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*Feminist Consequences*  
THEORY FOR THE NEW CENTURY

EDITED BY  
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12. Gillian Rose, *Love's Work: A Reckoning with Life* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 128.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
14. Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom: Ages of the World*, with F. W. J. von Schelling, *Die Weltalter*, trans. Judith Norman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 67–68. All further page references appear in the text.
15. See Judith Butler's critique of Žižek in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
16. For a sustained critique of what he takes to be Butler's linguistic determinism, see Pheng Cheah, "Mattering," *Diacritics* 26, no. 1 (1996): 108–39.
17. Eva Knodt, "Introduction," in Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).
18. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.
19. Slavoj Žižek, "Cartesian Subject Versus Cartesian Theater," in *Cogito and the Unconscious*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 269.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
21. Elizabeth Wilson, *Neural Geographies: Feminism and the Microstructure of Cognition* (New York: Routledge, 1998). All further page references appear in the text.
22. Cheah, "Mattering," pp. 108–39.

## Chapter 14

# Becoming-Woman: Rethinking the Positivity of Difference

ROSI BRAIDOTTI

## Introduction

By the end of the last century of the second millennium one cannot even attempt generalizations about the state of feminist theory in the West, let alone in the rest of the globe. If this is to go down in history as the century of women, then diversity and the respect of differences among women are not optional, but are a real epistemological and ethical necessity. All one can offer is a reasoned map, or a politically invested cartography of one's situated perspective or location. These politics of location aim at expressing accountability for one's own implication within the very power relations one is committed to critiquing and undoing. Feminist practice at the end as at the start of this century remains eminently political: it is the practice of accountability in a relational and collective mode that aims at unravelling power relations and reducing power differentials.

Taking this into account, if I were to sketch one aspect of feminist culture in the 1990s that I consider particularly relevant it would be the extent to which feminism came to show some of the same "perverse" features as late postindustrial societies in the West. In terms of what I would call the existential temperature as well as the mood of feminism, a marked generational shift took place by the end of the millennium.

### *Toward a Monstrous Social Imaginary?*

In general, feminism came to share the flair for sexual indeterminacy, hybrid identities, transgendered bodies, and mutant sexualities that so much of the contemporary "technoculture" also promoted. "Queer" stopped being the noun that marks an identity they taught us to despise, to become a verb that destabilizes any claim to identity. The anorexic body replaced the hysteric as the fin-de-siècle psychopathological symptom for femininity and its discontents. The abject drug-addicted bodies of *Trainspotting* met with unprecedented public success. A colder, more ironic sensibility with a distinct flair for sadomasochism became the nineties' version of "no more nice girls." Mae West has replaced Rebecca West as feminist mother, as Madonna claimed in her *Sex* photo album. Bad girls are in and they go for mutant others. Cyberfeminism in all its multiple rhizomatic variables also promoted a monstrous or hybrid imaginary. As Marina Warner put it, "in rock music, in films, in fiction, even in pornography, women are grasping the she-beast of demonology for themselves. The bad girl is the heroine of our times, and transgression a staple entertainment."<sup>1</sup> Marcia Tucker proudly announced it: we have entered the age of the "Giant Ninja Mutant Barbies."<sup>2</sup>

What is important to note is that this represents a marked change from the previous decade. In the eighties feminist theory celebrated both the ambiguities and the intensity of the "gynocentric" or "mother-daughter" bond in positive terms—*écriture féminine* and Irigaray's paradigm of "labial or specular politics" being somewhat the epitome of this trend. By the late nineties, however, the maternalist/feminine paradigm was well under attack, if not discarded. This shift away from gynocentric psychoanalytic feminism toward a definitely bad attitude to the mother coincides, as often is the case in feminism, with a generation gap.

Melanie Klein's "bad" mother has replaced the Lacanian-inspired "vanilla sex" representation of the M/other as object of desire. Accordingly, parodic

politics has replaced strategic essentialism and other forms of affirmative mimesis in feminist theories of difference.<sup>3</sup> Nixon<sup>4</sup> reads the anti-Lacanian climate of the '90s, best illustrated by the revival of interest in Melanie Klein's theory of the aggressive drives, "in part as a critique of psychoanalytic feminist work of the '70s and '80s, privileging pleasure and desire over hatred and aggression" (p.72). I would like to situate the new alliance that is currently being negotiated between feminists and Deleuze in this context of historical decline of Lacan's theory of desire as lack.<sup>5</sup> As for the emphasis on aggression, I see it as the cultural trend that expresses, among others, the rejection of the myth of global sisterhood and of inherent female feminist empathy. A more selective approach has become established, also in feminist politics.

Feminism shares the social imaginary of late postmodernity in the West by being in the grip of a teratological imaginary.<sup>6</sup> The monstrous, the grotesque, the mutant, and the downright freakish have gained widespread currency in postindustrial cultures.<sup>7</sup> The freak, the geek, the androgyne, and the hermaphrodite crowd the space of multiple urban, suburban, televised and on-line *Rocky Horror* shows. Drugs, mysticism, satanism, various brands of insanity are also on the catalogue. Liminal or borderland figures that mark the intersection between the human and the animal or the beast-figure, especially replicants, zombies, and vampires, including lesbian vampires and other queer mutants, seem to enjoy special favor in these post-AIDS days.

Although cultural critics tend to reduce the impact of this imaginary by consigning it to a very unclear category called "youth culture"—or, especially in Europe, "popular culture"—the teratological imaginary is also rampant in "high" cultural genres. Authors such as Angela Carter, Kathy Acker, Martin Amis, and Fay Weldon, as well as new genres such as science fiction, cyberpunk, horror, and crime stories, constitute a broad "posthumanist" techno-teratological landscape that privileges the deviant techno-bodies and the mutant others over the more conventional versions of the human.

Contemporary cyberspace culture simply intensifies this trend. Biotechnology has also contributed to shifting the issue of genetic mutations from the high-tech laboratories into popular culture, thus raising the idea of meta(-1-)morphosis to the status of a cultural icon. Jackie Stacey recommends that we link this social imaginary to the surge in classical and relatively newer killer diseases, of which cancer remains the deathly trademark.<sup>8</sup> Let me clarify one important point here. By "social imaginary" I mean a

set of socially mediated practices that function as the anchoring point—albeit contingent—for framing and shaping the constitution of the subject and therefore for identity formation. These practices are interactive structures where *desire* as a subjective yearning and *agency* in a broader sociopolitical sense are mutually shaped by one another. Neither “pure” imagination—locked in its classical opposition to reason—nor “fantasy” in the Freudian sense, the Imaginary marks a space of transitions and transactions. It’s inter- and intra-personal. Dynamic, it flows like a symbolic glue between the social and the self, the “constitutive outside” and the subject, the material and the ethereal.

It flows, but it is sticky: it catches on as it goes. It possesses fluidity, but it distinctly lacks transparency; let alone purity. I use the term “desire”—following poststructuralism—to connote the subject’s own investment or enmeshment in this sticky network of interrelated social and discursive effects. This network constitutes the social field as a libidinal—or affective—landscape, as well as a normative—or disciplinary—framework.

Considering its structure, the Imaginary cannot be unitary or have a generalized meaning. All we can do is offer philosophically reasoned diagrams or cartographies of it. Nor is it the case that an immediate Nietzschean transmutation of values can be implemented. Rather, it is the case that critiques of the social Imaginary have provided—since the sixties—the arena in which different theories of representation have clashed, fueling the discourse of the crisis of representation.

The notion of the social Imaginary thus owes a lot to poststructuralist political theory since Althusser and to Lacanian psychoanalysis, up to Deleuze’s intervention. I also want to argue that it stretches beyond the confines of these respective discourses. It helps relate the process of constitution of the subject to the webs of discourses that circulate in culture and society in such a way as to avoid the dichotomous opposition between the “inner self” on the one hand and the “outside cultural codes” on the other. I think that the idea of a fluid, albeit nontransparent Imaginary can account for the productive yet contradictory ways in which a nonunitary and consequently heterogeneous subject is formed in the feedback exchanges between the inside and the outside. It is these spaces in-between that are interesting.

The pronounced preference expressed by poststructuralist thinkers such as Foucault and Deleuze for surfaces rather than depths expresses this notion very powerfully. In this essay, therefore, I will speak of the subject as an intensive or dynamic field of intersecting forces that not only propel

him/her back and forth but also provide a frame in which to “contain” this same subject. More on this later.

I define the social Imaginary accordingly as a network of forces and interconnections that constitute subjects in multiple, complex, and multilayered ways. Subjects are consequently simultaneously constructed and destabilized by interpellations that hit them at all levels simultaneously. I care particularly for emphasizing and granting due specificity to prediscursive and unconscious processes by which subjectivity is invested and decentered by the constant and ultimately productive encounter with cultural codes, forces, affects, norms, and other “events” with which the subject grows coextensive.

To apply this to the teratological Imaginary, there is a clear resonance between the social manifestations of the fascination for the hybrid, or the mutant, and the ways in which they activate the “monsters within.” This is also known as the “metamorphic effect” of the monstrous other upon the self.<sup>9</sup> Diane Arbus noted, way back in the sixties, the strangely reassuring function that freaky bodies and monstrous others fulfill in the anxiety-ridden contemporary imagination.<sup>10</sup> Freaks have already had their traumas and have come out at the other end; they are ontological aristocrats resilient in their capacity to endure at a time when many early twentieth-century humans may instead have serious doubts as to what exactly happens next.

In other words, at times of fast-changing social and cultural conditions the mutant, hybrid, monstrous others accelerate to an almost vertiginous degree the destabilization of the subject. They both express and enhance the subjects’ confrontations with the pain of transition and transformation. They stress the inevitability of negotiations, shifts, and restructuring that lie at the heart of the process of change and how they imply both pain and exhilaration and can never avoid conflict.

These processes of change need to be read in the context of the historical decline or decentering of Europe (West and East) as a world power. It is also intrinsic to the postnuclear predicament of an advanced world whose social realities become virtual—or dematerialized—under the pressure and the acceleration of a digitally-clad economy. One is tempted to link these factors to the “postnuclear sensibility” of advanced societies where science and technology have led to the implosion of the Enlightenment promise of progress by and through reason. Far from being the leading principle in a teleological process aimed at the perfectibility of the human, science and tech-

nology have sort of "spilled over" and have turned into sources of permanent anxiety over our present and future. In other words, this historical context has definitely contributed to making the "end" thinkable.

A culture that can rationally contemplate the spectacle of its own extinction, by technological overkill and environmental collapse, is not only postindustrial/nuclear/modern, but also posthuman. And this goes well beyond the loss of the materialistic paradigm, such as it is often celebrated in structuralist and poststructuralist circles. It actually approaches a collective case of machine-envy in the humans and the desire to imitate the inorganic.

In an age where, as Donna Haraway astutely observes,<sup>11</sup> the machines are so restless while the humans are so inert, the issue is not only how to overcome the modernist divide between technophobia and technophilia, but also—for me—especially how to redefine the enfolded structure of the subject, which we used to call "the body" in the old days, in such a way as to account for its being immersed in the techno-industrial-military media apparatus while preserving a sense of its singularity. This singularity allows for accountability and for political practice amidst the collective renegotiations of identity that are going on around us. Essential traits of this project are the posthumanistic and antihumanocentric mode of representing the new subject-positions that have emerged in the teratological technolandscape of late postmodernity.

### *Consuming the Others*

A second set of reasons that cast an interesting light on the monstrous social imaginary is the reappraisal of difference—some would say the remarketing of difference—which has taken place in late postmodernity.

Sexualized, racialized, "marked" differences return to the center of the philosophical debate with the force of a return of the repressed. This proliferation of discursive practices of "otherness" cannot and should not be separated from material and geopolitical power relations in the age of postindustrialism, postcoloniality, and postcolonialism. I am endorsing here a definition of late postmodernity in terms of the systematic construction and marketing of consumable, representable, and tradable "differences" that are shot through with structural power relations. These power relations result in a proliferation of social as well as discursive practices that result in the "marketing" of pluralistic differences and the "commodification" of the "others"

in the mode of consumerism and neocolonial romantic appropriation of their "difference."<sup>12</sup> In the tradition of philosophical materialism within which I situate myself, I do not see any contradiction between the geopolitical and historical context, which engenders the practices of otherness, and the philosophical and discursive interest in both the politics and the theories of "difference." It is in fact to the credit of politically minded philosophies such as poststructuralism that they both register and intersect with historically relevant and politically poignant issues such as "difference."

I want to argue that this proliferation of discourses about difference, about "otherness," exposes the dichotomous economy of a philosophical reason that historically has posited itself as much by what it excludes as by what it includes within the apparatus of entitlements and power that lays the groundwork for subjectivity. In other words, the promotion of different differences is assured and governed by the empowered "Majority subject," as Deleuze would call Him (and the gender is anything but coincidental). These are the "others" of the Same, as Irigaray would more pointedly put it. This "familiarity of difference" is precisely what grants to monstrous others a metamorphic, peculiarly reassuring quality, to which I will return.

This proliferation of "pejorative others" is internally contradictory and fraught with tensions. Looked at from the angle of "different others," in fact, this inflationary production of different differences also and simultaneously expresses the emerging subjectivities of positive and self-defined others. It all depends on one's locators or situated perspectives. Far from seeing this as a form of relativism, I see it as an embedded and embodied form of enfolded materialism.

Translated into a Deleuzian feminist perspective, this means that these differences may be quantitatively small, but they are qualitatively major in that they tend *not* to alter the logic or the power of that Same, the Majority, the phallogocentric master code. In late postmodernity the center merely gets fragmented, but that does not make it any less central, or dominating. It is against the uncritical reproduction of sameness on a molecular, global, or planetary scale that Deleuze proposes a different take; instead of the Majority-driven proliferation of difference, we need a theory of active becoming that would allow us to transgress and ultimately exit from the entire dialectical frame of opposition Majority-versus-minorities.

Black, postcolonial, and feminist critics have rightfully *not* spared criticism of the paradoxes as well as the rather perverse division of labor that has emerged in postmodernity and poststructuralist philosophy. According to

this paradox, it is the thinkers who are located at the *center* of past or present empires who are actively deconstructing the power of the center—thus contributing to the discursive proliferation and consumption of former “negative others”—while those same others—especially in postcolonial, but also in postfascist and postcommunist societies—are rather more keen to reassert their identity, rather than to deconstruct it.

The irony of this situation is not lost on any of the interlocutors; think for instance of the feminist philosophers saying, “How can we undo a subjectivity we have not even historically been entitled to yet?” Or the black and postcolonial subjects who argue that it is now their historical turn to be self-asserting. And if the white, masculine, ethnocentric subject wants to “deconstruct” himself and enter terminal crisis, then—so be it! The point remains that “difference” emerges as a central—albeit contested and paradoxical—notion; this implies that the confrontation with the notion of “negative difference,” or “pejorative others,” is historically inevitable, as we—postmodern subjects—are historically condemned to our history.

Thus the monstrous or teratological imaginary expresses the social, cultural, and symbolic mutations that are taking place in the context of technoculture in the age of postcolonial, postfeminist, and other insurrected and emerging subjectivities. They are highly contested, multilayered, and internally contradictory subjectivities, but this does not make them any less materially embedded, concretely embodied, or any less ridden with power relations.

Sexualized and racialized monstrous others are signs of an embodied difference that had historically been coined negatively—by the metaphysical cannibalism of a subject that feeds upon its specular, structurally excluded others. Pejorative otherness thus helps to illuminate the dissymmetrical power relation within Western theories of subjectivity. By virtue of its organic, as well as structural, proximity to the dominant subject-position, the monstrous other helps define “sameness.” Normally it, after all—as Cangulhem teaches us—the zero-degree of monstrosity.

In such a context, I want to resist two complementary trends:

The first is the euphoric celebration of the intrinsically liberatory power of the major dislocation of subject positions (the “Majority-driven” proliferation of differences mentioned before) that our historicity is enacting—including the fascination for monstrous techno-bodies, for “postgender” bodies, and other hyped figurations that circulate in this end of century. Technocultures in postcoloniality are political regimes of acute visualiza-

tion. From the panoptical eye explored by Foucault, to the disembodied satellite eye / I of Haraway’s cyborgs—without forgetting, at a more sociological level, the ubiquitous presence of television and surveillance videos and the wired computer screens—it is the visual dimension of contemporary technoculture that defines its all-pervading power.

Some of the masters of the postmodern “aesthetics of disappearance” tend to launch euphoric celebrations of the “evaporation of reality,” to speak like Ernst Gellner, and to celebrate the reduction of the embodied subject to a mere “surface of representation,” placing all hope in potential multiple and virtual reembodiments. I would prefer to issue a more sober message, alerting us not only to the danger of “visual politics” but also to the challenge that it throws our way, namely of how to recompose an ethical and political sense of agency of the subject, without falling into nostalgic reappraisals of an authentic or essential “human nature”—or, on the contrary, an orientalist glorification of deviant others.

The second trend that I want to resist consists in giving in to a celebration of nihilism. To go back to the example of the monstrous social imaginary, I refuse the rather nostalgic position that consists in reading it as the symptom of the cultural decadence of our times, or the much celebrated decline of “master narratives,” or the loss of the canon and standards of “high culture.”

There is no denying the fact that, in late postmodernity, various brands of nihilism are circulating. A whole philosophical style based on “catastrophe” is popular among several prophets of doom, who contemplate the implosion of humanism with tragic joy.<sup>13</sup> Nothing could be further removed from the ethics of affirmation and the political sensibility of posthumanist subjects than the “altered states” proposed by what I face-tiously call the “narcophilosophers”: those who celebrate the implosion of sense, meaning, and values for their own sake. They end up producing historic renditions of that delirious megalomania against which Deleuze proposes firmly and rigorously a sustainable definition of the self.

It is against these contemporary forms of nihilism that a critical philosophy of immanence needs to disintoxicate us and to reset the agenda in the direction of affirmation and sustainable subjectivity.

What I see as the theoretical stake of the debate is the question of the status of difference, certainly, but more specifically the issue of how to elaborate adequate forms of representation of the contemporary subject-positions. At stake is how to reconfigure the positivity of difference, stressing the

potentially affirmative aspects of a philosophy of becoming, of active transformations in the age of posthumanist subjectivity.

### Becomings

Deleuze emphasizes processes, dynamic interaction, and fluid boundaries in a materialist, postmodernist brand of vitalism. The emphasis on actuality must be read against the background of Deleuze's stern rejection of the role of rational consciousness in our culture. Phallogocentric reason's Medusa-like head has the power to captivate and intimidate its beholders.

In his effort to move beyond the dogmatic image of thought, its oedipal foundations and the anxiety of influence it arouses, Deleuze redefines philosophy as the nonreactive activity of thinking the present, the actual moment, so as to account adequately for change and changing conditions.

In his quest for a postmetaphysical discourse about the thinking subject, Deleuze also redefines the practice of theory-making in terms of flows of affects and the capacity to draw connections. Accordingly, thinking is not for Deleuze the expression of the in-depth interiority of a "knowing" subject, or the enactment of transcendental models of reflexive consciousness. Pursuing to a radical degree the insight of psychoanalysis about the noncoincidence of the subject with his/her consciousness, Deleuze posits the subject as an affective or intensive entity.

Deleuze describes ideas as events, active states that open up unsuspected possibilities of life. In other words, beyond the propositional content of an idea, there lies another category: the affective force, the level of intensity that ultimately determines its truth-value. The truth of an idea is less in its propositional content or referential value than in the kind of affects that it releases; ideas are noble or lowly, active or reactive, depending on whether they mobilize one's powers of affirmation and joy over the forces of denial and negation.

In juxtaposition with the linear, self-reflexive mode of thought that is favored by phallogocentrism, Deleuze defines this new style of thought as "rhizomatic" or "molecular." These new figurations of the activity of thinking are chosen for their capacity to suggest weblike interaction and interconnectedness, as opposed to vertical distinctions, in a manner of speech that can be compared to Donna Haraway's figuration of the cyborgs.<sup>14</sup>

Deleuze defends this view of the subject as a flux of successive becomings by positing the notion of a "minority" consciousness.

This "intensive" redefinition of the activity of thinking entails a vision of subjectivity as a bodily entity: The embodiedness of the subject is not of the natural, biological kind; rather, Deleuze deessentializes the body, which thus appears this complex interplay of constructed social and symbolic forces. The body is not an essence, let alone a biological substance; it is a play of forces, a transformer and relay of energy; a surface of intensities. The embodied subject is a term in a process of intersecting forces (affects) and spatiotemporal variables (connections).

Applied to feminist discussions of gendered identity, this means that Deleuze's work does not rest upon a dichotomous opposition of masculine and feminine subject positions but, rather, on a multiplicity of sexed subject positions. The differences in degree between them mark different lines of becoming, in a web of rhizomatic connections:

For us . . . there are as many sexes as there are terms in symbiosis, as many differences as elements contributing to a process of contagion.

We know that many beings pass between a man and a woman; they come from different worlds, are born on the wind, form rhizomes around roots; they cannot be understood in terms of production, only in terms of becoming.<sup>15</sup>

These different degrees of becoming can be rendered as diagrams of thought, typologies of ideas, politically informed maps, variations on intensive states. Multiplicity does not reproduce one single model—as in the Platonic mode—but, rather, creates and multiplies differences. This has dire consequences for sexual difference.

In identifying the points of exit from the phallogocentric modes of thought, toward a new, intensive image of philosophy, Deleuze stresses the need for new images for these subject-positions. This results in the elaboration of a set of postmetaphysical figurations of the subject. The notion of the *figural* (as opposed to the more conventional aesthetic category of the "figurative") is central to this project.<sup>16</sup> Figurations such as rhizomes, becomings, lines of escape, flows, relays, and bodies without organs release and express active states of being, which break through the conventional schemes of theoretical representation.

Alternative figurations of the subject, including different feminine and



masculine subject-positions, are figural modes of expression, which displace the vision of consciousness away from phallogocentric premises.

Deleuze's central figuration is a general becoming-minority, or becoming-nomad, or becoming-molecular. The minority marks a crossing or a trajectory; nothing happens at the center, for Deleuze, but at the periphery there roam the youthful gangs of the new nomads:

All becomings are already molecular. That is because becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to portion formal relations. Neither of these two figures of analogy is applicable to becoming; neither the imitation of a subject nor the proportionality of a form. Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movements and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes.<sup>17</sup>

The space of becoming is therefore a space of affinity and symbiosis between adjacent particles. Proximity is both a topological and a quantitative notion, which marks the space of becoming of subjects as sensitive matter. The space of becoming is one of dynamic marginality.

Deleuze's theory of becoming-minority, however, displays a problematic double pull. On the one hand, the becoming-minority/nomad/molecular/bodies-without-organs/woman is posited as the general figuration for the kind of subjectivity that Deleuze advocates. On the other hand, not all the forms taken by the process of becoming are equivalent. Let us analyze this stage of his argument carefully.

In so far as man, the male, is the main referent for thinking subjectivity, the standard-bearer of the Norm, the Law, the Logos, woman is dualistically, i.e., oppositionally, positioned as his "other." The consequences are that

1. there is no possible becoming-minority of man;
2. the becoming-woman is a privileged position for the minority-consciousness of all.

Deleuze states that all the lines of deterritorialization go necessarily through the stage of "becoming-woman," which is not just any other form of

becoming minority, but rather is the key, the precondition and the necessary starting point for the whole process of becoming.

The reference to "woman" in the process of "becoming-woman," however, does not refer to empirical females but, rather, to topological positions. The becoming-woman is the marker for a general process of transformation; it affirms positive forces and levels of nomadic, rhizomatic consciousness:

There is a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, that do not resemble the woman or the child as clearly distinct entities. . . . What we term a molecular entity is, for example, the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject. Becoming-woman is not imitating this entity or even transforming oneself into it. . . . Not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman, create the molecular woman.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, the woman occupies a troubled area in this radical critique of phallogentrism: insofar as woman is positioned dualistically as the other of this system, she is also annexed to it. Deleuze—not uncharacteristically ignorant of basic feminist epistemological distinctions between Woman as representation and women as concrete agents of experience—ends up making distinctions internal to the category of woman herself. At this point his difference from Irigaray's sexual difference theory grows wider and more irreparable than ever.

Deleuze, just like Derrida and other poststructuralists, opposes to the "majority/sedentary/molar" vision of Woman as a structural operator of the phallogocentric system the woman as "becoming/minority/molecular/nomadic." Concludes Deleuze: all becomings were equal, but some were more equal than others. As against the molar or sedentary vision of woman as an operator of the phallogocentric system, Deleuze proposes the molecular or nomadic woman as process of becoming.

In so far as the male/female dichotomy has become the prototype of Western individualism, the process of decolonisation of the subject from this dualistic grip requires as its starting point the dissolution of all sexed identities

based on the gendered opposition. In this framework, sexual polarisations and gender-dichotomy are rejected as the prototype of the dualistic reduction of difference to a subcategory of Being. Thus, the becoming-woman is necessarily the starting point for dissolving the overemphasis on masculine sexuality; the persistence of sexual dualism and the positioning of woman as the privileged figure of otherness are constitutive of Western thought. In other words, "becoming-woman" triggers off the deconstruction of phallic identity, because of historical and cultural and not biologically essentialist reasons.

Sexuality being the dominant discourse of power in the West, as Foucault taught us,<sup>19</sup> it requires special critical analysis. Thus, the generalized becoming-woman is the necessary starting point for the deconstruction of phallogocentric identities precisely because sexual dualism and its corollary—the positioning of Woman as figure of Otherness—are constitutive of Western thought. In other words, it is because of historical and not biological reasons that sexed identities are foregrounded in the process of deconstruction.

More significant still for feminist theory is Deleuze's next step: Deleuze's ultimate aim with respect to sexual difference is to move toward its final overcoming. The nomadic or intensive horizon is a subjectivity "beyond gender" in the sense of being dispersed, not binary; multiple, not dualistic; interconnected, not dialectical; and in a constant flux, not fixed. This idea is expressed in figurations such as "polysexuality," the "molecular woman," and the "bodies without organs," which are the figurations for this world beyond gender, to which Deleuze's de-phallic style actively contributes.

Deleuze uses also the becoming-woman of women as the basis for a critique of certain kinds of feminism. Some feminists—among whom I do not hesitate to situate myself—display in fact the irritating tendency to refuse to dissolve the subject "woman" into a series of transformative processes that pertain to a generalized and "gender-free" becoming. In other words, feminists are conceptually mistaken, though they may be politically correct, in their assertion of specific rights and entitlements for women. They are even more misguided when they argue for a specifically feminine sexuality: more emphasis on the feminine is restrictive. Deleuze suggests that they should instead draw on the multisexed structure of the subject and reclaim all the sexes of which women have been deprived.

Ultimately, what Deleuze finds objectionable in feminist theory is that it perpetuates reactive, molar, or majority thinking: in Nietzsche's scale of values, feminists have a slave morality.<sup>20</sup> Thus, women would be revolutionary if, in their becoming, they contributed both socially and theoretically to

constructing a nonoedipal woman, by freeing the multiple possibilities of desire meant as positivity and affirmation. Women, in other words, can be revolutionary subjects only to the extent that they develop a consciousness that is not specifically feminine, dissolving "woman" into the forces that structure her.

This new general configuration of the feminine as the post- or, rather, neoedipal subject of becoming is explicitly opposed to the feminist configuration of a new universal based on extreme sexualization or, rather, an exacerbation of the sexual dichotomy, such as Luce Irigaray proposed. It is important to keep in mind, at this point, that Deleuze's understanding of the embodied nature of the subject and of the structures of the unconscious and of sexuality are based on his "intensive" notion of the subject. Vitalism; empiricism; affectivity; desire as positivity, not lack; typology of passions and machinic connections constitute the backbone of Deleuze's critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis, or, more specifically, of its Hegelian legacy. The latter overemphasizes dialectical oppositions, the metaphysical illusion of substance and the teleological structures of identity.

I do wonder whether Deleuze's objection to the Hegelian legacy in feminist thinking, and the oppositional logic it entails, which is quite manifest in the case of de Beauvoir, does justice to sexual difference theorists such as Irigaray.<sup>21</sup> Be that as it may, in Deleuze's framework all feminists are lumped together, and in his opinion emphasis on any one of the gender polarities, whether masculine or feminine, achieves the equally undesirable aim of reasserting all that he is critical of: binary thinking as the support of phallogocentrism as the dominant image of thought.

Following Luce Irigaray and the bulk of feminist political practice, I feel doubtful about Deleuze's call for the dissolution of sexed identities by the neutralization of gender dichotomies, because I think that it is both theoretically and historically dangerous for women. I am also, however, quite aware of the potentially paranoid undertones of this position in that it expresses a reactive attachment to the very identity—woman—that, as a feminist, I am committed to deconstructing. I would rather approach the issue of subjectivity in terms of a constructive paradox.<sup>22</sup> I see the concept of "becoming" as central to this project.

We have seen that Deleuze stresses the element of affectivity and desire that constitute the structural core of the subject. Thus, the subject is off-center in relation to the flow of affects that invest it. Psychoanalysis starts from the same assumption that the subject is not master in his house, but accord-

ing to Deleuze it fails to destabilize the power of consciousness as the moral and rational agency. Both in the *Anti-Oedipus* and in subsequent works, Deleuze (with Guattari) radicalizes the critique of psychoanalysis that Foucault had initiated on more sociopolitical grounds. In a more conceptual vein, Deleuze praises the psychoanalytic emphasis on the primacy of the "drives," but he also argues that psychoanalytic theory and practice end up closing the very door they had initially opened. The whole economy of the unconscious is resubjugated in-the-Name-of-the-Father and under the moral and political supervision of a self-regulating, socially enforced conscious and moral rationality. Freud's moment of genius, according to Deleuze, is the discovery of the theory of the drives. His failing is to have indexed them back toward a regulatory and normative scheme of subject, governed by compulsory heterosexuality, oedipal reproduction, and the cost-effective transmission of property best guaranteed by the socioeconomic and legal structure of the family. In other words, according to Deleuze, psychoanalysis reinvests the affective foundations of the subject in a libidinal economy dominated by the phallogocentric principle that equates consciousness with control or the despotic domination of the "dark continents within."

Contrary to this a nomadic or Deleuzian Spinozist approach stresses that the affectivity (*conatus*) is indeed the heart of the matter, but that it is equally the case that this desire is not internalized, but external—or rather, it happens in the encounter between different embodied and embedded subjects who are joined in the sameness of the forces that propel them. Intensive, affective, external resonances make desire that which remains unthought at the heart of thinking, because it is that which triggers and sustains the power of thinking in the first place.

A slice of matter activated by a fundamental drive to life, a *potentia* (rather than *potestas*)—neither by the will of God nor the secret encryption of the genetic code—this subject is yet psychologically embedded in the corporeal materiality of the self. The enfolded intensive or nomadic subject is rather an in-between: a folding-in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding-outward of affects. A mobile entity in space and time, an enfolded kind of memory (I will return to this concept), this subject is in-process but is also capable of lasting through sets of discontinuous variations, while remaining extraordinarily faithful to itself.

This idea of the "faithfulness" of the subject is central to the project of the "sustainable self" that I want to defend here. This "faithfulness to one-

self" is not to be understood in the mode of the psychological or sentimental attachment to an "identity" that often is little more than a social security number and a set of photo albums. Nor is it the mark of authenticity of a self that is a clearing house for narcissism and paranoia—the great pillars on which Western identity predicates itself. It is, rather, the faithfulness of duration, the expression of one's continuing belonging to certain dynamic spatiotemporal coordinates.

As I said earlier, the subject 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 or *potentia*—as a radically ontological force of empowerment.

Becoming is an intransitive process; it's not about becoming anything in particular—only what one is capable of and attracted to and capable of sustaining its life on the edge, but not over it (exit *Bataille*). It's not deprived of violence, but deeply compassionate. It's an ethical and political sensibility that begins with the recognition of one's limitations as the necessary counterpart of one's forces or intensive encounters with multiple others. It has to do with the adequacy of one's intensity to the modes and time of its enactment. It can only be embodied and embedded, because it's inter-relational and collective.

### *Memory and the Imagination*

Remembering is about repetition or the retrieval of information. In the human subject, that information is stored throughout the physical and experiential density of the embodied self and not only in the "black box" of the psyche. I find Deleuze's distinction between a "majority" and a "minority" memory very useful in illuminating the paradoxes and the riches of repetition as the engine of identity and coherence of the self.

Again, Freud's early psychoanalytic insights had caught a glimpse of two crucial notions. First, he understood that processes of remembrance extend well beyond the rationalistic control of consciousness. In fact, consciousness is merely the tip of the iceberg of a far more complex set of resonances, echo, and data-processing that we commonly call "memory." Second, these processes of remembrance are enlivened: they encompass the embodied self as a whole and therefore rest on somatic layers that call for a specific form of (psycho) analysis.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, however, Freud immediately closes the very door that he had half-opened by reindexing this vitalistic and time-bound definition of the subject onto the necessity to conform to dominant sociocultural expectations about civilized adult human behavior. Lacan, argue Deleuze and Guattari, operates a sort of kidnapping of the subject from the solid bodily or somatic grounds of Freudian psychoanalysis. This has the advantage of radicalizing the politics of psychoanalysis by attacking conventional morality, expectations about bourgeois propriety, and the reformist impact of American-dominated "ego-psychology." It also has the disadvantage, however, of introducing into the conceptual framework of the psychoanalytic subject a heavier dose of Hegelian dialectics, mostly through the idea of desire as lack and the role of negativity in the constitution of consciousness. These emerge as major points of disagreement between Lacan and Deleuze.

In his own work on the philosophy of "becoming," Deleuze is committed to rescuing the concept of "memory" from the metaphysical trappings into which psychoanalysis had thrown it. With reference to Bergson, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, Deleuze radicalizes and unhinges the role of memory in subject-formation.

In Deleuze's becomings, the Bergsonian continuous present is set in opposition to the tyranny of the past—in the history of philosophy, for instance, but also in the psychoanalytic notion of remembrance, repetition, and the retrieval of repressed psychic material. Deleuze, via Bergson, disengages memory from its indexation on a fixed identity, predicated upon a majority-subject. The memory of the logocentric or "molar" subject is a huge data bank of centralized information, which is relayed through every aspect of His activities (again, the gender is anything but coincidental).

The majority subject holds the key to the central memory of the system, thus reducing to an insignificant, or rather "a-signifying" role the memories

of the minorities—subjugated, marginal, alternative "countermemories," as Foucault used to call them. In reaction to this centralized, monolithic memory, Deleuze activates a minority-memory, which is a power of remembrance without a priori prepositional attachment to the centralized data bank. This intensive, zig-zagging, cyclical, and messy type of re-membering does not even aim at retrieving information in a linear manner. It simply intuitively endures. It rather functions as a deterritorializing agency that dislodges the subject from his unified and centralized location. It destabilizes identity by opening up spaces where virtual possibilities can be actualized. It's a sort of empowerment of all that was not programmed within the dominant memory.

Re-membering in this mode requires composition, selection, and dosage, that is, the careful layout of empowering conditions that allow for the actualization of affirmative forces. Like a choreography of flows or intensities that reprise adequate framing in order to compose into a form, intensive memories reprise empathy and cohesion between their constitutive elements. They operate like a constant quest for temporary moments when a balance can be sustained, before the forces dissolve again and move on. And on it goes, 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 programs of the dominant memory system. This continuous memory is, however, not necessarily or inevitably linked to "real" experience. In what I consider as one of the more radical conceptual attacks on the authority of "experience" and the extent to which the appeal to experience both confirms and perpetuates the belief in steady and unitary identities, Deleuze links memory, rather, to the imagination.

The imagination plays a crucial role in enabling the whole process of becoming-minority. The imaginative, affective force of remembrance—that which returns and is re-membered/re-peated—is the propelling force in this idea of becoming-intensive. When you re-member in the intensive or minority-mode, you in fact open up spaces of movement—of deterritorialization—that actualize virtual possibilities that had been frozen in the image of the past. Opening up these virtual spaces is a creative effort. When you re-member to become what you are—i.e., a subject-in-becoming—you actually reinvent yourself on the basis of what you hope you could become with a little help from your friends!

It is crucial in fact to see to what an extent processes of becoming are collective, intersubjective, and not individual or isolated. "Others" are the integral element of one's successive becoming. Again, my quarrel here is with any notion of the subject that would imply an ethics of individual responsibility in the bourgeois liberal model. A Deleuzian feminist approach would rather favor the destitution of the sovereign subject altogether and consequently the overcoming of the dualism Self/Other. Sameness/Difference which that vision of the subject engenders. Subjects are fields of forces that aim at duration and joyful self-realization and that, in order to fulfill them, need to negotiate their way across the pitfalls of negativity that phallogocentric culture is going to throw in the way of the fulfillment of their intrinsic positivity.

As far as I am concerned, this means exit Hegel and Lacan; enter Spinoza and Nietzsche, reread with Deleuze.

Re-membering in this nomadic mode is the active reinvention of a self that is joyfully discontinuous—as opposed to being mournfully consistent, as programmed by phallogocentric culture. The tense that best expresses the power of the imagination is the future perfect, "I will have been free," shifting away from the reassuring platitudes of the past to the openings hinted at by the future perfect. This is the tense of a virtual sense of potential. Memories need the imagination to empower the actualization of virtual possibilities in the subject. They allow the subject to differ from oneself as much as possible while remaining faithful to oneself, i.e., while enduring.

A personalized overthrowing of the internal simulacra of the self, this kind of imaginative recollection of the self is about repetition, but it is less about forgetting to forget (Freud's definition of the neurotic symptoms) than about retaking, as in refilming a sequence. The imaginative force of this operation is central to what I would consider as a vitalist, yet antessentialist theory of desire.

Desire is the propelling and compelling force that is attracted to self-affirmation, i.e., the transformation of negative into positive passions. The desire is not to preserve but to change; it is a deep yearning for transformation or a process of affirmation. To enact the different steps of this process of becoming, one has to work on the conceptual coordinates. These are not elaborated by voluntaristic self-naming but, rather, through processes of careful revisitations and retakes. Empathy and compassion are key features of this nomadic yearning for in-depth transformation. The space of becoming is a space of affinity and a correlation of elements between compatible and mutually attractive forces.

It is a space of sympathy between the constitutive elements of the process. Proximity or intellectual sympathy is both a topological and a qualitative notion, both geography or meteorology and ethical temperature. It is an affective framing for the becoming of subjects as sensible or intelligent matter. The affectivity of the imagination is the motor for these encounters and the conceptual creativity they trigger off. It is a transformative force that propels multiple, heterogeneous "becomings" of the subject.

### *Running with Virginia Woolf*

Throughout his work, Deleuze quotes Virginia Woolf as a perfect example of the process of becoming. Woolf's "stream-of-consciousness" style expresses with uncanny precision the seriality, as well as the radical immanence and the structural contingency, of the patterns of repetition by which differences occur. In *The Waves*, for instance, Woolf captures the concrete multiplicity—as well as the shimmering intensity—of becoming-molecule, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible.<sup>23</sup> The sheer genius of Woolf rests in her ability to present—and, I would add, also to experience—her life as a passing through. She is the writer of multiple and intransitive becoming, in-between ages, sexes, elements, characters. Woolf's texts enact a flow of positions, a crossing of boundaries, an overflowing into a plenitude of affects where life is asserted to its highest degree. Woolf also provides Deleuze with a model for the "plane of immanence," where different elements can encounter one another, producing those assemblages of forces without which there is no becoming. As I have said, these assemblages are geographical and even meteorological—they organize space and time around them. The "haecceity" is the specific and highly contingent actualization of a field of forces stable enough, and consolidated by their structural affinity, so as to be able to constitute a phase of immanence.

Woolf's prose expresses the vitalistic interconnections that make the whole process of becoming into a concrete and actualized event. I think that this process of composition and assemblage of forces is what desire is all about, as an ontological layer of affinity and sympathy between different enfolded subjects.

Although Deleuze recognizes the extraordinary position of Woolf as a

conveyor or relay-point for this passionate process of becoming in both *Diary* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, he is very careful to dis-engage Woolf's work from her being-a-woman, and even more from the "écriture féminine" style made popular by sexual-difference feminism.

There is something in what feminists of sexual difference like myself call the "feminine libidinal economy" of excess without self-destruction and desire as plentitude, not lack, that is central to the whole Deleuzian project of becoming.<sup>24</sup> As it is to his aesthetics and theory of art. Nonetheless, Deleuze cannot resolve his ambivalence toward it.

To challenge Deleuze's desexualization of Woolf's style and of her power of affirming positive passions, and thus to provide a diagram of possible becomings, I will turn to one *topos* in her work that I consider of the highest significance and whose sexual connotations and specificity are beyond doubt. Throughout Woolf's letters and diaries as well as in her fictional works, the figure of Vita Sackville-West—the real-life model for *Orlando*—looms large. What makes it particularly striking is the highly defined field of perception that she enacts and, in some ways, organizes.

From their very first encounter in 1923, which was dutifully recorded in Woolf's diaries, through to the end of her life, Vita stands for a life force of mythical proportions. Clearly magnified through the lens of erotic desire but stretching beyond the whimsical tricks of Eros (that cruel god), Vita endures in a field of her own that is one of perpetual becomings.

Spatiotemporal coordinates gather around her; carried by her statuesque legs, the arch of her shoulders, the specific hue of her complexion, Vita organizes Virginia's cosmos around Vita. There's a specific quality of light around her, which is recorded and repeated in the diaries with mathematical precision. It has to do with the porpoise radiance and the luster of pink and of pearls.<sup>25</sup>

There's an acceleration of life about Vita—due to the speed of desire, but also to the more bearable lightness of being. The space gets filled with warmth, with that shimmering intensity that we also find in Woolf's novels. There's a heightening of sensorial perception, the flowing of deep-seated affinity, of immense compassion, to the very end.

*Diary*, February 16, 1930

Vita was here: and when she went, I began to feel the quality of the evening—how it was spring coming; a silver light; mixing with the

early lamps; the cabs all rushing through the streets; I had a tremendous sense of life beginning; mixed with that emotion, which is the essence of my feeling, but escapes description. . . . I felt the spring beginning and Vita's life so full and flush; and all the doors opening; and this is I believe the moth shaking its wings in me.<sup>26</sup>

Virginia will remember these affects, and be able to retrieve their spatiotemporal coordinates throughout her life, even when the actual (I would be tempted by "empirical," except that it may backfire by evoking the phenomenological distinction empirical/transcendental, which Deleuze is absolutely committed to undo and to replace with multiple becomings in/of radical immanence) relationship with Vita has lost its brilliance.

I want to argue that these spatiotemporal, geographical, historical, and meteorological features are Vita, such as she exists as the phase of immanence where she and Virginia activate a process of becoming that goes beyond their psychological, amorous, and sexual relationship. Something much more elemental, rawer, is at stake.

The best way to assess the scale and magnitude of this encounter, and the fields of possible becomings it activates, is by turning to the literature itself: the letters and diaries as well as the fictional work. This is neither a biography nor a mere love letter—it is the unfolding, with meticulous regularity, of the virtual layers of *potentia* contained in the encounter between Virginia & Vita. It is the actualization of multiple and virtual realities, possibilities such as they are perceived, recognized, and amplified by the writer of genius that was Mrs. Woolf. In her study of Virginia Woolf's correspondence, Kate Stimpson argues that the epistolary genre is very specific—and can best be defined as an in-between space, bridging the public and the private.<sup>27</sup> As such, Woolf's letters possess a fluid quality that allows the readers to catch a glimpse of the fleeting state of the writer's mind. Moreover, the letters are interactive exchanges that construct an intersubjective space with her (privileged) interlocutor. They draw a space of flow and becoming through a set of "epistolary performances" that are expressed in order to be shared in a communal—albeit volatile—communicative space. Today's equivalent would be E-mail exchanges.

Moreover, the intense and deep affectivity that is expressed in these letters opens a space of freedom that allows simultaneously for experiments with different writing techniques and for depositing residual and complex emotions. These letters

occupy a psychological and rhetorical middle space between what she wrote for herself and what she produced for a general audience. They are a brilliant, glittering encyclopedia of the partially-said . . . the materials or a full autobiography of consciousness, a mediation between life and work. . . . They concern social worlds that she needed and wanted. They form an autobiography of the self with others, a citizen/denizen of relationships.<sup>28</sup>

It is the link, the affinity, the bond of *potentia* and recognition between them that results in setting the frame for the affirmation of this joyful potency—i.e., in being able to sustain it.

This is all the more remarkable if you consider that, in real life, the actual V & V were far from the life forces that they happened to become together. Virginia could hardly sustain, in her frail body and even more vulnerable psychic balance, the intensity of the forces that she registered, evoked and recorded. As for Vita, Virginia put her finger on it, with the disarming cruelty of her superior intelligence: “you lack transparency. There’s something that doesn’t vibrate in you; it may be purposely—you don’t let it: but I see it with other people as well as with me; something reserved, muted.”<sup>29</sup>

That she hit the mark is testified by Vita’s comments in her correspondence to her husband Harold Nicolson:

Damn the woman! She has put her finger on it. There is something that . . . doesn’t come alive . . . it makes everything I do (i.e.: write) a little unreal; it gives the effect of having been drawn from the outside. It is the thing which spoils me as a writer; destroys me as a poet. . . . It is what spoils my human relationships too.<sup>30</sup>

But this fundamental opacity of Vita’s soul is compensated and sustained by a feminine magnificence about her.

*Diary*, July 1927

Vita very free & easy, always giving me great pleasure to watch & recalling some image of a ship breasting a sea, nobly, magnificently, with all sails spread & the gold sunlight on them.<sup>31</sup>

A Deleuzian feminist reader could draw a cartography of the affective forces that frame the encounters between Virginia and Vita, such as they are

reported in the diaries and the letters (literature and work of remembrance) as well as in the fiction (literature and work of the imagination).

The most recurrent images are that of the porpoise, pink light, the pearls; images of radiance and vitality that occur systematically throughout Woolf’s writings. Vita produces a diagram that contains forces of the utmost intensity: a quality of the light, coupled with a degree of intensity that may alternatively generate desire or trigger an outburst of comic laughter. Vita becomes a factor that introduces an acceleration in the pulse of life, the opening up of possibilities, like the fluttering of wings before one takes the flight. Vita not merely re-presents, but actually enacts and organizes physically as well as in writing the becoming-woman of Virginia Woolf, a becoming-woman that has a distinctly marine quality about it, so ubiquitous are the images of fluidity, flowing, waves, and sea animals. It does mark a fundamental moment in Woolf’s race against time, which is the space where she could finally write.

The assemblage of forces that activate the becoming—Orlando of Vita requires a careful phase of composition of forces that go through the becoming-woman of Virginia and the becoming-lesbian of both Vita and Virginia—but only in order to move on, to keep on becoming—to that last recognition of the bond to Vita as an imperceptible and all-encompassing life force. A pattern of de-territorialization takes place between them, which runs parallel to and in-and-out of their respective and mutual existences, but certainly does not stop there.

It will have been a joyful and towering passion, though not entirely Virginia’s or Vita’s or my own, or yours. You cannot have your own “phase of immanence” (or of transcendence, for the phenomenologically-minded) and still hold onto it; you can only share in the composition of one, in the company of others. One does not run with Woolf alone—women, even Virginia Woolf herself—must learn to run with other (s/he)-wolves.

The real-life Vita recognizes this, much as she had acknowledged from the start her friend’s superior literary genius. After reading *Orlando*, for which she is the model, she actually fails to cope with the shock:

*Vita to Virginia*, November, 10, 1928

How could you hang so splendid a garment on so poor a peg? . . . Also, you have invented a new form of narcissism—I confess—I am in love with Orlando—this is a complication I had not foreseen.<sup>32</sup>

The life that Virginia sees in her is something that Vita herself deeply aspires to. This is nothing to do with narcissistic delight—it is actually a sort of yearning on Vita's part for the potential that lies not so much in her as in the encounter between herself and Virginia. It is simultaneously the slightly ashamed recognition of her own limitations ("I'm not that good, really!") and the grateful recognition of what she owes to her lover's passionate enhancement of the life that is in her ("Thank God you saw that in me!").

In other words, the relation between what in psychoanalysis is called the empirical level (the real-life Vita) and its symbolic representation (the leading character in *Orlando*) is no longer adequate to make sense of the intense transformation that takes place around the field of forces that is activated by Virginia & Vita. The empirical psychology of the two women has nothing to do with this: the psychoanalytic notion of identifications is equally inadequate to account for the magnitude of the exchange that takes place between these two high-powered subjects. We are better off seeing Virginia & Vita as a common block of becoming, a plane for the realization of forces that transcend them both and yet require their presence and affinity in order to become actualized. Forces are concentrated, focused, and activated in the space *between* them and aim at the fulfillment of their own *potentia*. These forces are the acceleration of pure becoming.

Vita herself does justice to this process by accepting to become a mere reader and not the main star of the process of becoming—Orlando. Being an aristocrat and a much celebrated author herself in her own right, this displacement required some humility and flexibility on Vita's part, qualities in which we know that she was notoriously deficient. Yet she displays surprising skills of adaptation by letting her narcissism be simultaneously gratified—"I love myself as Orlando!"—and blown to smithereens—"Orlando is the literary creation of a woman who is a much greater writer than I will ever be!"

In the framework of an ethics of joyful affirmation, the dilemma is clear. One oscillates between positive and negative passions: gratification and resentment, gratitude and envy, as Melanie Klein—one of Deleuze's main sources of inspiration—would put it. Ultimately I find that Vita settles for the more ethical option; she transforms negative into positive passions and accepts to go along with the process of alchemical transformation of her own life and image, which Virginia has actualized. Vita, too, goes running with Woolves.

Neither Virginia nor Vita's life was like that; this becoming is not about

being faithful to the authority of past experience and the solidity of foundations. It is about inventing it together in the space that is framed by the encounter between the two of them, out of the transitory flows of multiple and incoherent experiences of all kinds, speeds, and intensity, in the spaces where transformation can occur. The life that flew between Vita and Virginia certainly was an intensified and accelerated space of becoming.

In the brand of antessentialist vitalism that I adopt from Deleuze, that life has no brand name on it. Nor does it flow within the constraints of a phallogocentric scheme of signification that imposes its own code: desire as lack; alterity and/as negativity; the burden of Being that coincides with consciousness. None of this applies any longer. This is why psychoanalysis cannot do justice to the kind of concrete and highly singular process of becoming that I am trying to account for, bending Deleuze for my own needs.

Thus, it is Vita's shameful recognition of her falling, not the jubilant assertion of her triumph that opens the gates through which flows the intensity that shapes the encounter between Virginia & Vita. The moment of negative passion (envy, resentment, feeling of dispossession) is the prelude to the ethical gesture that involves transcending the negativity and accepting the displacement of the self through the impact of an other that is so very close. This is a case of destitution of the ego, not of its triumphant apotheosis. This is also the ethical moment in their interaction, which rescued *Orlando* from being an act of cannibalistic consumption of the other and turns it into one of the greatest love stories of all times. Similarly, Virginia's self-effacement is crucial to the whole process of being able to sustain, provoke, record, and return the life that is in Vita, amplified to the nth power. Such is the task of *potentia*, and such is the genius of Virginia Woolf's writing.

In other words, one's affirmation of the life that one is shot through with is materially embodied and embedded in the singularity that is one's enfolded self. But this singular entity is collectively defined, interrelational and external; it is impersonal but highly singular because it is crossed over with all sorts of "encounters" with cultural codes, bits and pieces of that sticky social imaginary I mentioned earlier and that constitutes the subject by literally gluing it together, for a while at least. This is not an atomized individual but a moment in a chain of being that passes on, goes through the instance of individuation, but does not stop there; it moves on nomadically, by multiple becomings.

Commenting on Primo Levi's and Virginia Woolf's suicides Deleuze—who will himself choose this way to terminate his own existence—put it



very clearly: you can suppress your own life, in its specific and radically immanent form and still affirm the potency of life, especially in cases where deteriorating health or social conditions may seriously hinder your power to affirm and to endure joyfully. This is no Christian affirmation of Life nor transcendental delegation of the meaning and value system to categories higher than the embodied self. Quite on the contrary, it is the intelligence of radically immanent flesh that states with every single breath that the life in you is not marked by any signifier and it most certainly does not bear your name. So what will the skeptic say at this point? Is it not the specific property and quality of the imagination to magnify reality, especially in situations that, as Virginia would put it, are "not untinged with amorosity"?<sup>33</sup> There is something extremely familiar and almost self-evident about these processes of transformation of the self through an other that triggers processes of metamorphosis of the self.

That is precisely the point: this theory of radical immanence is very simple at heart and it is intuitively accessible. What happens is really a relocation of the function of the subject through the joining of memory and the imagination into propelling a vital force that aims at transformation. As a rigorous reader of Spinoza, Deleuze suggests a positive and equal relationship between reason and the imagination. Overthrowing the traditional hierarchy of intellectual and mental faculties, which had discriminated against the imaginative and the oneiric, Deleuze locates the *potentia* of affirmation firmly on the side of the imagination. In so doing, he produces a new theory of desire.

Hence the importance that literature, the arts, theater, music, and film play in his work. They do not fulfill merely an illustrative function; they are rather the privileged field of application for the kind of conceptual creativity that Deleuze would like to make operative also within philosophy. I agree with Deleuze: the result of this process is not (just) feminine writing, or the assertion of feminine specificity. What is expressed is a force of affirmation, the potency of a joy that goes beyond the metaphysical divide of sexual differentiation. And yet, the affirmation of that life force requires as its unalienable and inevitable starting point the process of becoming-woman. It requires it of Virginia & Vita, as it does of Deleuze and any of the readers; sexual difference as a threshold of differentiation remains primary to this process.

The question of the trace of sexual difference and the privileged location of "the feminine" in Deleuze's account of becoming is therefore a very

fundamental issue. There are moments, especially in Deleuze's work on literature and art, when he clearly codes as "feminine" that vitalistic, antessentialist power of affirmation, no matter who or where it happens to actualize itself. Of course the aim is not to affirm the feminine but to open up fields of multiple becomings. It is nonetheless the case that the kind of style and sensibility that sustain this process are unequivocally closer to the feminine.

My conclusion can only be one of sustained ambivalence, in return. The paradoxes of Deleuze's theory of becoming are productive and dynamic. While pleading that they should be inscribed in the contemporary scholarly agenda, I also want to recommend that we all linger a little longer on these productive paradoxes, without rushing headlong into a hasty resolution. Let us endure, instead!

### Conclusion

So what does all this have to do with the monstrous social imaginary I started off with? Have we not come too far? I rather think that we are right around the corner. It seems clear to me that a culture that is in the grip of a techno-teratological imaginary at a time of deep social and historical changes is a culture that badly needs *less* abstraction and less hype. We have received our prosthetic promises of perfectibility; now let's hand over our pound of flesh, shall we?

I believe that a concretely embedded reading of the subject as a material, vitalistic, antessentialist but sustainable entity can be a profoundly sane reminder of the positive virtualities that lie in store in the crisis and transformation we are currently going through. But there is also a question of style, in the sense of a political and aesthetic sensibility. It is crucial to nurture a culture of affirmation and joy, if we are to pull out of the end of millennium stagnation. And there has to be something mere rigorous than "new age" celebration of bodily harmony!

What I also want to argue for in this conclusion is a conceptual, not a polemical recognition of a structural and—in my eyes at least—productive paradox in Deleuze's thought on the issue of the becoming-woman, at a time when the question of his legacy is a very contested one. I am struck by a pattern that is beginning to emerge in the reception of Deleuze's work, which displays such conventional genderized features: is it not astonishing that it is mostly from the areas of feminism and through the voices of

women that the positivity of Deleuze's re-composition of the subject outside the humanistic frame is being asserted? And that the intoxicating, nihilistic contemplation of the dissipation of life forces is mostly the work of men? To what an extent does this highly genderized reception merely restate the genderized dimension of labor that is so dominant in Western societies: women as the savior of mankind?

The *Alien* film series is a perfect example of this trend. It turns the "new feminist monsters" engendered by late postindustrial technosocieties into the subjects who are most likely to save humanity from its technoactivated annihilation. The feminist is the last of the humanists. It would be too sad an ending, were an intergalactical Joan of Arc bearing Sigourney Weaver's face to come to represent all that feminism can do for a condemned species. And what a defeat for the feminists who work with sexual difference, to have the dialectics of the sexes merely reserved for the benefit of women—while leaving the power structures completely in place. I wonder whether it may not be more productive all-round if, practicing a philosophy of enduring sustainable subjectivity, some of us could work toward raising this tension to the level of a genuine paradox and explode it as such.

Feminism is not about a quest for authenticity, or the Golden Fleece of truth. I think that at the dawn of the new millennium we need to acquire a flair for complicating the issues so as to live up to the complexities of our age. I would like feminism to avoid the flat-out recomposition of genderized and racialized power differences on the one hand, and, on the other, the equally unsatisfactory assumption of a triumphant feminine as showing the way to the future. Cultivating the art of complexity—and the specific aesthetic and political sensibilities that sustain it—I plead for working with an idea of the subject as the plane of composition for multiple becomings.

What is at stake, ultimately, is an acceleration that would allow us to jump over the high fence of the ruins of metaphysics. Not in a utopian mode, but in a very embodied and embedded way, actualized in the here and now. We need a process by which "Being" gets dislodged from its fundamentalist pedestal, starts whirling off its logocentric base—and gets a beat. Losing its dogmatic authority, "Being" can expose at last the multiple "differences within"—exposing also its function as the great pretender and stitching together the different moments it enacts but that it does not encompass into a unity that "Being" would then supervise.

As in Gertrude Stein's operatic prose, the swift exhilaration that emanates from texts that are clearly indexed on the *potentia* of life, and not

on its diminishment or negation, has to put wings on our feet and infuse joyfulness. If it doesn't have the right beat, it will not work—but if it biases our minds with excessive intensity, it will not be much good either. Let us just opt for the staggering intelligence of "just a life," as Deleuze put it in the last text he wrote before ending his own slice of life. Just a life in its radical immanence, in affirmation and sets of discontinuous but sustainable becomings.

It may be a way of returning the subject back to the specific complexity of one's singularity—and returning the activity of "thinking" to a lightness of touch, a speed that many of us passionately aspire to. Becoming, over and over again.

## NOTES

1. Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time*, The 1994 Reith Lectures (London: Vintage Press, 1994), p. 11.
2. Marcia Tucker, "The Attack of the Giant Ninja Mutant Barbies," in *Bad Girls* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art / MIT Press, 1994).
3. See Rosi Braidotti, "Feminist Deleuzian Tracks, or Metaphysics and Metabolism," in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, ed. C. Boundas and D. Olkowski (London: Routledge, 1995).
4. Mignon Nixon, "Bad Enough Mother," *October* 71 (1995): 71–92.
5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
6. I am using "teratological" in the classical sense of a discourse about monstrous beings, from the Greek *teras*, meaning "monster" or "marvel." For more details, see Rosi Braidotti, "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines," in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and "Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: On Teratology and Embodied Differences," in *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs*, ed. Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti (London: Zed Books, 1996).
7. Rosi Braidotti, "Teratologies," in *Deleuze and Feminism*, ed. Claire Colebrook and Ian Buchanan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).
8. See Jackie Stacey, *Teratology* (London: Routledge, 1997).
9. The best psychoanalytic rendition of this idea in feminism is to be found in Jane Gallop, "The Monster in the Mirror: The Feminist Critic's Psychoanalysis," in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989).
10. Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus* (New York: Millerton, 1972).

11. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (London: Free Association Books, 1990) and "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992).
12. Avrah Brah, *Cartographies of the Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 1999); Caren Kaplan and Ingepal Grewal, *Scattered Hegemonies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
13. See, for instance, Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).
14. I have explored further the lines of intersection between Deleuze's polysexuality and feminist attempts to think subjectivity beyond gender polarities in "Feminist Deleuzian Tracks."
15. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, p. 242.
16. I am grateful to Roland Bogue for elucidating this point.
17. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, p. 272.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
19. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); *Histoire de la sexualité, I: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); *Histoire de la sexualité, II: L'Usage des plaisirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); *Histoire de la sexualité, III: Le Souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). For a feminist analysis, see Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, eds., *Foucault and Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), and Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender, and the Self* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).
20. On this point, see Wendy Brown, "Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures," *differences* 3 (1991): 63-84.
21. On this point, see Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).
22. Teresa de Lauretis, "The Essence of the Triangle, or Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously," in *The Essential Difference*, ed. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 1-39.
23. See Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1992), pp. 5-6.
24. For a synthetic introduction to the feminism of sexual difference, see my chapter "Sexual Difference Theory," in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Iris Young and Allison Jaggar (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
25. See the letters of December 13, 1933; February 15, 1935; and November 15, 1937, in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth Press, 1975-80); see also the diary entry for July 1934 in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 4, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Hogarth Press, 1977-82).
26. *Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, 1925-1930.
27. Catharine R. Stimpson, "The Female Sociograph: The Theater of Virginia

- Woolf's Letters," in *Where the Meanings Are: Feminism and Cultural Spaces* (New York: Methuen, 1988).
28. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, p. 130.
  29. Quoted in a letter from Vita to Harold, November 20, 1926, in *Vita and Harold: The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (New York: Putnam, 1992), p. 173.
  30. Letter from Vita to Harold, November 20, 1926, in Nicolson, ed., *Vita and Harold*, p. 173.
  31. *Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3.
  32. *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, 1923-1928, ed. L. de Salvo and M. A. Leaska (London: Macmillan, 1984).
  33. *Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, December 12, 1925.