dislodging the belief in the 'natural' foundations of socially coded and enforced 'differences' and of the systems of value and representation that they support.

Secondly, a politicized deconstructive method emphasizes the need to historicize the analysis of the creation of scientific concepts as normative formations and, thus, it allows us to take on the historicity of the very concepts that we are investigating. In a feminist frame, this emphasis on historicity means that the scholar needs some humility before the eternal repetitions of history and the great importance of language. We need to learn that there is no escape from the multi-layered structure of our own encoded history and language. The political implications are even more striking. They suggest that there is no readily accessible uncontaminated or 'authentic' voice of the oppressed, be it women or blacks or people of colour. This turns, first, into an attack on the essentialism of those who claim fixed identities of the deterministic kind. It also undercuts, however, any claim to 'purity' as the basis for epistemological or political alternatives. Claims to 'purity' are always suspect because they assume subject positions that would be unmediated by language and representation.

Politically, therefore, feminist postmodernist philosophies are opposed to 'identity politics' and to the counter-affirmation of oppositional identities because they end up reasserting the very dualisms they are trying to undo. Simultaneously, they also stress the positivity of difference within a theoretical platform for a politics of diversity in so far as they make a point of carefully avoiding and even undermining any attempt at re-essentializing 'gender', 'race' and 'ethnicity' as natural given 'data'. Feminist postmodernist philosophies are committed both to a radical politics of resistance and to the critique of the simultaneity of potentially contradictory social and textual effects. This simultaneity is not to be confused with easy parallels or arguments by analogy. That gender, race, class and sexual choice may be equally effective power variables does not amount to flattening out any differences between them.

I could sum up post-deconstructivist strategies by saying that all deconstructions are equal but some are more equal than others. Whereas the deconstruction of masculinity and whiteness is an end in itself, the non-essentialistic reconstruction of black perspectives, as well as the feminist reconstruction of multiple ways of being women, also have new values to offer. In other words, some notions need to be deconstructed so as to be laid to rest once and for all: masculinity; whiteness; heterosexism; classism; ageism. Others need to be decon-

structed only as a prelude to offering positive new values and effective ways of asserting political presence of newly empowered subjects: feminism; diversity; multiculturalism; environmentalism. We need to fight passionately for the simultaneous assertion of positive differences by, for and among women, while resisting essentialization and claims to authenticity.

The Importance of Psychoanalysis and Post-structuralism

Psychoanalysis is crucial in theorizing and representing a non-unitary vision of the subject. I want to keep clearly in view the enfolded, sexed and contradictory nature of the human subject, where fantasies, desires and the pursuit of pleasure play as important and constructive a role as rational judgement and standard political action. I would like to try to reconnect the wilful agency required of politics with the respect that is due, both theoretically and ethically, to the affective, libidinal and therefore contradictory structures of the subject. Sexuality is also central to this way of thinking about the subject.

In her important critique of the sex/gender distinction, Moira Gatens (1996) stresses the extent to which gender theory tacitly assumes a passive body onto which special codes are imprinted. The social-psychology-inspired gender model is diametrically opposed to the insights of psychoanalysis. The points of divergence concern, first, the structure of human embodiment: passive for gender theory, dynamic and interactive for post-structuralist theory. A second very important point concerns the notion of sexuality and of its role in the constitution of subjectivity which is of great importance for post-structuralism, not so for social psychological gender theories (Chanter 1995).

Although the body has been, in fact, a permanent feature of radical feminism from the start and has already undergone several brilliant redefinitions, the feminist theorists of sexual difference put a new *kind* of emphasis on the embodied female subject. They de-essentialized the body, that is to say they refused to reduce it to either raw nature (one is born a woman) or to mere social construction (one becomes a woman). Instead, they situated the body at the intersection of nature and culture, in a zone of high turbulence of power (de Lauretis 1987). By emphasizing the embodied structure of female subjectivity, these feminists politicized the whole issue. Moreover, by setting the ques-

tions of political subjectivity in the framework of phallogocentrism, they aimed at the empowerment of women in the deep structures of subjectivity. Embodiment provided a common but highly complex ground on which to postulate the feminist project. In a feminist postmodernist perspective, the body is an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces. The body is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age and so on) are inscribed; it is a cultural construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous and unconscious nature.

In other words, the body, which for Beauvoir was one's primary 'situation' in reality, is now seen as a situated self, as an embodied positioning of the self. Although the terminology may appear similar, the conceptual and political differences are considerable. In spite of her phenomenological roots, Beauvoir upholds a rather Cartesian attitude towards the embodied structure of subjectivity. This means that she tends to reduce the body to the facticity of existence, which is to say its material roots; these are thought of as inevitable but are also inevitably opposed to the subject's capacity for thinking. The mind-body dualism in Beauvoir reduces the embodied self to the level of a material site in opposition to the subject's intentionality. Feminist post-structuralist philosophers critique this dualistic opposition, as they do all binary systems, but in addition they reinvest the body and the embodied roots of subjectivity with a more pervasive sense of what a body can actually do and of how it incorporates modes of thinking and knowing which extend beyond dualistic oppositions to the mind. This renewed sense of complexity aims to stimulate anew a revision and redefinition of contemporary subjectivity.

For Irigaray (1985) the body, and especially sexuality, is clearly perceived as the site of power struggles and contradictions and, consequently, it is viewed critically. But it is also addressed and re-visited precisely because of its crucial importance as a site of constitution of the subject. In other words, the signifier 'woman' is both the concept around which feminists have gathered in their recognition of a general condition and also the concept that needs to be analysed critically and eventually deconstructed. This is, furthermore, an historically situated statement: it is a suitable description of the condition of women in postmodern late capitalism. In my reading of post-structuralist philosophies of difference from Foucault to Irigaray and Deleuze (Braidotti 2002), I emphasize the material, sexualized structure of the subject. This sexual fibre is intrinsically and multiply connected to social and political relations; thus, it is anything but an individualistic entity.

Sexuality as a social and symbolic, material and semiotic institution is singled out as the primary location of power in a complex manner which encompasses both macro- and micro-relations. Sex is the social and morphological assignment of identity and suitable form of erotic agency to subjects that are socialized/sexualized in the polarized dualistic model of masculine/feminine implemented in our culture. Far from marginalizing sexuality, in this feminist conceptual framework it is a central point of reference which acts as the matrix for power relations in the broad but also most intimate sense of the term.

In American feminist philosophy through the 1990s, the sex/gender dichotomy swung towards the pole of gender with a vengeance, embracing it either as the preface to liberal individual 'rights' or in terms of social constructivist 'change'. In both cases, gender occupies the centre of the political spectrum and establishes the sex/gender dichotomy as a crucial term of reference, to the detriment of issues of sexuality and of sexual difference. It was left to the gay and lesbian and queer campaigners to try to re-write sexuality into the feminist agenda. In this framework, homosexuality is almost always synonymous with transgression or subversion. The tendency is also to critique heterosexuality as the dominant matrix of power and to target specifically the maternal roots of female sexuality for critique. Judith Butler (1990, 1993), following on from the work of Gayle Rubin (1975) and Monique Wittig (1992), makes an important intervention, pointing out that the distinction sex/gender is, in fact, untenable. If anything, argues Butler, it is the always-already sexualized matter that constructs the possibility of this dichotomy in the first place. Butler then proceeds to propose her own theory of performativity as a form of affirmative deconstruction of all identities, even those they taught us to despise.

Beyond Postmodernism: The Return of the Body

From the mid-1990s, a new brand of materialism emerges in feminist philosophies, following on from the postmodernist phase. It addresses both issues of technological change and the subsequent structural inequalities, and also issues of ethnicity, race, national and religious identity in the age of globalization. The work on the politics of location offered by post-colonial and anti-racist feminist thinkers like Gayatri Spivak (1987), Grewal and Kaplan (1994) and many others, helps us illuminate the present. The paradoxes, power dissymmetries and fragmentations of the present historical context require that we

shift the political debates from the issue of differences between cultures, to differences *within* the same culture. In other words, one of the features of our present historical condition is the shifting grounds on which periphery and centre confront each other, with a new level of complexity which defies dualistic or oppositional thinking.

Black, post-colonial and feminist critics have rightfully *not* spared criticism of the paradoxes as well as the rather perverse division of labour that has emerged in the age of globalization. According to this paradox, it is the thinkers who are located at the *centre* of past or present empires who are actively deconstructing the power of the centre and, thus, contributing to the discursive proliferation and consumption of former 'negative' others. Those same others, however, especially in post-colonial, but also in post-fascist and post-communist societies, are more keen to reassert their identity, rather than to deconstruct it. The irony of this situation is not lost on any of the interlocutors. We can think, for instance, of the feminist philosophers saying: 'how can we undo a subjectivity we have not even historically been entitled to *yet*? Or we consider the black and post-colonial subjects who argue that it is now their historical turn to be self-assertive and thus reject postmodernism as a discourse of crisis. And if the white, masculine, ethnocentric subject wants to 'deconstruct' himself and enter a terminal crisis, then – so be it! The point remains that 'difference' emerges as a central – albeit contested and paradoxical – notion and this means that a confrontation with it is historically inevitable as we – postmodern subjects – are historically condemned to our history. Accounting for these differences through adequate cartographies consequently remarks a crucial priority.

A significant example of the often paradoxical affinity between feminist theory and philosophical nomadology is Donna Haraway's redefinition of materialism (1988) which redesigns the epistemological grounds of feminist theory after postmodernism. She redefines the idea of politics of location in the late 1980s which will remain influential throughout the 1990s. Haraway's argument is that, in the age of globalization, under the impact of technology, there is no unmediated relationship to experience. Our social life is marked by a set of technological mediations. This calls on us to readjust our schemes of thought to a social reality which is pervaded by structural injustices engendered by late post-industrial societies the world over. In this line of thinking the practice of theoretical reason and, hence, of the philosophy of science is not seen as narrowly rationalistic but rather allows for a broadened definition of the term, to include the play of the

unconscious, dreams and the imagination in the production of scientific discourse. Following Foucault (1977), Haraway draws our attention to the construction and manipulation of docile, knowable bodies in our present social system.

This view was elaborated further in Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1991), which is one of the most quoted and influential feminist figurations for an alternative view of subjectivity. I read the figuration of the cyborg along three distinct, though interrelated axes: as an analytical, a normative and a utopian category. On the analytical level, it assists in framing and organizing a politically invested cartography of present-day social and cognitive relations. As a normative value, it points towards more adequate and precise standards of evaluation and judgement of the social processes currently under way. Finally, as a utopian manifesto, endowed with a remarkable visionary charge, it draws virtual and possible scenarios for the advancement of the project of reconstructing subjectivity in the age of advanced technology. Haraway herself describes the hybrid figuration of the cyborg as a mix of political fiction, of mythology and of lived experience – especially women's – at the end of the twentieth century.

As a hybrid, or body-machine, the cyborg is a connection-making entity; it is a figure of interrelationality, receptivity and global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions (human/machine; nature/culture; male/female; oedipal/non-oedipal). It allows Haraway to think specificity without falling into relativism. The cyborg is Haraway's representation of a generic feminist humanity. By redefining it radically, it answers the question of how feminisms might reconcile the radical historical specificity of women with the insistence on constructing new values that can benefit humanity as a whole. Moreover, the body in the cyborg model is neither physical nor mechanical – nor is it only textual. As a counter-paradigm for the interaction between the inner and the external reality, it offers a reading not only of the body, nor only of machines but also of what goes on between them. As a new powerful replacement of the mind-body debate, the cyborg is a post-metaphysical construct.

In my reading, the figuration of the cyborg reminds us that metaphysics is not an abstract construction but, rather, a political ontology. The classical dualism body-soul is not simply a gesture of separation and of hierarchical coding; it is also a theory about their interaction, about how they hang together. It suggests how we should go about rethinking the unity of the human being. Balsamo (1996), in her reading of Haraway, stresses two crucial aspects of the cyborg: namely,

that it corrects the discursive body with the materially constructed body. Secondly, she indicates that it bears a privileged bond to the female body. Woman as the 'other of the same' is in fact the primary artefact, produced through a whole social interaction that is both constructed by and is the expression of the various 'technologies of gender' that are currently operational (de Lauretis 1987).

Haraway is a non-anthropocentric philosopher with a strong affinity to eco-feminism: she reconceptualizes the process of knowledge starting from a machine-based or an animal-centred or an earth-grounded perspective. The cyborg theories emphasize that multiplicity need not lead necessarily to relativism. Haraway argues for a multifaceted foundational theory, for an anti-relativistic acceptance of differences, so as to seek for connections and articulations in a non-gender-centred and non-ethnocentric perspective.

Towards the Posthuman?

Interest in Darwin and evolutionary theory has grown considerably as a result of the renewal of interest in the body within feminist philosophy, on the one hand, and the rise of feminist studies of science and technology, on the other. This intensifies the crisis of philosophical humanism that post-structuralists had already celebrated in their interest in Freud, Marx, Nietzsche and Darwin. The point of their radical critique is both humanism and anthropocentrism; both have to do with the role and function of reason and the implicit assumptions it contains not only about subjectivity but also about the human as such. Traditionally, the self-reflexive control of life is reserved for the humans, whereas the mere unfolding of biological sequences is for the non-humans. The former is holy (*bios*), the latter quite gritty (*zoe*). 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. Artists have crowded into this in-between area, offering a number of interconnections. And so have feminist philosophers who are engaged in rethinking feminist subjectivity in a dialogue with contemporary biology, while disagreeing with the neo-determinism of social biologists and evolutionary psychologists. Feminists attempt to disengage biology from the structural functionalism of DNA-driven linearity and to veer it instead towards more creative patterns of development (Halberstam and Livingston 1995).

Social accountability is also high on the agenda. Elizabeth Grosz has stressed the importance for feminists to rethink the biological structure of the human. This call for a return to the body reiterates the rejection of social constructivism which, as I noted earlier, is crucial to feminist theory in the third millennium (Grosz 1994). In other research fields, such as science studies, however, where attention for and a critical engagement with evolutionary theories has always been central to the agenda, a more sceptical note is being struck. Thus, in their recent and quite masterful critique of evolutionary theories, Hilary and Steven Rose (2000) denounce their profound misogyny and their complicity with imperial and colonialist projects of white, eurocentric pseudo-science. They also track down the increasing interdependence of contemporary biological research and commercial as well as industrial concerns which are far from politically neutral.

The need for a new ethical project that would integrate a renewed interest in corporeality or bodily materialism with a serious critique of the limitations of the linguistic turn within postmodernism has been voiced by several feminist philosophers. Bio-ethics as an area has grown in importance of late (Diprose 1994); some humanistic philosophers like Martha Nussbaum (1986) point to the need for a return to Aristotelian principles of moral virtue; others, like Benhabib (1992), argue for the unavoidable confrontation with Kantian morality. In a more creative vein, Gatens and Lloyd (1999) re-visit Spinozist ethics with Gilles Deleuze so as to provide a robust new ethical standpoint. Noteworthy in this context is the interest in the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze (Buchanan and Colebrook 2000) and in its applications to feminist philosophy (Braidotti 2002).

Conclusion

It is important to emphasize that, because of the great variety and high quality of the work accomplished over the past thirty years, feminist philosophy has moved beyond the premises that mark its beginnings. These are respectively a concern with mere criticism of the established canon, on the one hand, and, on the other, an exaggerated fascination with the 'philosopher queens' whose thought and personalities have marked the feminist movement with particular intensity. The rich variety offered by the field today shows that critique has been replaced by creative alternatives and the invention of new approaches and theoretical tools. As a result, the seduction of philosophical theory

has been reduced accordingly and subjected to rigorous scrutiny. I think that both non-closure and the rejection of master figures and master theories have been accepted as ruling principles in the practice of feminist philosophies. This also implies going beyond the different 'isms' of our respective traditions of thought, to accept diversity but also the increasingly high degrees of specialization and the distinctive conceptual style of each tradition. I would locate in this approach the making of a distinctive feminist philosophical culture, which has moved from critique to affirmation, from negative readings to positive re-invention of the discipline, becoming both more complex and more focused in the process.

I think it remains of the greatest importance, now that the field of feminist philosophy is so well organized and methodologically sound, to keep on interrogating the criteria and the norms by which we organize the many micro-narratives that rule our thinking and generate our research. Resisting the temptation of teleological closure, self-transparency and hegemony, I would like to stress the importance of continuing to work on the very systems of indexation, the categories by which we, as feminist philosophers, organize our own work. The politics of location as an objective, accountable methodology that accepts partiality while avoiding relativism can be of the greatest assistance in this process. We need to interrogate the very ways in which the new feminist philosophical canon is being formed and transformed, while we passionately pursue this aim.

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11

Cyberculture

Jenny Wolmark

Over the past decade an extraordinarily wide-ranging field of related studies has developed which focuses on cybernetics and information technology. This chapter is concerned with the relationship between feminist theory and the emerging fields of enquiry which come under the broad heading of cyberculture. All these fields are concerned with the social and cultural impact of information technology and with the ways in which the barriers between 'real' and 'virtual' space are being broken down. Indeed, the conceptual, electronic environment of cyberspace, initially described as a 'consensual hallucination' in the fiction of science-fiction writer William Gibson, is now taken for granted, so much so that, as Michael Heim suggests, cyberspace has become 'a tool for examining our very sense of reality' (1991: 59).

In order to address what she refers to as 'scary new networks' being set in place by the increasing domination of information technologies, Donna Haraway invokes the term 'informatics' (1990: 203) to describe the inextricably linked cultural, linguistic, social, sexual and biological connections and networks that derive from these technologies. New technologies have also generated an abundance of utopian and dystopian fantasies, many of which are reiterated in cyberculture, but as Constance Penley and Andrew Ross argue, such fantasies are an expression of 'real popular needs and desires' as well as being a 'powerful and persuasive means of social agency' (1991: xiii). The pervasive nature of these fantasies is emphasized by Judith Squires, who rightly suggests that 'the cybernetic has gripped our imaginations. It