

Meta(l)morphoses

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Science fiction has gone through a whole evolution taking it from animal, vegetable, and mineral becomings to becomings of bacteria, viruses, molecules, and things imperceptible. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 248)

IN THIS ARTICLE, I will pursue a twofold aim: first to stress the relevance of Deleuze's theory of becoming, not only for contemporary philosophical and critical theory, but also for cultural studies. Second, I will continue to challenge the sexually undifferentiated structure of Deleuze's notion of 'becoming', by analysing a series of science fiction texts – novels and films – which point towards highly genderized patterns of becoming (Braidotti, 1993).

Deleuzian A-Subjective Consciousness

The relevance of Deleuze's nomadic philosophy for critical practices other than philosophy rests on his critique of classical representation and more especially on the emphasis he places on the figural mode, affectivity and becoming. I want to stress this, because I think that the aesthetic aspects of Deleuze's philosophy are often down-played.¹

I fear that at this stage of the reception of Deleuze's work, a re-compartmentalization of his work is taking place, along the lines allowed for and even required by academic institutions of higher learning: one can speak of a 'cultural studies' approach to Deleuze, which centres on his literary, theatre and film texts and which runs parallel to and often unaware of philosophical commentaries on his work. The effect of this – however understandable – division of labour, strikes me as negative for the appreciation and the understanding of Deleuze's work.² After all, Deleuze's critique of 'representation' is the overarching concern that unifies the different moments of his work, without effacing its heterogeneity. Patton goes so far as to suggest a structural analogy between Deleuze's reflection on the

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purpose of his rhizomic philosophy and his critique of the classical frame of representation, in both art and philosophy (Patton, 1994).

I think that precisely because his philosophy attempts to re-code and re-configure the image of thought by a series of rigorous interventions on the representation of the pre-discursive and pre-conceptual groundwork of philosophical reason, it is impossible to separate the 'cultural' from the 'conceptual' aspects of his work. In this respect, as I have argued before, I do think that 'minority subjects of subjugated knowledges', such as feminist, black, postcolonial, queer and other theorists are in a privileged position as readers of Deleuze's transgressive philosophical phantasmagoria.

Deleuze's project rests on the affirmation of the radical immanence of a subject whose embodiment is a process of perpetual becomings and also on a passionate belief in the project of redefining the activity of thinking. The emphasis on figurations, or counter-images of thought, is no mere metaphorization: it is rather the cartographic commitment to constantly re-drawing politically informed maps of the present. It is situational, insofar as figurations trace patterns of possible lines of transformation, but it is also situated, because the cartographies rest upon the material complexity of the embedded and embodied nomadic subject. The flux of becoming of this vitalistic but anti-essentialistic understanding of the embodied subject happens always and already in-between: it is relational, conjunctive and dynamic.

In my reading, the process of becoming is like the patient task of approximating, through a series of adaptations, the raw simplicity of the forces that shape one's embodied intensity or existential temperature. Becoming is a process of approaching what we are, that is to say reducing oneself to the naked bone of one's speed of remembrance, one's capacity for perception, one's empathy for and impact on others. The opposite of narcissistic self-glorification, Deleuze's becoming is rather the humble apprenticeship to not being any-thing/where more/other than what one is capable of sustaining and tolerating. It is life on the edge, but not over it; it is excessive, but not in a sacrificial sense (exit Bataille). It is definitely anti-humanistic, but deeply compassionate in so far as it begins with the recognition of one's limitations as the necessary counterpart of one's forces or intensities. It is ethical, following Spinoza's notion of adequateness of one's passions to the modes and times of their enactment. It is collective-minded and relational because it requires impact with others and the destabilization of the self that follows such encounters. It can only be embodied and embedded and thus it is a radical form of immanence.

Immanence does not relate to a Something that is a unity superior to everything, nor to a Subject that is an act operating the synthesis of things: it is when immanence is no longer immanence to anything other than itself that we can talk of a plane of immanence. (Deleuze, 1997: 4)

Deleuze's central figuration is a general becoming-minority, or becoming-nomad, or becoming-molecular/woman/animal, etc. The minority is the dynamic or intensive principle of change in Deleuze's theory, whereas the

heart of the (phallogocentric) majority is dead. The space of becoming is posited as a space of affinity and symbiosis between adjacent forces: it is a space of dynamic marginality and of affinity of entities on the plan of immanence upon which they intersect. Proximity is both a topological and a quantitative notion, both geography and meteorology, which marks the space of common becoming of subjects as sensitive matter. Boundas (1994) suggests that the most effective way to think about Deleuze's becoming is as a serialized notion, removed from the dualistic scheme of transcendental philosophy, which inevitably indexes the process of becoming on to a notion of the self, the individual or the ego.

All becomings are already molecular. That is because becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to proportion 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 fulfils, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 272).

The process of decolonizing the thinking subject from the dualistic grip requires also the dissolution of all sexed identities based on the gendered opposition. Thus, the 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. Deleuze, just like Derrida and other post-structuralists, opposes to the 'majority/sedentary/molar' vision of woman as a structural operator of the phallogocentric system, the woman as 'becoming/minority/molecular/nomadic'.

In so far as Man represents the majority, there is no 'becoming-man': he is stuck with the burden of Being; this also means that the various minorities (women, children, blacks, animals, vegetables, molecules) are the privileged starting points for the process of becoming. In my terms, this means that the multiple variables of difference or of devalued otherness are positive sites for redefinition of subjectivity. Thus, an asymmetrical starting position between minority and majority is suggested by Deleuze. This means that the process of deterritorialization is dual and the quantitative minorities can undergo the process of becoming only by disengaging themselves entirely from the identity unity imposed upon them by the opposition to the majority. It is in this sense that Woman (as 'the second sex', or 'the other of the Same', as Luce Irigaray put it) needs to 'become-woman' in the molecular sense of the process. This is a double movement which overthrows the oppositional dialectics in an analogous yet asymmetrical move:

There is no subject of becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority; there is no medium of becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of a minority. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 292)

Thus, the suggestion is of a block of common asymmetrical becomings which turns the former dialectical opponents (men and women; old and young; white and black, etc., etc.) into allies in a process of becoming that constitutes the undoing of the common grounds for their former unitarian – albeit dualistically opposed – identity. In this respect, as Burger pointed out, ‘an argumental strategy characteristic of rhizome-thinking is . . . that it again and again reproduces the categories that it negates’ (Burger, 1985: 34). I would like to add, however, that this repetition of the very terms one takes one’s departure from, far from being the reiteration of a system of domination, constitutes the necessary anchoring point for the cartography of becoming which Deleuze and Guattari are sketching.

One must indeed start from somewhere and the process of becoming is a time-bomb placed at the very heart of the social and symbolic system which has welded together Being, Subjectivity, Masculinity, Heterosexuality and Western ethnocentrism. The different becomings are lines cutting open this space and demanding from us constant remapping: as Canning suggests, every time it is a question of finding the new coordinates (Canning, 1985).

The process of becoming is the kind of ‘morning after’ when one decides that the old coordinates of the social and symbolic system will not do. It is the shedding of the reactive forces in favour of more elemental ones: the courage to go without props; the choice for expansion of one’s boundaries; a yearning for being-different in the sense of a growth towards difference. Like a conversion to nothing more (or less) abstract than the need to change and to go on changing indefinitely.

It is in this sense that for me Deleuze’s theory of becoming is also a theory of desire: the only possible way to undertake this process is to actually be attracted to change, to *want* it, the way one wants a lover – in the flesh. Deleuze’s becoming is a theory of non-figurative desire. Thus defined, desire is political because it entails the social construction of different desiring subjects, that is to say subjects who desire differently. Breaking out of the official mould of oedipalized, socially productive libidinal economies, Deleuze’s becoming paves the way for all kinds of other economies and apparatuses of desire. They cannot be dissociated, however, from the singular desire to construct oneself ‘as’ different. Becoming occurs in the tense of ‘futur antérieur’: you will have been another.

Contrary to those who fear that the proliferation of micro-discourses and molecular practices of becoming will result in a relativistic drift into nihilism, I will go on to argue that I see this as a productive and affirmative process. The subject can only reinvent him/herself by relinquishing itself from the web of power relations on which it used to rest. What I find interesting about Deleuze’s contribution to ‘cultural studies’ is precisely this sort of pragmatics of the affective forces that shape certain texts. It is a typology of textual passions, a sort of applied affective meteorology which traces grids of possible lines of becoming, that is to say of deterritorialization of the subject – across the texts.

The Becoming-Insect

You have the individuation of a day, a season, a year, a *life* (regardless of its duration) – a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity) . . . A cloud of locusts carried in by the wind at five in the evening; a vampire who goes out at night, a werewolf at full moon . . . It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 262)

One needs to turn indeed to ‘minor’, not to say marginal and hybrid genres, such as science fiction, science fiction horror and cyberpunk, to find fitting cultural illustrations of Deleuze’s work on embodiment and becoming. In this section I will argue forcefully for the relevance of Deleuze’s theory of becoming to science fiction texts and films, while also arguing with Deleuze on the issue of the sexually differentiated nature of these processes.

The specific case study I would like to concentrate on is the becoming-insect, in relation to the becoming-woman. In a previous study³ of the novel *G.H.*, by Clarice Lispector, I outlined the sequence: becoming-woman/animal/insect/imperceptible. I also emphasized the gendered nature of both the process of becoming and of the time-sequence that marks it. The insect is hybrid, timeless and it possesses talismanic force. The encounter between the emancipated woman and this abject inhabitant of the entrails of space is resolved in her recognition of the coextensivity of all living matter.

Deleuze’s analysis of the latitudinal/longitudinal span of intensities that connect different layers of consciousness is highly relevant. What does not check, however, is his assertion of the undifferentiated trajectory of the becoming. For G.H. the progression is highly gender-specific, as are the cross-references to body-parts and body-fluids that mark this process. She moves towards becoming-molecular, but the becoming-imperceptible coincides with a sort of illumination that connects her to the pre-human, but also projects her inexorably towards a post-human interconnectedness. G.H. becomes one with the cosmos as a dynamic principle: she is but a point in it, burning with an intensity that makes her into an organizing principle. Faced with the immensity of this force which is in her but does not belong to her, G.H. simply bows down and honours this totality, in adoration. This living force is in excess of the phallogocentric hold and by letting go of it G.H., far from dissolving into the undifferentiated, emerges as ‘the woman of all women’ one with the whole of that gendered humanity which she cannot represent otherwise than by partaking fully of its speed and intensity. After which there is only silence.⁴

Contemporary science fiction texts trace numerous lines of affinity and coextensivity between women and animals or insects. Whereas commentators usually focus on one of these aspects (see, for instance, White, 1995), however, I think they should be kept together as a block of becomings. More specifically, following Deleuze, I see them as a variation on the paradigm

'woman = monster/alien other', suggested by Lefanu (on this point see Braidotti, 1994b). They are assimilated within the general category of 'difference', which facilitates a deep empathy between women and aliens and also favours exchanges and mutual influences. This points in the direction of a very gendered approach to the different processes of becoming and the metamorphoses that mark science fiction. Science fiction horror films often draw explicit parallels between the woman's and the alien's, animal or insect bodies. In Cronenberg's remake of *The Fly* (1986) this point is made explicitly in the nightmare scene where the woman gives birth to a gigantic maggot; this process is paralleled by the Kafka-like metamorphosis of the scientist.

In this film, the asymmetry between the sexes shows in the following: whereas for the woman the becoming-insect is a descent into a monstrous reproductive hell, the man only experiences his body as the mutation into insect begins. As often in Cronenberg's work, the asymmetry in the process of becoming between the sexes is respected and it becomes explored visually in different (de)compositions of embodiment. More importantly, the difference is not only in the starting positions of the two sexes, but also in their end results.

Further examples of this asymmetrical gendered rendition of the becoming-insect can be found in the classic science fiction films from the American 1950s, which express a deep-seated anxiety about the nuclear age. This anxiety gets coated very often in the form of the destructive powers of either the females or aliens, or possibly both. This fear has been likened to the tradition of the 'Virago' theme in classical literature⁵ and an example of it is the film *The Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman* (1958). The film features a very angry young woman who, exposed to atomic radiation, grows out of all proportion and terrorizes her husband and then the local town. Exactly like insect-films such as *Tarantula* (1955) and *Them* (1954), this blown-up, larger-than-life female figure is a screen on which all sorts of other anxieties get projected.

This point can be demonstrated with reference to another cult-film from the 1950s – *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) which acts almost as the counterpoint to *The Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman*. In this film the male hero – shrunk to miserable proportions after exposure to nuclear radiations – falls victim to a giant black spider. His encounter with the hairy beast gets visually compared through cross-cutting, with images of his own wife, who by now has grown proportionally gigantic. In an effect reminiscent of the most misogynist passages in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the female body emerges from this as a monstrous iconic other. I will return to this structural analogy between the woman and the insect.

The asymmetry in the representation of the visual destiny of the two sexes when exposed to the same devolutionary forces (atomic radiation) is striking: the process unfolds along gender lines: the woman blows up into a terrifying force and the poor man shrinks out of sight. Visually, the effects of this asymmetry are even more striking, resulting respectively in gigantic

close-ups of female genitalia on the one hand, and on the other in the heroic celebration of minute human males in their deadly encounters with hairy giants. The same technique is used in the film *Tarantula*, with the close-up of the giant spider's face through a window frame of the house where the suburban white woman watches the hairy cavity in horror. This is not only a classical *vagina-dentata* shot, but it also enacts an opposition black/white; human/non-human, with uncouth hairiness as a major differential. Another case in point is the close-up of the scientist/insect head in the original *The Fly* (1958). The fly-head marks the loss of reason and language, but the gain is an extreme improvement of the faculty of vision. When he looks at his wife through his insect-eyes, we get another blow-up phenomenon, with the female multiplied tenfold. In a gesture which anticipates Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), she mercifully kills him under an industrial press.

Pursuing further the line of becoming-insect/woman/imperceptible I will now take the insect as a figuration of the abject, a borderline figure, capable of having different meanings and associations. It is a generalized figure of liminality and inbetweenness. After all, for Aristotle, insects have no specific sex. Grosz, on the contrary, sees the insect as a highly sexualized 'queer' entity, capable of titillating the collective imagination especially on the issue of sex and death (Grosz, 1995). I differ on this point and tend to situate them rather on the horizon of the 'post-human', in closer connection to the technological than to the actual animal 'kingdom'.⁶

How are the insect and the technological linked in a process of becoming that dislodges the human from his/her naturalistic foundations, thus inflicting a final blow to any notion of 'human nature'? Shaviro (1995) rightly suggests that insofar as the becoming-insect in science fiction is an effect of devolutionary practices, it is linked – albeit negatively – to the technology that triggers them off. In the 1950s that is nuclear technology and in the 1990s it is rather molecular biology, but the two are linked both historically and conceptually. It is the speed and efficiency of its molecular structure and more especially of its reproductive cycle that has made the fruit-fly into the most important experimental site in modern biology. Haraway also hints at an 'insect paradigm' in contemporary molecular biology, which has moved beyond the classical opposition of 'vitalistic' to 'mechanistic' principles, to evolve instead in the direction of serial repetitions. Haraway takes this as a serious indication that we have already left the era of 'bio-politics' to enter that of: 'the informatics of domination'. As the text by Clarice Lispector demonstrates, in such a universe, the insects will most definitely inherit the earth.

But there are other aspects of the becoming-insect that, read in a Deleuzian perspective, point towards technology and away from humanism: *homo faber*, rather than *homo sapiens*. Deleuze singles some out quite explicitly in *Mille Plateaux* – that insects are essentially about the becoming-imperceptible, the becoming-molecular mostly because of the speed of their lifespan. Their significant traits in terms of a Deleuzian mapping of forces are: dryness; hairiness; metal-like body-frames; great resilience (the

spider in *Tarantula* must be napalmed before she can be defeated). They are elemental, either because linked to the earth and to its underground/crust (*chthonic* forces) or defying its gravity thanks to aircraft-like bodyframes (remember the exhilaration of Kafka's Gregor when he discovers that he can crawl up on the ceiling).

In terms of their reproduction, insects have perfected hybridity. They point to a disturbingly diverse sexual cycle, when compared to the mammals; in fact, insects are non-mammals that lay eggs. As such, they are likely to feed into the most insidious anxieties about unnatural copulations and births, especially in a 'posthumanist' culture obsessed with artificial reproduction (for a more detailed analysis see Braidotti, 1994c). Moreover, because of their speedy organism, there is no question of caring for their infants, mostly because they are not born prematurely (like humans). In a Deleuzian vein, these relatively obvious differences from the human lay out the grid of a new set of spatio-temporal coordinates, which translate into affective typologies and speed or rhythms.

The transformative speed as well as an immense power of adaptation is the force that makes insects the entity most closely related to the becoming-molecular and becoming-imperceptible. The fact that most of their life cycle is made of metamorphoses through different stadia of development is a manifestation of the same principles. As the title of this article suggests, however, I would rather speak of metal-morphosis, that is to say of a general becoming-imperceptible of the insect technology. I think that in a Deleuzian perspective the evidence points to a powerful link between the insect and electronic technology: the ticking away of incessant bytes of information at the speed of light. I think this destabilizing posthuman speed is the source of Deleuze's connection to writers like Burroughs, but also to others, whom he inexplicably ignores, like Kathy Acker and Angela Carter.

The evidence I have gathered so far also suggests something else, however. There is a specific pattern of becoming-woman/insect, which has features of its own and cannot be reduced to the undifferentiated becoming postulated by Deleuze, as I will show next.

The Becoming-Machine

The same hypothesis can be confirmed if we analyse another configuration: the metamorphoses in the sense of becoming-machine in science fiction texts. The evidence is overwhelming in contemporary culture that there is a privileged bond between the male and the machine. The woman seldom metamorphoses into an android or a robot and if she does, the consequences are as horrific as in insect movies. Films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) show female robots/cyborgs and they are killing machines as lethal as the males. In a way, male representations of woman as machine are a modernist *topos*, perfected in *Metropolis* (1926) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).

Springer (1991) argues that the 'cyber discourse' describing the union of humans and electronic technology is currently dominant in the scientific

community and in the popular culture texts such as films, television, video games, magazines, cyberpunk fiction and comic books. I would like to say, however, that this does not mean that contemporary technology eliminates corporeality: it rather explodes it outwards to unprecedented proportions. This results, among other things, in the eroticization of the technological, which on the one hand continues the modernist tradition but on the other pushes it to implosion by collapsing the boundaries that historically had separated organic from inorganic matter.

As I have argued elsewhere (Braidotti, 1995), this positions contemporary culture in a sort of paradox, on the one hand an eroticized fetishization of the technological has permeated the imaginary and the economic dimensions of our societies. On the other hand, this coincides with a sort of flight from the body which, in my opinion, confirms the most classical and pernicious aspect of Western phallogentrism. Evidence of this can be found in the extent to which gender boundaries and gender differences become exaggerated in cyberpunk.⁷ For instance, films like *The Terminator* and *Robocop* celebrate both the fusion of the male human body with the machine and the failure to overcome the worst aspects of masculine violence.⁸

This can be further demonstrated with reference to two other science fiction films: one is a light comedy, called *Weird Science* (1985), which tells the Pygmalion myth in high-tech mode, with some American teenaged boys designing the perfect woman on their PC and having her coming alive to sexually initiate and further service them all. The other film, *Eve of Destruction* (1991), features a female cyborg; here both the heroic and the liberatory notes are dropped in favour of a more traditional Frankensteinian approach. The cyborg Eve is the exact double of the female scientist that created her and even programmed her with her memories. Once she escapes, the cyborg proceeds to act out the scientist's repressed fantasies of revenge against men, causing death and destruction all round. The female cyborg contains a nuclear device inside her uterus, which duly gets activated and puts nothing less than the survival of the planet at risk. No cyborg saviour figure so far has been cast in the mould of the feminine.

Thus, the becoming-machine in science fiction films bears a strong affinity to a molar line of reconstruction of masculinity. There is also evidence, however of another set of transformations in the work of the previously mentioned Cronenberg; they trace the becoming-woman of the man. In *Videodrome*, the male body undergoes a very different set of metamorphoses. *Videodrome* is a video channel that specializes in snuff films. Through these scenes, they manipulate people's brains – including a brain tumour, which is described as an 'extra organ', that makes people receptive to the videodrome signal. What's interesting is that the boundary between reality and the televisual image is so blurred, that it becomes indistinguishable from Rex's hallucinations.

What makes *Videodrome* a classic is that it addresses the issue of the physicality and the corresponding malleability of the male body, while it also

shows to what an extent the body is constructed, thus striking an anti-humanist note. Of special relevance are the scenes where the video/TV screen comes alive, in turn as an alluring female body, a bleeding, dying, tortured body and, at the end, a mass of bleeding organs. The plasticity of the screen, combined with the loss of depth/organic reality of the protagonist's body makes the interpenetration of the human and the machine/organic-inorganic possible.

Even more significant for my purposes, when the protagonist's body becomes a video player, a big split appears from the navel to pelvis region (unmistakably vaginal), we witness a real becoming-woman of the male body-machine. As such, he can now be penetrated, that is to say he has acquired a productive inside, a uterine cavity (Modleski, 1986). His enemies can 'play him' - by inserting a videotape inside him which programmes him, to make him kill all their enemies. His 'memory system' is thus controlled by the majority and this embodied male becomes as much of an android as the *Blade Runner* 'replicants'. By becoming actively penetrable, his becoming-woman is complete.

Creed argues that this becoming-woman can be read critically in a feminist perspective (Creed, 1990): the dislocation of the categories of otherness is enacted, but no genuine alternative emerges; all we get is a man violating himself as a woman and masochism is the dominant theme of *Videodrome*. In this respect, the becoming-woman of the majority repeats the worst traits of the phallogocentric regime: it is an exercise in humiliation and an apprenticeship in self-mutilation. The man undergoes what women have had to suffer for centuries: this is the ultimate scenario of powerlessness and violation of one's body and it marks at best a generalized becoming-sadean.

Yes, But . . .

As I have argued throughout this essay: I think that a culture where this sort of imaginary is circulating, which hastily assimilates the 'cyber-revolution' to an as yet undefined sense of 'posthumanism', is a society that simply needs Deleuze's philosophy in order to avoid a downhill slide into nihilism. In positing this alternative I also mean to disagree most emphatically with those who assimilate Deleuze's philosophy of complexity to nihilism and relativism. I think that Deleuze's theory of becoming offers a useful and illuminating grid by which to read the contemporary aesthetic sensibility in an age of decline of humanistic paradigms. Deleuze's thought is especially helpful to approach some of the more iconoclastic and at times disturbing aspects of contemporary culture: the disaggregation of humanistic subject-positions and values; the ubiquitous presence of narcotic texts and practices; the all-pervasive political violence; the intermingling of the enfleshed and the technological. These features, which are often referred to as 'the posthuman' universe seem to cry out for Deleuze's philosophy of radical immanence as a way of making sense of what - within the parameters of humanism - can only appear as senseless, anarchical and threatening.

I think, however, that Deleuze's strength on these matters is also his weakness and that far too often hasty and rather 'pop-minded' readings of

his philosophy assimilate it rather superficially to those very cultural practices which Deleuze illuminates for us. The tendency seems indeed strong to read Deleuze as a 'narco-philosopher', a 'cyberpunk thinker', a 'post-gender pansexualist' and so on. My position on this is clear: I think it is to the credit of Deleuze's thought that he provides us with valuable inroads into the contemporary imagination, in its conceptual, political and aesthetic manifestations. This alone proves that his is a philosophy for our times and that Foucault was hinting at this when he suggested that one day this century will be known as Deleuzian. However, Deleuze's philosophy constitutes also a rigorous and tightly argued attempt to reverse Platonism and undo classical theories of representation, while avoiding relativism by grounding his theory of subjectivity in a concept of radical immanence. Nothing could be further from the 'pop' image that is often given of his philosophy.

Simultaneously, and in potential collision with the first line of argument, I have also tried to point to significant evidence from contemporary culture which indicates that the asymmetry Deleuze acknowledges in the respective starting positions of the majority and the minorities results in asymmetrical, not in common processes of becoming. There is not a unique form of becoming-woman/insect/imperceptible for all women, let alone for both women and men. There is not one common format that can account for the speed, the longitude and latitude of both masculine and feminine becoming. On the contrary, the sequence becoming-woman/insect and becoming-woman/machine points to very differentiated patterns.

Given that the science fiction texts I used as evidence are not Deleuze's immediate responsibility, we are left with two options. One consists in saying that our culture is not Deleuzian yet and that we need to put more effort into exploring radical forms of molecular becoming and in finding forms of representation in keeping with the Deleuzian project of becoming. I would like to suggest that, in contemporary culture, music may be the area where a Deleuzian revolution is most likely and, in some ways, already happening (see, for instance, Bogue, 1991). I would like to add also that even more effort would be needed to make these transformations in our cultural sensitivity operational in public policy-making and in the structure of scholarship, research and teaching. In this respect I have also suggested that it is urgent, in the contested zone of the posthumous reception of Deleuze's work, to put more efforts into unwrapping the conceptual hardcore of his philosophy and more especially of his possible - as in virtual - contribution to the growing field of cultural studies.

The second option consists in saying that Deleuze's scheme of becoming is faulty and it needs to be revised in the sense of multiple but not undifferentiated becomings. Between the two, my heart lingers and I shall not be pushed to choose.

However 'molar' this may appear, I do think it important to assert the asymmetry between the majority and the minority all the way to the specific forms of affectivity, time-sequences and the kind of plans of immanence they can engineer. As people who come *after* Deleuze, I also think it important

that we take up this point seriously and develop it sequentially. It seems to me urgent to rescue Deleuze's work from the risk of falling into the banality of asserting that minorities – in all their diversity – constitute the perfect prototype for the generalized modes of a-subjective consciousness that Deleuze is advocating. I think it simply is *not* the case for Deleuze that women, blacks, children, insects or plants are rhizomic *avant la lettre* or have been nomadic since the beginning of time. And yet this oversimplified notion is gathering momentum in the present stage of reception of Deleuze.⁹ I think this is dangerous not only because it is a misreading of Deleuze's becoming, but also because it hinders the work of serious conceptual criticism of Deleuze's work, which in my opinion needs to be undertaken. I want to suggest that the only way to avoid the double pitfall of oversimplification and therefore banality on the one hand, and dogmatic repetition of his master's voice on the other is to explore further the notion of how the asymmetry between the majority and the minorities affects the entire process of becoming and not only its point of departure.

All this notwithstanding, I think it is right to suggest that, to enact a Deleuzian process of becoming, you are better off cultivating 'our inner housefly or cockroach, instead of your inner child. . . . And don't imagine for a second that these remarks are merely anthropomorphizing metaphors' (Shaviro, 1995: 53). These changes of coordinates rather point to the political and conceptual necessity to change in-depth and thus to extract from our enfolded memory the repertoire of available images for self-representation. It is not a mere voluntaristic switch of identifications and it could not be further removed from wilful self-naming. I would rather describe it as a process of peeling off stratum after stratum, the layers of signification that have been tattooed in the surface of our body and – more importantly – in its psychic recesses and the internalized folds of one's sacrosanct 'experience'. Like a snake shedding an old skin, one must remember to forget it.

Notes

1. For a useful introduction to this aspect of Deleuze's work, see Bogue (1989).
2. A perfect example of this is the tendentious account of the failure of Deleuze-inspired 'Cultural Studies' in Miller (1993).
3. I did a preliminary analysis on these interrelated becomings in Braidotti (1994a).
4. To do full justice to the issues involved in this, I developed a close comparison of Deleuze and Irigaray on the question of becoming.
5. See for instance the enlightening collection edited by Dorrit Einersen and Ingeborg Nixon (1995).
6. For a very early outline of the 'becoming animal' see the special issue: 'Polynessuality', *Semiotext(e)* 4(1), 1981.
7. I am grateful to Anneke Smelik for the analysis of the cyberpunk and cyborg film genres.
8. In this regard I do not share the positive assessment of the male cyborg suggested by Goodchild (1996: 59, 147), though I regret I cannot expand on this point here.
9. For a feminist critique of Deleuze's alleged philosophical orientalism, see Grewal and Kaplan (1994).

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