

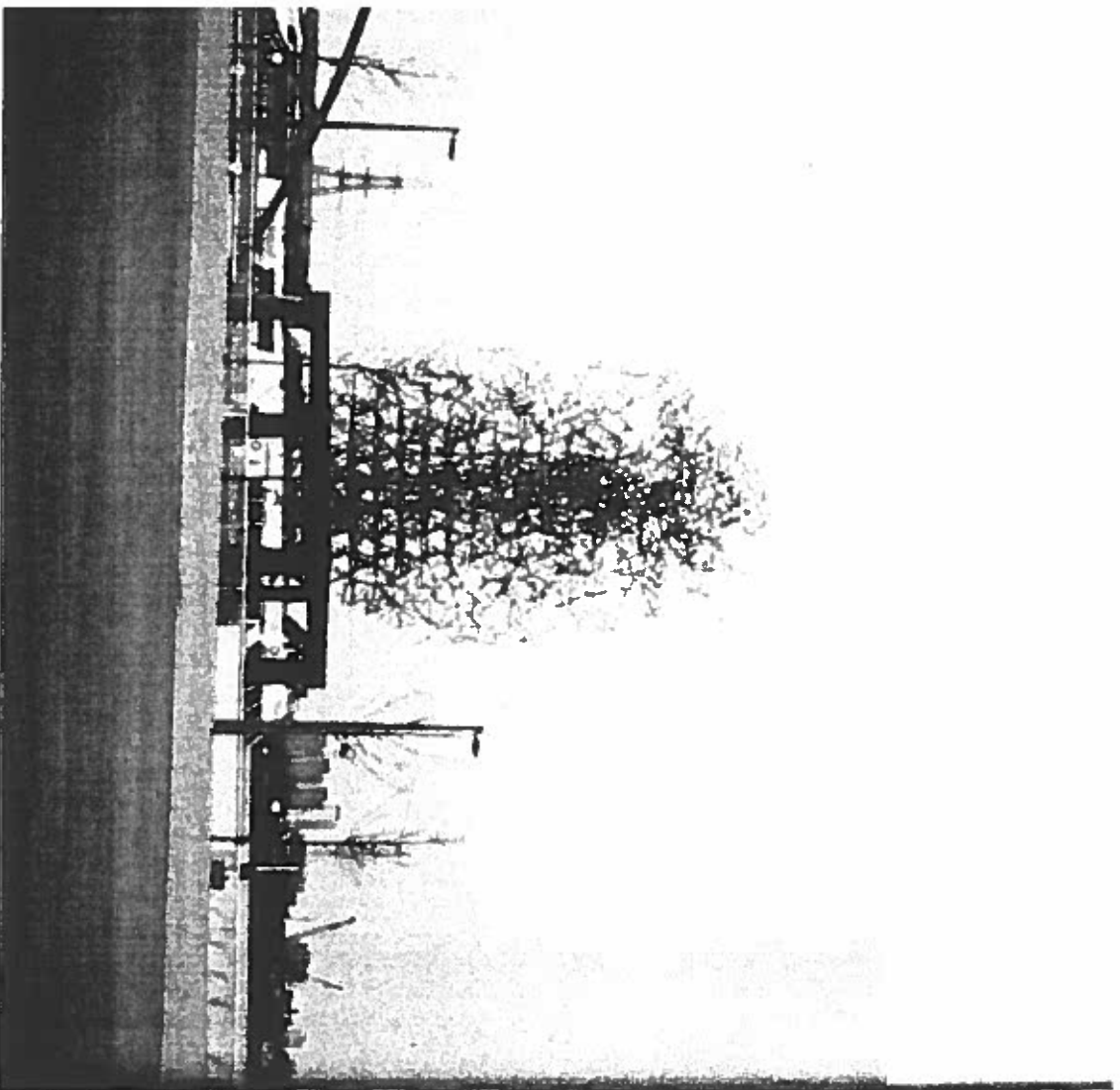
ENVISIONING THE

Future

SCIENCE FICTION AND THE
NEXT MILLENNIUM

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Cyberteratologies

Female Monsters Negotiate the Other's

Participation in Humanity's Far Future

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A teratological imaginary grips urbanized Western postmodernity. (I use "teratology" to mean the scientific discourse about the origin and nature of monstrous bodies.¹) The monstrous, grotesque, mutant, and downright freakish (also known as the postmodern Gothic) have gained widespread currency in urban postindustrial cultures. Leslie Friedler (1979) points out that since the 1960s a youth culture has evolved that entertains a strong—albeit ironic and parodic—relationship to freaks. Feminist culture offers no exception. Susan Sontag (1976) notes that the revival of cultural interest in freaks in literature and cinema of the 1960s coincides with the outlawing of the famous Coney Island freak show. The physical suppression of the freaky beings facilitated their metaphorical consumption. Just like other endangered species, the eviction of freaks from their highly policed territories functions as a license for their commodification as the subject matter of popular art and culture.

One of the sources of the great popularity of the postmodern Gothic is that its structural ambiguity lends itself to multimedia applications: to visualization, dramatization, serialization, transformation into musicals (Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera* come to mind) as well as into various video games. Early cinema (like *Nosferatu* and *The Golem*) swarms with all kinds of monstrosities. The shift from marginality to the mainstream occurs in the 1970s with W. P. Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971) and Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) and *The Stepford Wives* (1972). A new generation of accomplished film directors was ready to take up the challenge: Steven Spielberg, David Cronenberg, Brian De Palma, James Cameron, David Lynch, Ridley Scott, Tony Scott, Kathryn Bigelow, and others. The audience was primarily the baby boomers, that is to say the first postwar generation that grew up with television and its endless reruns of grade-B films. As Noel Carroll points out (1990), this gen-

ration engaged with feminism, civil rights, and other momentous social and political changes.

Freaks, geeks, androgynes, and hermaphrodites crowd the space of multiple Rocky Horror Shows. Drugs, mysticism, Satanism, and various brands of insanity are also included. Murder and cannibalism, made visible during the 1960s by Romero in *Night of the Living Dead*, became eroticized by Greenway in the 1980s and became mainstream by the 1990s (with *Silence of the Lambs*). An analysis of the current fascination with the freakish half human/half animal or beast figure alone would be quite lengthy. We may think, for example, of comic strips (the Ninja Turtles); classic television series like *Star Trek*; covers of records, CDs, and LPs; video games and CD-ROMs; video clips and computer-generated images of Internet and virtual reality as further evidence of the same trend. They are connected to the drug culture, as much as to its spin-offs in music, video, and computer cultures. A great deal of this culture flirts with sexual indeterminacy, which has been prevalent since David Bowie's path-breaking Ziggy Stardust.

Contemporary culture shifts the issue of genetic mutations from high-tech laboratories to popular culture. Hence, the relevance of new science fiction and cyberpunk monsters who raise metamorphosis to the status of a cultural icon. Altered states are trendsetters; video drugs now compete with pharmaceuticals. This cyberteratology imparts a new twist to the century-old connection between the feminine and the monstrous. There is indeed a distinct teratological flair in contemporary cyberspace (a proliferation of new monsters) that often merely transposes into outer space very classical iconographic representations of monstrous Others. Whether utopian (*Close Encounters*) or dystopian (*Independence Day*), messianic (*E.T.*) or diabolical (*Alien*), the intergalactic monstrous Other is firmly established within the imaginary of today's media and the electronic frontier. Lara Croft of the CD-ROM *Tomb Raiders* inaugurates the digital heroine character, post-Barbarella but also post-Ripley and, I will argue, thoroughly Gothic. In this essay, I assert that the female monster's presence marks the inception of a science fictional cultural trend that can impact upon the far future by reserving a place for female and minority subjectivities within that far future.

The contemporary trend for borderline or liminal figures of sexuality is also quite significant. I am especially interested in the replicants, zombies, and vampires (including lesbian vampires and other Queer mutants) who seem to enjoy special favor in these post-AIDS days. This is not only the case as far as "low" popular culture genres are concerned; it is equally true of relatively "high" lit-

erary genres, in such authors as Angela Carter, Kathy Acker, Martin Amis, Bret Easton Ellis, and Fay Weldon. The established success of genres such as horror, crime stories, science fiction, and cyberpunk also points to a new "post-human" technoteratological phenomenon that privileges the deviant or the mutant over more conventional versions of the human. Susanne Becker argues that these forms of neo-Gothicism also express some of the libidinary potential of the postmodern condition in that they return to the social agenda issues of emotion and excess. She also argues that "one of the secrets of the Gothic's persistent success is gender-related: it is so powerful because it is so feminine" (Becker 1999, 2). Part of this feminine power consists, according to Becker, in excess that exceeds the boundaries not only of the classic Gothic genre but also of pulp, porn, parody, and other postmodern subgenres. Such blurring constitutes a serious gender-related challenge for cultural criticism.

On this score, feminism is very much a part of this culture. Contemporary feminist culture is just as passionately, parodically, and paradoxically involved with the cybermonstrous universe as any other social movement or cultural and political practice in postindustrial societies. Feminism shares fully in and actively contributes to the teratological technoimaginary of our culture in that it emphasizes hybrid and mutant identities and transgendered bodies. Witness Linda Dement's fabulous computer art: in *Cyberflesh Girl-monster* Dement plays with body boundaries and the contours of the corporeal, presenting graphical surfaces where erudite theoretical quotations mingle with organs that are re-assembled, grafted, and mounted to constitute monstrously unfamiliar forms. This is a relevant expression of the confected location of femininity in postmodernity.

Gender trouble, a sort of transsexual imaginary (rather than 1970s-style lesbianism), has entered feminist culture. "Queer" is no longer the noun that marks an identity they taught us to despise; it has become a verb that destabilizes any claim to identity—even and especially to a sex-specific identity. The alliance between Queer sexuality, drugs, and cybertechnology was announced in the psychedelic, narcotic film *Liquid Sky* (Slava Tsukerman 1993), where lethal alien biomachines spread like a virus through the postindustrial urban landscape. These machines seduce and induce cosmic orgasms and then kill the humans at orgasm point, making them disappear. The aliens feed upon the euphoria-producing chemicals secreted during orgasm.

The contemporary version of "no more nice girls" provides a colder, more ironic sensibility with a flair for sadomasochism. Mae West has replaced Rebecca West as feminist mother. As Madonna claims in her *Sex* album (1993), cyberfeminism in all its multiple rhizomatic variables promotes a monstrous or hy-

brid imaginary. Bad girls are in, and bad girls carry/are carried by a teratological imaginary. As Marina Warner explains: "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" (Warner 1994, 11). The iron-pumping giant Ninja mutant Barbie is upon us!

The monstrous or teratological imaginary expresses the social, cultural, and symbolic mutation ensuing around the phenomenon of technoculture (Penley and Ross 1991). Visual regimes of representation are at the heart of this mutation. From the Panoptical eye Foucault explores in his theory of "bio-power," to the ubiquitous presence of television, surveillance video, and computer screens, it is the visual dimension of contemporary technology that defines its pervasive power. With the continuing electronic revolution reaching a peak, it is quite clear that this disembodied gaze constitutes a collision of the virtual spaces with which we coexist in increasing degrees of intimacy. In this context, feminist analysis describes both the pleasures and the dangers of "visual politics" (Vance 1990) and the politics of visualization—especially in biotechnology (Franklin, Lury, and Stacey 1991). Whereas the emphasis on the powers of visualization encourages some of the theoretical masters of nihilistic postmodern aesthetics—such as Kroker and Kroker (1987) and Baudrillard (1995)—to reduce the bodily self to a mere surface of representation and to launch a sort of euphoric celebration of virtual embodiments, the feminist response has been more cautious and ambivalent. It consists of stressing both the liberating and potentially one-sided application of the new technologies (Haraway 1992; Zoe 1992). Feminists promote the need to develop figurations of contemporary female subjectivities that can do justice to the complexities and contradictions of our technological universe.

Contemporary Science Fiction

La science fiction a toute une évolution, qui la fait passer des devenir animaux, végétal ou minéraux, à des devenir de bactéries, de virus, de molécules et d'imperceptibles.

—Deleuze and Guattari (1980, 304).

One needs to turn to "minor" (not to say marginal and hybrid) genres—such as science fiction, science fiction horror, and cyberpunk—to find fitting cultural illustrations of the changes and transformations presently taking place. I also think these genres provide an excellent field in which to test and apply Deleuze's work on culture, embodiment, and becoming. Deleuze himself ac-

knowledges the importance of science fiction when he praises these texts for their nomadic force; science fiction is indeed all about displacements, ruptures, and discontinuities. As a “low culture” genre, moreover, it is also mercifully free of grandiose pretensions—of the aesthetic or cognitive kind—and thus ends up providing a more accurate and honest depiction of contemporary culture than other, more self-consciously “representational” genres (such as the documentary).

Furthermore—for the purpose of my argument about the quest for positive social and cultural representations of hybrid, monstrous, abject, and alien Others in such a way as to subvert the construction and consumption of pejorative differences—I think science fiction offers an ideal breeding ground to explore what Haraway describes affectionately as “the promises of monsters.” I will argue forcefully for the relevance of Deleuze’s theory of becoming to science fiction texts and films.² I will also argue with Deleuze about the issue of the sexually differentiated nature of these processes. I will, finally, challenge Deleuze’s idea of sexually undifferentiated “becomings” by pointing to significant evidence of gender-specific patterns.

Even the most conservative commentators (Smith 1982) recognize that science fiction is a literature of ideas, with a serious philosophical content and a distinct tendency to moralize. The dividing line between conservative and other critics, however, concerns the relation between the fantastic, the magical, and the strict genre of science fiction. Thus, Nicholas Smith argues that “absurdist, existentialist literature, the type in which human beings are inexplicably transformed into cockroaches, does not qualify as science fiction” (Smith 1982, 9). I beg to differ with his reductive approach. Smith recalls the traditional standards of judgment Todorov discusses, namely that even fantastic literature must not seriously threaten the morphological normality and the moral normality of the humanistic worldview. Metamorphoses are fine, as long as they are kept clean and in control, that is, as long as they are anthropocentric and moralizing. All the rest does not deserve serious consideration. I will, instead, defend the idea that science fiction displaces our worldview away from the human epicenter and that it manages to establish a continuum with the animal, mineral, vegetable, extraterrestrial, and technological worlds. Science fiction points to a posthumanist, biocentered egalitarianism.

As Laurie Anderson wittily comments, science fiction’s anti-anthropocentrism allows it to dispense rapidly with the question of “human nature” and its psychological repertoire, so as to move toward the exploration of other possible worlds. The emotions commonly associated with the human condition are not eliminated, as much as decentralized and diffused throughout the text. Sci-

ence fiction provides the means to mirror and even magnify the cultural crises of our time.

What distinguishes contemporary science fiction from nineteenth-century science fiction is that, rather than offering utopian scenarios, it reflects our sense of estrangement regarding the rapidity of current change. Science fiction, in other words, defamiliarizes the present, not dreams of possible futures. It both reflects and provokes unease. Science fiction, therefore, becomes a vehicle for reflecting upon our limitations regarding cultural, ideological, and technical closures. By provoking such reflection, science fiction (especially texts Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy, and Samuel Delany produce) becomes self-referential in that the genre reflects upon its limits and circumstances. Science fiction mirrors the fundamental sense of disbelief of an entire culture toward itself—“How can this be? Is it real?”—and thus it echoes perfectly the doubts of well-meaning progressive people confronted with large-scale social transformations. Hence, science fiction paradoxically reintroduces a utopian element into the mode of autorefentiality.

Like Deleuze, I think that neither in science fiction nor in any other text is there a master plot to be unveiled or revealed by the simultaneous deployment of world history and individual psychic processes. There are, instead, only debris and sets of hazard meetings and ad hoc intersections of events (Deleuze calls these intersections points of crossings) rather than Freud’s libidinal rededication or Marx’s teleological process. Therefore, however close to Deleuze in terminology, Jameson’s project (1982) is conceptually and affectively different from the nomadology. Jameson applies a modernist philosophy of time to the analysis of the socioeconomic cultural conditions of late postmodernity. He adopts the lexicon of poststructuralism, not its syntax, which thrives on fragments and discontinuities without falling into the indulgence of self-pity, the hysteria of panic, or the dubious luxury of anxiety and melancholia. Poststructuralism is a pragmatic philosophy that rejects the ghosts of metaphysical interiority, the “hauntology” of missing presence. It specifically rejects the tyranny of a signifier that forever refers to something else, which is never “there” and never “that” anyway. What you see is what you get. What you see—as Walter Benjamin said ever so lucidly before the Nazis pushed him to commit suicide—is but the debris heap often called progress.

Feminist Science Fiction

As adventure-minded and action-oriented tales of exploration, war, conquest, and destruction, science fiction coincides with relatively traditional gender narratives; it is quite a male-dominated adventure story. As Sarah Lefanu

states, however, science fiction as an experimental genre came of age during the 1960s to challenge the stock conventions of both realistic and fantastic literature. Eminently political, in both a dystopian and a utopian sense, it destabilizes authority in all its forms, and as such, it exercises a fatal attraction for feminist writers bent upon challenging the masculine bias of literature and society. The number of female science fiction writers has consequently grown rapidly (Lefanu 1988).³

Science fiction writers locate their historical roots in the nineteenth-century Gothic tradition, which is one of the few genres of the period that allows women to play active roles as travelers, murderers, thieves, and adventurers. That most Gothic heroines are eminently wicked certainly attests to their intelligence and wit. One of the direct links between the Gothic and science fiction is the idea of travel through space and time; outer-space travel is conducive to fantasies of escape into alternative systems. Gender relations, sexuality, child bearing, and alternative ecological and technological systems are currently all part of the postnuclear trip. Science and technology, therefore, remain the most direct reference point. Even at its most dystopic, as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), feminist science fiction is essentially technophilic. It distances itself from the feminist tradition of opposition to biotechnology, best exemplified by Gena Corea's notion of "the mother machine" (also known as "the reproductive brotzel"; 1985), where women are totally subordinated in relation to mechanical procreation.

Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* influenced both the theoretical and political practice of the second feminist wave and the fiction of Suzy McKee Charnas, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy, and Sally Miller Gearhart. Firestone represents the "technophilic" trend in feminism, which assumed a minority position until the late 1980s when more "cyber-minded" feminists emerged. Cybernetic feminism relies on the use of technologies in every aspect of social interaction (including reproduction) in order to relieve women from drudgery, the oppressive patriarchal family, and masculine violence. Technology exists within Firestone's Marxist utopia to remove humanity from its enslavement to an obsolete natural order. The reproductive utopia of technobabies is part of this aim, and it is related to collectivist politics, social utopianism, and 1970s radical feminism.

Another important insight Lefanu brings to this discussion is that of a structural analogy between woman as the second sex — what Luce Irigaray (1993) calls the "Other of the Same" — and the alien or monstrous Other. Her analogy is assimilated within the general category "difference," understood as a term of pe-
joration. Lefanu extends this insight to describe a deep empathy between women

and aliens that, within science fiction, favors exchanges and mutual influences. As a matter of fact, in science fiction written by women, women love aliens and feel connected to them by a deep bond of recognition.

The striking feature of feminist science fiction, then, is less the affirmation of the "feminine" (in an essentialist and moralist manner) than the questioning and the deconstruction of the gender dichotomy itself. Feminist science fiction erodes the cultural foundations of notions such as "woman" and "man." Marleen S. Barr, in her work on feminist literary postmodernism and in dialogue with Robert Scholes (1975), coins the expression "feminist fabulation" to describe science fiction, utopian fantasy, and the mainstream fiction of Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, and Doris Lessing, which share in restructuring patriarchal narratives, values, and myths (Barr 1992). According to Barr, these texts contribute to the postmodern undoing of master narratives and challenge literary hierarchies.

Science fiction is about sexual metamorphoses and mutations. In the manner of Woolf's Orlando, Angela Carter's New Eve changes from man to woman. Joanna Russ's "female man" opens new possibilities when she navigates between sexual polarities. Ursula Le Guin's protagonists determine their sexual characteristics depending on with whom they happen to fall in love. Most of these mutations function as methods to explore sexuality and desire in situations of extreme duress—for example, just before or after the collapse of civilization and the end of recorded time.

A great deal of these physical and morphological mutations are expressed in the language of monstrosity, abjection, and horror; in fact, science fiction shamelessly ransacks and recycles the whole Gothic repertoire. What horror fiction fundamentally concerns is the lifting of categorical boundaries between humans and their Others: racialized or ethnic Others, animals, insects, and inorganic and technological Others. The main function of horror fiction, consequently, is to blur fundamental distinctions and to introduce a sense of panic and chaos. The monstrous body fulfills the magical or symptomatic function as an indicator of the register of difference. Hence, the monster can never avoid a blind date with women. In the postnuclear cybernetic era, moreover, the encounter between the maternal body and the technological apparatus is so intense that it calls for new frames of analysis. Contemporary "monstrous Others" blur the dividing line between the organic and the inorganic, thus also rendering superfluous the political divide between technophobia and technophilia. The issue becomes how to redefine the techno-body in such a way as to preserve a sense of singularity, without falling into nostalgic reappraisal of an essential self. The boundaries-of-identity issue raises its monstrous head. Are

Corea's nightmare world of "gender-cide" (1985) and Atwood's dystopia of the technobrothel (1985) possible future scenarios pertinent to the year 3000?

In summary: within the contemporary imaginary, the monstrous refers to the play of representation and discourses that surround the bodies of late postmodernity. The monstrous expresses a deep anxiety about the bodily roots of subjectivity that foreground the maternal/maternal feminine as the site of monstrosity. I tend to view this cultural penchant as a counterpart and counterpoint to the emphasis hegemonic postindustrial culture places upon the construction of clean, healthy, fit, white, decent, law-abiding, heterosexual, and forever young bodies. This emphasis, aimed at perfecting the bodily self and at correcting the corporeal self's traces of mortality, creates the need for plastic surgery, dieting, and the fitness craze. Other techniques for disciplining the body also simultaneously help the body to supersede its "natural" state. What we witness in popular culture is almost a Bakhtinian ritual of transgression. The fascination with the monstrous (or, the freaky body double) is directly proportional to the suppression of images of both ugliness and disease. It is as if what we chase out the front door (the spectacle of the poor, fat, homeless, homosexual, black, dying, aging, decaying, leaky body) actually creeps back in through the rear window. The monstrous marks the "return of the repressed" of technoculture, and as such, it is intrinsic to it. These monstrous representations not only express the negative or reactive anxieties of the majority. They also, often simultaneously, exemplify the emerging subjectivities of former minorities, thus tracing possible patterns of becoming.

Thus, while the monstrous feminist haunts the imagination of the creators of the antifeminist backlash, feminists who want to redefine difference positively undertake a less destructive reappraisal of the monstrous Other. Multiculturalism and the critique of Orientalism and racism also contribute to rethinking the cultural and scientific practices surrounding monstrous bodies. The need has emerged to create a new epistemology to deal with difference in nonpejorative terms. In this case, the freak/monstrous Other becomes emblematic of the vast political and theoretical efforts directed toward redirecting human subjectivity away from the persistently logocentric and racist thinking that characterized subjectivity in Western culture.

Confronted with such a discursive inflation of monstrous images, I reject the nostalgic position that tends to read them as signs of the cultural decadence of our times (also known as the decline of "master narratives" or the loss of the great canon of "high culture"). I am equally opposed to the paranoid and misogynist interpretations of the new monsters. The proliferation of a monstrous social imaginary calls, instead, for adequate forms of analysis. More particularly,

this proliferation requires a form of philosophical teratology that Deleuze is in a unique position to provide. I argue that a culture (both mainstream and feminist) in which the imaginary is so monstrous and deviant, especially in its cybernetic variants, can profit greatly from Deleuze's philosophical nomadology. Deleuze's emphasis upon reconfiguring the positivism of difference, his philosophy of becoming and his emphasis upon thinking about changes and the speed of transformation, provides an illuminating way to approach the complexities of our age. There is a profound sense of relevance in both Deleuze's political and aesthetic sensibility; it is as if he is indeed attuned to the most problematic contemporary questions.

From a cultural perspective, Deleuze's intensive approach to contemporary creativity—be it conceptual, scientific, or artistic—casts a significant light upon some of the most unprecedented aspects of advanced postindustrial cultures. Among them I include the desegregation of humanistic subject positions and values, the ubiquitousness of drug practices and cultural artifacts derived from the drug culture, pervasive political violence, and the intermingling of the biological with the technological. These features, which are often referred to as the "posthuman" universe, can be understood more positively if they are approached from the perspective of Deleuze's philosophy of radical immanence. Deleuze enables multiple patterns of becoming to overthrow the humanistic parameters of representation; he avoids relativism by grounding his practice into a tight spatiotemporal framework.

Beyond Metaphors: Philosophical Teratology

I have argued that the reason the monstrous is a dominant part of the social imaginary is that it offers privileged mirror images. We identify with these images because of either fear or fascination. This identification may also explain the peculiarly reassuring function that the representation of freaky bodies fulfills in relation to the anxiety-ridden contemporary imagination. As Diana Arbus (1972) suggests, freaks have already been "through it" and have come out at the other end. If not quite survivors, freaks are at least resilient in regard to their capacity to metamorphose and thus survive and cope. Many present-day humans may instead harbor serious doubt about their capacity to cope, let alone survive. In the case of monsters, the accident or catastrophe, to paraphrase Brian Massumi (1992), has already ensued. These events can provide welcome relief from the generalized political economy of fear, precisely by incarnating fully its destructive potential; they can also exemplify the virtual catastrophe by embodying it. The effect is cathartic, erotic, and deeply emotional; with a sigh of relief would-be suburban monsters rush to embrace their potential. Other

self. Contemporary horror and science fiction literature and film portray an exacerbated version of anxiety in the form of "Otherness within": the monster dwells in your embodied self and it may burst out at any minute into unexpected and definitely unwanted mutations. The monster is inside you, ready to erupt. The monstrous grows within one's organism, as Jacky Stacey (1997) reminds us, in the form of cancer or other postnuclear diseases, are variations on the "enemy within" theme.

The monsters are "metamorphic" creatures who fulfill a kaleidoscopic mirror function and make us aware of the mutation that we experience in these postnuclear/-industrial/-modern times. For example, Sontag (1976) argues that Arbus's photos of human oddities are troubling not so much because of their subject matter, but because of the strong sense of the photographer's own consciousness and involvement with them. The fact of Arbus's suicide adds a tone of tragic authenticity to her images, and it testifies to the metamorphic power of freaks—that is to say the extent to which freaks captivate Arbus and psychologically ambush her. Arbus's representation of freaks embodies the paradox of the contemporary teratological imaginary: on the one hand, they familiarize us with the human oddities and thus lower our threshold to tolerate the horrible. On the other hand, they keep a cold and unsentimental distance from her representations, displaying them as utterly un-self-conscious and quite autonomous. In fact, Arbus's pictures of freaks utterly lack irony and the stiff respectability of Victorian portraits; they paradoxically ultimately reinforce our sense of alienation from them. Her pictures become neutrally self-referential and, hence, fail to convey any possible moral message.

The metamorphic power of monstrous Others illuminates the thresholds of "Otherness" and displaces their boundaries. As I argued earlier, this process mobilizes issues of embodiment, morphology, and sexuality—scrambles the code of phallogocentric, anthropocentric representation in which they are traditionally cast. For instance, Fiedler's analysis of the typology of contemporary monsters classifies them in terms of lack, excess, and displacement of organs. Noel Carroll (1990) also points to hybridity and categorical incompleteness as defining features of monsters. This means that monsters superimpose features from different species, alternately displaying effects of excess or staggering omissions. The detachability of bodily organs is crucial to this effect. Carroll analyzes it in terms of complete lack of shape—as in the gelatinous blob-like entities—which effaces all meaningful morphological reference points. This effacement also involves fusion and fission of body parts. Bodily juxtaposition of this sort blurs such distinctions as living/dead, male/female, human/animal, insect/machine, and inside/outside. Fission/fusion displaces the attributes of

these categories over other entities, creating body doubles, alter egos, and other forms of displacement of familiar traits. A variation on this theme is the evocation of abject monstrosity by metonymy: vermin, skeletons, and decaying body parts that represent the monstrous entity without actually portraying the monstrous entity.

This representation facilitates creating an analogy with the feminine. As psychoanalytic feminist critics have successfully argued (Wright 1992), the feminine also bears a privileged relation to lack, excess, and displacement. By being positioned as eccentric vis-à-vis the dominant mode, or as constantly off-center, the feminine marks the threshold between the human and its "outside." This outside acts as a multilayered framework that at once distinguishes the human form and connects it to the animal, vegetable, mineral, and also the divine. As a link between the sacred and the abject, the feminine is paradoxical in its monstrosity. In other words, the feminine functions via displacement, and its ubiquity as a social or philosophical "problem" is equal to the awe and horror it inspires. Metamorphic creatures are uncomfortable "body doubles" or simulacra who simultaneously attract and repel, comfort and unsettle; they are objects of adoration and aberration. As I mentioned earlier, in science fiction texts written by women, a deep complicity exists between the male Other and the Other of the entire human species.

Another historically continuous analogy between women and monstrous beings concerns the malignant powers of women's imagination. Ever since antiquity, the active and desiring woman's imaginative powers have been represented as potentially lethal—especially if the woman is pregnant. A great deal of critical commentary exists regarding the destructive powers of the pregnant woman's imagination.⁴ Marie-Hélène Huet (1983) uses a psychoanalytic framework to interpret the fear of the maternal imagination as a variation of male castration anxiety. The pregnant woman literally has the capacity to undo the father's signature—to "un-create" life. Mary Ann Doane (1987) and Linda Williams (1989) find the same mechanism at work in classic Hollywood cinema where "when the woman looks" with desire, trouble is never too far away. These feminist critics argue that, within phallogocentric culture, the desiring females' lethal gaze expresses a general fear and mistrust of female desire and subjectivity.

Psychoanalytic feminist theory also casts an interesting light upon this aspect of the monstrous imaginary. First, women who are caught in the phallogocentric gaze tend to have a negative self-image and to dread what they see when they look in the mirror. Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, for example, saw monsters emerging from the depths of their inner mirrors. Women, who represent difference in their cultural productions in terms of aberration or mon-

strosity, often experience difference as negative. Gothic literature can be read as a female projection of an inner sense of inadequacy. According to this perspective, the monster primarily fulfills a specular function, thereby playing a major role in the definition of female self-identity. *Frankenstein*—the creative product of the daughter of a renowned feminist—is also the portrait of a deep lack of self-confidence and an even deeper sense of displacement. Not only does Mary Shelley side with the monstrous creature, accusing its creator of avoiding his responsibilities, but she also presents the creature as her abject body double; this presentation allows her to express self-loathing with staggering lucidity.

Gilbert and Gubar (1979) argue that within English literature women have often depicted themselves as vile and degraded. Thus, they read *Frankenstein* as Mary Shelley's anti-Prometheus response to Milton and also as a tale of self-hatred. The latter reading is especially true for creative women, the women whom Virginia Woolf urged to "kill the angel in the house" and confront their inner demons so as to stretch their resources to the limit. I read Frankenstein's monster as mirroring essentially the process of literary creation: he is isomorphic in relation to the structure of Shelley's book—which is also rather badly conceived and shapeless. The monster, then, confronts readers with the auto-referentiality that Jameson considers to be the key to science fiction's power to make us experience our limits. I find Shelley's text to be affected by deep malaise which, via many flashbacks and detours, forms an uneasy epistolary format. The effect upon readers is one of unrest and torment. Moreover, Shelley, on several occasions, deliberately compares the text to her protagonist's monstrous body. The text is analogous to a horrible, unfinished product that portrays writing as doomed to failure and basically unfulfilling. The monster is Shelley's "becoming-writer"—and he is a most imperfect writing machine. His difficulties with comprehension and communication reflect the circular logic of the writing process itself that mirrors the pursuit of its own clarity. Writing, a game of seduction and repetition, is eroticized analogously to the agony of longing; but it offers little relief and even fewer rewards. The constant confrontation that Shelley establishes between human heterosexuality and the sterile pleasures of the anthropomorphic monster stresses the point that writing does not pursue the sublime; writing, instead, courts disaster and crime.

Thus, Shelley primarily criticizes the hubris of the scientists who play God by creating artificial life. She insinuates that these scientists are crazy little men locked up in their dungeons and masturbatory chambers who fall prey to matrix envy while trying to turn shit into gold or petrified matter into new life; they swap anatomy to pursue a new destiny. The ontological jealousy of the fallen angels who work maniacally to capitalize on time and space to achieve self-

reproduction also haunts the writer. And a comparable folly inhabits the creative spirits who endlessly spill their fluids upon white pages in an endless inescapable process of self-birth. The circularity of the writing process expresses a delirium of self-legitimization. All writing is simultaneously predatory, vampiristic, and self-serving—and no significant distance separates the creator's gloved hands from the hideous claws of the monster. Through *Frankenstein*, Shelley herself becomes such a writing device—a depersonalized entity, a "back-color machine." Chris Baldick explains that Shelley's masterpiece achieves a double self-referentiality, "both in its composition and in its subsequent cultural status miming the central moments of its own story" (Baldick 1987, 30). The process of artistic creation, the status of motherhood, and the birth process—via a remarkable case of "pbiogenesis"—all mirror each other and constantly overlap. When the reader remembers that Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, died as a result of giving birth to her, the text, body, and mother become one ungovernable heap of excessive meanings; these characteristics propel *Frankenstein* outward, into a mythic dimension.

This metamorphic dimension fulfills an important function. The monstrous as a borderline figure blurs boundaries between hierarchically established distinctions (between human/nonhuman, Western/non-Western, and so on) and also between horizontal or adjacent differences. In other words, as Jane Gallop explains (1989), the monstrous triggers the recognition of a sense of multiplicity contained within the same body. The monstrous is an entity whose multiple parts are neither totally merged nor totally separate from the human observer. Thus, by blurring the boundaries of differentiation, the monstrous signifies the difficulty of maintaining manageable margins of differentiation between boundaries separating self and other.

As Irigaray maintains, the problem with boundaries and differentiation lies at the core of the mother/daughter relationship. Any daughter—that is, any woman—has a self that is, rather than being completely individuated, constitutively connected to another woman—her mother. "Mother" is already quite tangled and complex; it is the site of a symbiotic mix-up, which—according to Lacan—requires the ordering power of the Law of the Father to restore boundaries. Barbara Johnson (1982) pursues this argument in "My Monster/My Self" (which, of course, alludes to Nancy Friday's popular *My Mother/My Self*). Is the mother or the self the monster? Or, does the monstrous lie in the undecidability of what ensues in-between? The inability to answer such questions involves the difficulty of negotiating stable and positive boundaries with one's mother. The monstrous feminine is precisely the signpost of this structural and highly significant problem.

What is important to note here is that during the 1980s feminist theory celebrated both the ambiguities and the intensity of the mother/daughter bond in positive terms. ("Écriture féminine" and Irigaray's paradigm of "the politics of sexual difference" epitomize this trend.) By the late 1990s, however, the maternalist/feminine paradigm was well under attack, if not discarded. This shift from gynocentric psychoanalytic feminism toward a definitely negative attitude directed at the mother coincides, as often is the case regarding feminism, with a generation gap. Silvia Kolbowski notes (1995) that Melanie Klein's "bad" mother replaces the Lacanian-inspired "vanilla sex" representation of the M/other as object of desire. Accordingly, in feminist theories of difference, parodic politics replaces strategic essentialism and other forms of affirmative mimesis. Nixon reads the anti-Lacanian climate of the 1990s (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 70's and 80's, privileging pleasure and desire over hatred and aggression" (Nixon 1995: 72). I would like to situate the new alliance currently being negotiated between feminists and Deleuze in this context of the historical decline of Lacan's theory of desire as lack and the revival of Klein's theory of drives. A colder and more aggressive political sensibility dominated the 1990s. However, I share neither in the rejection of the mother nor in the denigration of the maternal/maternal feminine that this rejection entails. This does not mean that I am thrown back into the murky depths of uterine essentialism. My rejection of a position allegedly beyond gender, or beyond sexual indifferenciation, is, instead, framed by philosophical nomadism. This means that I value processes of change and transformation as methods to actualize a virtual feminine in a network of interconnections with other forces, entities, and actors. Like Massumi, I do not regard Deleuze's ideas as an incentive to abandon politics but, rather, as a method to add complexity to politics by imbuing politics with movement, dynamism, and nomadism. This open-ended, multilayered virtual feminine matrix is neither flesh nor metal, neither destiny nor teleology; it is motion, in spatial as well as temporal terms.

Hal Foster argues that, during the late postmodernism of the 1990s, advanced technological cultures moved beyond the notion of the death of the subject toward "traumatic realism" (Foster 1996, 131). There is a return of the "real" subject that opposes the excessive emphasis the 1980s placed upon textual models of culture or conventional notions of realism. In reaction to the AIDS crisis and the general decline of the end-of-the-millennium welfare state, a growing disillusionment with the psychoanalytic celebrations of desire as experimentation and mobility is also palpable. What is significant, argues Foster,

is that this cultural dissatisfaction is expressed as a return to the shocked subjectivity of a traumatized subject. Given that, as Arbus notes, freaks are born with their traumas written all over them and that they embody the actualized catastrophe, they emerge as a revived cultural paradigm. Cindy Sherman's artistic trajectory is telling in this regard: from her early romances, to her history portraits, to her present-day abject disaster pictures, Sherman signals the shift from a fascination with signs and the effects of representation upon reality to the fear that a gaze disengaged from any symbolic system cannibalizes the whole body.

The horror genre (in Kristeva's sense of the blurring of boundaries) returns; this return involves a cultural fascination with the amorphous, the shapeless, and the obscene. It assumes the negative form of the cult of wounded, diseased, traumatized bodies. Foster describes these bodies as a contemporary type of advanced melancholia that expresses a real fatigue with the politics of difference and an equal fascination for indistinction and death. Aesthetically, the return of horror produces both the ecstatic fascination for a body that the technological gaze invades and the fear of this invasion that leads to real despair—and to a sense of loss.

I argue that technological culture expresses a colder and more depersonalized sensibility. The arena within which this discussion takes place is the social imaginary—a highly contested social space in which the technoterratological body double, supported and promoted by postindustrial societies, is pervasive. Whether we like it or not, we are made to desire the human/machine interface. I consequently argue that, given the importance of both the social imaginary and the role of technology in coding it, we need to develop adequate forms of representation and resistance. Conceptual creativity is called for; new figures are needed to help us negotiate the maze of technoterratological culture.

What also emerges from a closer analysis of the cyberteratological imaginary of advanced cultures is the crucial and highly strategic role the maternal feminine plays within it. There is especially one aspect of the quasi-isomorphic relationship between the technological tool and the maternal body that I find quite significant. This relationship has less to do with the classic technophobic objection that the machines are "taking over" the womb (Corea 1985), than with a shift in the position of female reproductive powers. In a context of disruption of the time/space continuum of humanism and of generalized postmodern clear anxiety, popular culture highlights the threat of the collapse of paternal authority under the impact of female power's excessive growth. This collapse positions the suburban nuclear family as the privileged stage of a horror show (Greenberg 1991). Such staging has been a part of popular culture ever since

The Exorcist appeared, and it was already explicit in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (as well as, of course, in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and *Alien*). Monstrous gestations are a means to upset the monotonous normativity of the suburban family.

How does this situation apply to women?

Women are not only reduced to maternal power; maternal power is also redirected toward technology-based and corporate-owned reproductive production systems. Corporations, in some respects, are the real moral monsters science fiction and cyberpunk films portray; corporations ruthlessly corrupt, corrode, exploit, and destroy. The global incubators are the cybernightmare *The Matrix* depicts—and this nightmare speaks for itself.

In other words, "Mother" has been assimilated within the technoindustrial system; reproduction—especially the replication of white, male babies—is a primary asset in the postcapitalist cash nexus. The maternal body in late postmodernity is, therefore, positioned at the heart of the political economy of fear. The mother's body simultaneously reproduces the possibility of the future and must be made to inscribe this future within the regime of high-tech commodification (that is, within today's market economy). Holding the maternal/material feminine in this double bind creates excessive turbulence. This situation causes empirical females, as Camilla Griggers (1997) points out, to suffer a high degree of discontent, pathology, and disease.

The immediate effect of this topos is to disengage the child, fetus, and embryo—and even the ova—from the woman's body. Much has been written about these "fetal attractions" (Franklin 1997; Perchesky 1987) as well as the fetus's presence as an independent item in popular imagery. These images are also, as *The Silent Scream* demonstrates, instrumental regarding the impact of anti-abortion campaigns involving intimidation and terrorism. Sofia Zoe (1984) attentively analyzes embryological images; she recommends that they be kept within the context of nuclear technology and the threat of extermination: "To the list of technologies we commonly think of as reproductive, like abortion, birth control and other more exotic techniques like gene-splicing and editing, cloning etc. we add artifacts like radioactive waste and toxic poisons which also directly intervene in life chemistry and embryology" (Zoe 1984, 48).

According to Zoe, the extraterrestrial embryological imagery that abounds in science fiction film expresses the intense uterus envy that is built into technological culture. In 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, for instance, maternal imagery codes the spaceship's main computer. (I especially think of the umbilical cord that connects the astronaut to the ship.) Zoe defends the hypothesis that, via

the male abdomen, a clear displacement from female uterus to paternal brain occurs. This displacement produces a contemporary version of the myth of Athena's birth: fully armed, emerging from the father's head, she bears on her breastplate the image of Medusa's forever-frozen horrific gaze. Zoe also notes the recurrence of the father/daughter dyad in science fiction: from Rotwang and Maria in *Metropolis*, to Dr. Morbius's girl Alta in *Forbidden Planet*, to Raachael in *Blade Runner* (who is the brainchild of a corporation). These films exemplify the penchant for imagining Athena-like figures of young warriors who serve the system upon whom the father/scientist/corporation projects the animated remains of what used to be the female mother/nature (which is by now cannibalized into the company-owned technomatrix). The brain/womb of the corporation produces the "star child" located in a crystalline Cartesian geometrical space: high-tech supermons integrated in advanced computer circuits. There is no sticky or messy "wetware" here. Fortunately, the pure light of reason also reveals nightmares: slimy evil alien creatures that shiny warriors fight to the bitter end. (Ripley in *Alien* comes to mind.)

Confronted with such maternal corporate high-tech power—and such ominous examples of women's free will—men are represented as the heroic resistance fighters. In *Terminator*, the male prophet descends to Earth to pave the way for the Savior and to ensure that the elected female saves humanity by re-producing the future Messiah. An entrenched anxiety about reestablishing the paternal line of filiation translates into a new masculine determination to make women do the right thing. Spielberg and Lucas are the principal creators of this fundamentally conservative approach to the corporate-run vision of reproduction: they tuck the technological apparatus safely away within a maternal role. Fortunately, other directors do not follow Spielberg's and Lucas's examples. Cronenberg, for instance, highlights the vulnerability of the male body.

Conclusion

Contemporary social imaginary, in a twist that strikes me as rather misogynist, directly blames women for postmodernity's crisis of identity. In one of the double binds that occur so often in regard to representing those people marked as different, women are portrayed as unruly elements who should be controlled—represented as so many cyber- Amazons in need of governance. Women are also, however, depicted as already complicitous with and integrated within the industrial reproductive complex. "Mother the bitch" is also the "serial mom" who uses and abuses her power over life. Sofia Zoe succinctly describes this tendency: "Superman has incorporated and taken over female functions to be-

come a high-tech super mom, who feeds and fertilizes us with junk food, spermatic images and silicon chips, and who temps us with terminal apples" (Zoe 1984, 51).

Translated into the Deleuzian language of the "becoming-woman," the maternal/material feminine simultaneously appears as the despot face of the majority and the pathetic face of minorities. Postindustrial culture fights the battle for its renewal upon the mother's increasingly contaminated body. To survive, advanced capitalism must incorporate the mother—effectively metabolize the mother's offspring. This incorporation is also known as the "feminization" of advanced cultures and what I call the "becoming-woman of men." (My term brings Joanna Russ's "female man" to mind.)

Tania Modleski (1991) discusses this tendency in contemporary postfeminist American culture as a whole. For instance, women are identified with the most popular (that is, lowbrow) cultural consumer goods (such as talk shows and soap operas). This identification leads to defining the "feminization of culture" as a synonym for lack of high culture. Men, however, continue to be represented as creative and autonomous spirits. In some ways, this cultural tendency reflects the nineteenth-century tradition of structural ambivalence toward women. Huyssen (1986) lucidly analyzes this tradition in that he understands it as a paradoxical masculine identification with women. Flaubert's "Madame Bovary, c'est moi" coincides with the effective exclusion of real women from literature. Such exclusion also takes the form, in Flaubert as well as in soap operas, of representing women as avid consumers of pulp. Women symbolize the vulgarity of mass culture; creative high culture and tradition remain the firmly entrenched prerogatives of men.

The *Alien* films therefore function as welcome feminist interventions. The series turns the "new female monsters" that late postindustrial technosocieties engineer into heroic subjects who are most likely to save humanity from technology-induced annihilation. The feminist becomes the last human. J. H. Kavanagh (1990) argues that *Alien* celebrates the rebirth of humanism appearing as progressive feminism. The struggle is internal to the feminine; it occurs between an archaic monstrous feminine the alien represents and the postfeminist emancipated woman Ripley/Sigourney Weaver represents. The alien is a *phallus den-tatus* born from a man's stomach; it stands grotesquely erect most of the time and often uses its phallic tail to try to commit oral rape. Ripley emerges, in contrast, as the life-giving, postfeminist principle. She is warrior with a heart of gold who rescues pets and little girls—as well as life in the galaxy. She is the new humanist hero: woman as the savior of mankind.

It would be far too predictable an ending, however, if an intergalactic Joan

of Arc bearing Sigourney Weaver's ghostly white face³ represented everything feminism can accomplish for a species experiencing an advanced state of crisis. Saving humanity is not an unworthy cause; it is a role that women have historically often been called upon to play—especially during war, invasion, liberation struggles, or other forms of daily resistance. Women have, however, seldom drawn real social benefits from their episodes of heroism. When the third millennium dawns, women's participation in ensuring humanity's future will consequently need to be negotiated rather than taken for granted. As Barbara Krueger states: "We don't need another hero."

Moreover, in the context of the feminism of difference that I defend throughout this essay, it is a defeat merely to reverse the dialectics of the sexes to benefit women—that is to say, mostly white, highly educated women—and to leave power structures unchanged. It is more productive to allow tensions that are built into the millennial crisis of values to explode within feminism—and, hence, to reveal feminism's paradoxes. Because feminism is definitely not about a search for final authenticity (a quest for the golden fleece in the form of truth), I believe that at the start of the current new millennium (and at the inception of all new millennia to come), we need to acquire a flair for complicating the issues that will enable us to equal the complexities of our age. I would like feminists to avoid repetitions without difference as well as the blatant recomposition of genderized and racialized power differences. I would also like feminists to avoid the equally unsatisfactory assumption of a morally superior triumphant feminine defining the one-way road to the future.

There is no denying that, during late postmodernity, various brands of nihilism are circulating. A whole philosophical style based upon catastrophe is popular among several prophets of doom who contemplate the implosion of humanism with tragic joy.⁴ Nothing could be further removed from the ethics of affirmation and the political sensibility of posthumanist subjects than the altered states proposed by those people whom I call "narco-philosophers"; these individuals celebrate the implosion of sense, meaning, and values. They produce histrionic renditions of the delirious megalomania against which Deleuze posits firmly and rigorously a sustainable definition of the self. It is clear to me that a culture in the grip of a technoteratological imaginary occurring during a time of intense social and historical change is a culture that badly needs *less* abstraction and hype. This suggested diminishment concerns the economy of the spectral—that is to say, the forever living dead the media's representation system perpetuates. Images live forever—especially during the age of digital manipulation; images circulate within a continuously present ghostly/ghostly economy of vampiric consumption. This postmodern Gothic element is con-

sequently overwhelming within today's highly mediatic societies. The iconic stars live on: Marilyn and Diana, who will always appear forever young and dead, return endlessly to our attention.

I believe that a concretely embodied and embedded reading of the subject as a material, vitalistic, and anti-essentialist (and sustainable) entity can function as a profoundly sane reminder of the positive virtualities that lie in store regarding the crisis and transformation we now experience. I refer to a question of style (in the sense of a political and aesthetic sensibility). To assuage end of millennium stagnation, it is crucial to nurture a culture of affirmation and joy. To cultivate 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 site of composition for multiple becomings. It is against the contemporary forms of nihilism that a critical philosophy of immanence needs to disintoxicate us and to reset our agenda in the direction of affirmation and sustainable subjectivity. In this project, the presence of monsters can provide both solace and a model. I hope that monsters will accompany those who witness the next new millennium's inception.

NOTES

1. Teratotoxicology (Glamisier 1964) is the branch of molecular biology that involves biochemically-induced birth defects and mutations that have been monitored in the wake of the Manhattan Project. By extension, teratotoxicology triggers in humans the desire to represent the unrepresentable (and to think the unthinkable), which results in an advanced state of machine envy and the desire to imitate the inorganic or nonhuman.
2. See also White (1995).
3. Lefanu argues that the number of women science fiction writers has increased dramatically. There were no female winners of the Hugo Award between 1953 (the year of the award's inception) and 1967. Between 1968 and 1984 there were eleven female Hugo Award winners.
4. For a more detailed explanation see Braidotti (1994; 1996).
5. Anneke Smelik comments on the analogy between Ripley and Joan of Arc, especially in *Alien III* (Smelik 1996).
6. See Kroker and Kroker (1987).

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