ROSI BRAIDOTTI

metamorphoses

TOWARDS A MATERIALIST THEORY OF BECOMING

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THEORY OF BECOMING

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Polity

For Anneke

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Prologue

'I am rooted, but I flow.'

Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 69

These are strange times, and strange things are happening. Times of ever-expanding, yet spasmodic, waves of change, which engender the simultaneous occurrence of contradictory effects. Times of fast-moving changes which do not wipe out the brutality of power-relations, but in many ways intensify them and bring them to the point of implosion.

Living at such times of fast changes may be exhilarating, yet the task of representing these changes to ourselves and engaging productively with the contradictions, paradoxes and injustices they engender is a perennial challenge. Accounting for fast-changing conditions is hard work; escaping the velocity of change is even harder. Unless one likes complexity one cannot feel at home in the twenty-first century. Transformations, metamorphoses, mutations and processes of change have in fact become familiar in the lives of most contemporary subjects. They are also vital concerns, however, for the scientific, social and political institutions that are expected to govern and take care of them.

If the only constant at the dawn of the third millennium is change, then the challenge lies in thinking about processes, rather than concepts. This is neither a simple nor a particularly welcome task in the theoretical language and conventions which have become the norm in social and political theory as well as cultural critique. In spite of the sustained efforts of many radical critics, the mental habits of linearity and objectivity persist in their hegemonic hold over our thinking. Thus, it is by far simpler to think about the concept

A or B, or of B as non-A, rather than the process of what goes on in between A and B. Thinking through flows and interconnections remains a difficult challenge. The fact that theoretical reason is concept-bound and fastened upon essential notions makes it difficult to find adequate representations for processes, fluid in-between flows of data, experience and information. They tend to become frozen in spatial, metaphorical modes of representation which itemize them as 'problems'. I believe that this is one of the issues that Irigaray addresses, notably in her praise of the 'mechanic of fluids' against the fixity and lethal inertia of conceptual thinking (Irigaray, 1997). Deleuze also takes up this challenge by loosening the conceptual ties that have kept philosophy fastened on some semi-religiously-held beliefs about reason, logos, the metaphysics of presence and the logic of the Same (also known as molar, sedentary, majority).

The starting-point for my work is a question that I would set at the top of the agenda for the new millennium: the point is not to know who we are, but rather what, at last, we want to become, how to represent mutations, changes and transformations, rather than Being in its classical modes. Or, as Laurie Anderson put it wittily: nowadays moods are far more important than modes of being. That is a clear advantage for those who are committed to engendering and enjoying changes, and a source of great anxiety for those who are not.

One of the aims of this book therefore is both to explore the need and to provide illustrations for new figurations, for alternative representations and social locations for the kind of hybrid mix we are in the process of becoming. Figurations are not figurative ways of thinking, but rather more materialistic mappings of situated, or embedded and embodied, positions. A cartography is a theoretically-based and politically-informed reading of the present. A cartographic approach fulfils the function of providing both ex-egetical tools and creative theoretical alternatives. As such it responds to my two main requirements, namely to account for one's locations in terms both of space (geo-political or ecological dimension) and time (historical and geneological dimension), and to provide alternative figurations or schemes of representation for these locations, in terms of power as restrictive (*potestas*) but also as empowering or affirmative (*potentia*). I consider this cartographic gesture as the first move towards an account of nomadic subjectivity as ethically accountable and politically empowering.

By figuration I mean a politically informed map that outlines our own situated perspective. A figuration renders our image in terms of a decentred and multi-layered vision of the subject as a dynamic and changing entity. The definition of a person's identity takes place in between nature–technology, male–female, black–white, in the spaces that flow and connect in between. We live in permanent processes of transition, hybridization and nomadization, and these in-between states and stages defy the established modes of theoretical representation.

A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self – it is no metaphor. Being nomadic, homeless, an exile, a refugee, a Bosnian rape-in-war victim, an itinerant migrant, an illegal immigrant, is no metaphor. Having no passport or having too many of them is neither equivalent nor is it merely metaphorical, as some critics of nomadic subjectivity have suggested (Boer 1996; Gedalof 1999; Felski 1997). These are highly specific geo-political and historical locations – history tattooed on your body. One may be empowered or beautified by it, but most people are not; some just die of it. Figurations attempt to draw a cartography of the power-relations that define these respective positions. They don't embellish or metaphorize: they just express different socio-economic and symbolic locations. They draw a cartographic map of power-relations and thus can also help identify possible sites and strategies of resistance. In other words, the project of finding adequate representations, which was raised to new heights by the poststructuralist generation, is neither a retreat into self-referential textuality, nor is it a form of apolitical resignation, as Nussbaum self-righteously argues (1999). Non-linearity and a non-unitary vision of the subject do not necessarily result in either cognitive or moral relativism, let alone social anarchy, as neo-liberals like Nussbaum fear. I rather see them as significant sites for reconfiguring political practice and redefining political subjectivity. The book will accordingly engage throughout with my cartographic reading of the present, in terms of cultural, political, epistemological and ethical concerns.

In these times of accelerating changes, many traditional points of reference and age-old habits are being recomposed, albeit in contradictory ways. At such a time more conceptual creativity is necessary; a theoretical effort is needed in order to bring about the conceptual leap across inertia, nostalgia, aporia and other forms of critical *stasis* induced by the postmodern historical condition. I maintain that we need to learn to think differently about ourselves and the processes of deep-seated transformation. This quest for alternative figurations expresses creativity in representing the kind of nomadic subjects we have already become and the social and symbolic locations we inhabit. In a more theoretical vein, the quest for figurations attempts to recombine the propositional contents and the forms of thinking so as to attune them both to nomadic complexities. It thus also challenges the separation of reason from the imagination.

One of the central concerns of this book is consequently the deficit in the scale of representation which accompanies the structural transformations of subjectivity in the social, cultural and political spheres of late post-industrial culture. Accounting adequately for changes is a challenge that shakes up long-established habits of thought. Most persistent among those is the habit that consists in dealing with differences in pejorative terms, that is to say, to represent them negatively. Hence my leading question, which has become a

sort of red thread through all my books: how can one free difference from the negative charge which it seems to have built into it? Like a historical process of sedimentation, or a progressive cumulation of toxins, the concept of difference has been poisoned and has become the equivalent of inferiority: to be different from means to be worth less than. How can difference be cleansed of this negative charge? Is the positivity of difference, sometimes called 'pure difference', thinkable? What are the conditions that may facilitate the thinkability of positive difference? What is the specific contribution of poststructuralist philosophies to these questions?

By the year 2000, the social context had changed considerably since the days when the poststructuralist philosophers put 'difference' on the theoretical and political agenda. The return of biological essentialism, under the cover of genetics, molecular biology, evolutionary theories and the despotic authority of DNA has caused both an inflation and a reification of the notion of 'difference'. On the right of the political spectrum, in Europe today, contemporary racism celebrates rather than denies differences. In this reactionary discourse, however, differences of identity are essentialized and attached to firm beliefs about national, regional, provincial or at times (see the French National Front, the Italian Northern 'lega' or the Haider phenomenon in Austria) town-based parameters for the definition of identities. Resting on fixed notions of one's territory, these ideas of 'difference' are deterministic, and also exclusive and intrinsically xenophobic. In this context, moreover, difference is a term indexed on a hierarchy of values which it governs by binary opposition: what it conveys are power-relations and structural patterns of exclusion at the national, regional, provincial or even more local level. It is because of what I consider the political and social regression of this essentialistic notion of 'difference' that I find it important to reset the agenda in the direction of a radical (poststructuralist) critique. The notion of 'difference' is far too important to be left either to the geneticists or to the various brands of nostalgic supremacists (white, male, Christian) who circulate these days.

This is therefore less a book about philosophy than a philosophical book. It aims at providing a singular cartography of some of the political and cultural forces operative in contemporary culture. From there on, I will present a number of my own variations on nomadic thought, with special reference to Gilles Deleuze's and Luce Irigaray's philosophies of difference. After surveying the state of contemporary feminist philosophies of the subject in general (chapter 1) and of the nomadic subject in particular (chapter 2), I will go on to explore contemporary culture and cultural studies (chapter 3). I will offer readings of some of the more striking aspects of contemporary popular culture, especially the powerful lure of technology and of techno-bodies (chapters 4 and 5), as well as the Gothic or monstrous social imaginary that so often accompanies their representations (chapter 4). I will argue

that the current cultural fascination with monstrous, mutant or hybrid others expresses both a deep anxiety about the fast rate of transformation of identities and also the poverty of the social imaginary and our inability to cope creatively with the on-going transformations. At the centre of it all I will place the social, cultural and symbolic mutations induced by technological culture. Throughout, I will try to stress the important and original contribution that a non-unitary vision of the subject can make to critical theory and cultural practice. Resting on a nomadic understanding of subjectivity, I will attempt to de-pathologize and to illuminate in a positive light some contemporary cultural and social phenomena, trying to emphasize their creative and affirmative potential. By addressing from a variety of angles the issue of nomadic subjectivity, I will attempt simultaneously to produce an adequate cartography of this historical situation and to expose the logic of the new power-relations operative today. This book functions therefore like a walk along a zigzagging nomadic track of my own making, which was inspired by philosophies of difference and more especially by concepts such as embodiment, immanence, sexual difference, rhizomatics, memory and endurance or sustainability.

I will also stress issues of embodiment and make a plea for different forms of thinking about and representing the body. I will refer to this in terms of 'radical immanence'. This means that I want to think through the body, not in a flight away from it. This in turn implies confronting boundaries and limitations. In thinking about the body I refer to the notion of enfleshed or embodied materialism (I use the two interchangeably). I have turned to the materialist roots of European philosophy, namely the French tradition that runs from the eighteenth century into Bachelard, Canguilhem, Foucault, Lacan, Irigaray and Deleuze. I call this the 'materialism of the flesh' school in that it gives priority to issues of sexuality, desire and the erotic imaginary. I connect to it the corporeal feminism of sexual difference. This Continental tradition produces both an alternative vision of the subject and tools of analysis which are useful in accounting for some of the changes and transformations that are occurring in post-industrial societies in the age of globalization. In my critical exegesis of Deleuze's theory of becoming and Irigaray's theory of sexual difference, I will argue that nomadology is not at all incompatible with feminist practices of sexual difference, but rather that the two can reinforce one another and strike a productive alliance.

After thirty years of postmodernist and feminist debates for, against or undecided on the issue of the 'non-unitary', split, in-process, knotted, rhizomatic, transitional, nomadic subject, issues of fragmentation, complexity and multiplicity should have become household names in critical theory. The ubiquitous nature of these notions, however, and the radical-chic appeal of the terminology do not make for consensus about the issues at stake, namely what exactly are the implications of the loss of unity of the

subject. Much disagreement and arguments at cross purposes have been voiced as to the ethical and political issues which the non-unitary subject raises in contemporary culture and politics (Nussbaum 1999). In other words the 'so what?' part of the discussion on nomadic subjectivity is more open than ever, while the contradictions and the paradoxes of our historical condition pile up around us. What exactly can we do with this non-unitary subject? What good it is to anybody? What kind of political and ethical agency can she or he be attached to? How much fun is it? What are the values, norms and criteria that nomadic subjectivity can offer? I am inclined to think that 'so what?' questions are always relevant, excellent and a welcome relief in the often foggy bottoms of critical theory.

Although it is critical in orientation, this book is never negative. I believe that the processes of transformation are on-going and that the equivalent process of transformative repossession of knowledge has just begun. With that comes also the quest for alternative figurations to express the kind of internally contradictory multi-faceted subjects that we have become. There is a noticeable gap between how we live – in emancipated or post-feminist, multi-ethnic societies, with high technologies and telecommunication, allegedly free borders and increased controls, to name just a few – and how we represent to ourselves this lived familiarity. This imaginative poverty can be read as the 'jet-lag' problem of living simultaneously in different time-zones, in the schizophrenic mode that is characteristic of the historical era of postmodernity. Filling in this gap with adequate figurations is the great challenge of the present. And I cannot think of a bigger one for the future.

What is adequate about new figurations needs to be the object of a collective discussion and confrontation, and of public debates, and it cannot be determined by a single individual. I believe that such critical, discursive exchanges should be at the heart of critical theory today. The first question that I would consequently like to address to my readers is cartographical: do you agree with the account of late post-industrial culture I will provide here? Do we live in the same world? in the same time-zones? How do you account for the kind of world *you* are living in? Drawing that cartography is the beginning of philosophical dialogue today. My project consequently joins forces with other attempts made from different philosophical traditions (Fraser 1996) to reconstruct the public sphere and to develop a public discourse suitable to the contradictory demands of our times.

The cartographic approach of my philosophical nomadism requires that we think of power-relations simultaneously as the most 'external', collective, social phenomenon and also as the most intimate or 'internal' one. Or rather, power is the process that flows incessantly in between the most 'internal' and the most 'external' forces. As Foucault taught us, power is a situation, a position, not an object or an essence. Subjectivity is the effect of the

constant flows or in-between interconnections. What attracts me to French philosophies of difference such as Deleuze's multiple subjects of becoming, or Irigaray's 'virtual feminine', is that they do not stop on the surface of issues of identity and power, but rather tackle their conceptual roots. In so doing, they push the psycho-sociological discussion of identity towards issues of subjectivity, that is to say, issues of entitlement and power. I find it particularly important not to confuse this process of subjectivity with individualism or particularity: subjectivity is a socially mediated process. Consequently, the emergence of new social subjects is always a collective enterprise, 'external' to the self while it also mobilizes the self's in-depth structures. A dialogue with psychoanalytic theories of the 'split' nature of subjectivity is consequently high on my agenda and will run throughout the book.

This brings me back to the emphasis I want to place on issues of figuration. Political fictions may be more effective, here and now, than theoretical systems. The choice of an iconoclastic, mythic figure, such as the nomadic subject, is consequently a move against the settled and conventional nature of theoretical and especially philosophical thinking. Nomadism is also, however, a cross-reference to the 'hidden' face of Western philosophy, to its anti-logocentric undercurrents, which F. Chatelet described as the 'demonic' tradition best symbolized by Nietzsche (Chatelet, 1970). Deleuze banks on this philosophical counter-memory, when he celebrates nomadic thought as a genealogical practice that re-locates philosophy away from the gravitational pull of metaphysics (Deleuze 1973b). Deleuze is particularly intent upon challenging the domination of conscious rationality as a model for the subject, and devotes his energy to re-imagining the philosophical subject altogether. Irigaray's project is analogous: she focuses her critique on the phallogocentric structure of thought and the systematic exclusion of the feminine from theoretical representation. Whereas Irigaray draws inspiration from the untapped resources of a virtual 'feminine', which feminists have to re-configure in their own specific imaginary, Deleuze places all hopes on in-depth transformations of the subject in terms of sexually differentiated processes of becoming (see chapter 2). Nonetheless, there is a point of convergence between Irigaray and Deleuze in their effort in re-inventing the very image of the subject as an entity fully immersed in relations of power, knowledge and desire. This implies a positive vision of the subject as an affective, positive and dynamic structure, which clashes with the rationalist image traditionally projected by institutionalized philosophy.

Thus, my choice of the nomadic figuration is also a way of situating myself vis-à-vis the institution of philosophy as a discipline: it is a way of inhabiting it, but as an 'outsider within', that is to say critically but also with deep engagement. Last, but not least, this figuration has an imaginative pull that I find attuned to the transnational movement that marks our historical situation.

Equally important for nomadic 'becomings' is the quest for a style of thinking that adequately reflects the complexities of the process itself. 'Becoming-animal', for instance is related by Deleuze to a certain approach to writing, to the productions of texts like Kafka's or Woolf's, where the human-centred world view is shattered by other affects, other types of sensibility (more in chapter 4). 'Becoming' is about repetition, but also about memories of the non-dominant kind. It is about affinities and the capacity both to sustain and generate inter-connectedness. Flows of connection need not be appropriative, though they are intense and at times can be violent. They nonetheless mark processes of communication and mutual contamination of states of experience. As such, the steps of 'becoming' are neither reproduction nor imitation, but rather empathic proximity and intensive interconnectedness. It is impossible to render these processes in the language of linearity and self-transparency favoured by academic philosophers. 'Becoming', not unlike Irigaray's 'écriture féminine' calls into question the very performance of a philosophical test, pulling it away from the attraction of logocentrism. Also known as 'de-territorializing', or 'rhizomatic', this nomadic style is an integral component of the concept of 'becoming', and not a mere rhetorical additive.

In order to do justice to these complexities I have opted for a style that may strike the academic reader as allusive or associative. It is a deliberate choice on my part, involving the risk of sounding less than coherent at times. It has to do with my concern for style not as a merely rhetorical device, but as a deeper concept. In choosing to defend the often poetic 'ways' in which philosophers like Irigaray and Deleuze present their theories, I am joining the call for a renewal of the language and the textual apparatus of academic writing but also of public political discussions.

Consequently, I am very committed to the task of reconfiguring a theoretical style in a manner that reflects and does not contradict theoretical nomadism. To attack linearity and binary thinking in a style that remains linear and binary itself would indeed be a contradiction in terms. This is why the poststructuralist generation has worked so hard to innovate the form and style, as well as the content, of their philosophy. This has been greeted by a mixed reception in the academic community. Assessed as 'bad poetry' at best, as an opaque and allusive muddle at worst, the quest for a new philosophical style that rejects the dualism of content and form has clashed with the mood currently dominant in scientific discourse. In the neo-deterministic, pseudo-liberal context of the dawn of the third millennium, a renewed emphasis upon 'scientific clarity' has accompanied the resurgence of genetic, molecular and evolutionary hard-liners for whom 'style' is at best a decorative notion. How the despotic tendency of contemporary scientific discourse joined forces with anti-poststructuralist positions is a phenomenon that deserves more attention than I can give it here. Suffice

it to say that such reductions harm not only the 'French' philosophers, but also the implicit definition of 'science' that is systematically opposed to them. Such an aggressive approach reinstates a dogmatic vision of science that does no justice to the state of contemporary research. It is a regression all along the line. Thinking nomadically means also taking the risk of oblique and allegorical cross-references. My quarrel with linearity, therefore, remains open.

In a more feminist vein, as Linda Alcoff so generously noted, this choice of style expresses my desire 'to find value in multiple feminist modes of theory. . . . This is a difference not just in style but, importantly, in political understanding, in part based on a different view of discourse that appreciates the fact that, because it is not coherent or stable, our modes of resistance need not be either' (Alcoff, 2000: 870). Indeed, my choice of a nomadic style is intended as a gesture of rejection of the competitive, judgemental, moralizing high tone that so much feminist theory has come to share with traditional academic writing. In turn, this has to do with my refusal to embrace the 'image of thought' that is conveyed by such a judgemental exercise of critical reason. I do not support the assumption of the critical thinker as judge, moral arbiter or high-priest(ess). Nothing could be further removed from my understanding of the task of the critical philosopher than such a reactive deployment of protocols of institutional reason. My decision to adopt an unconventional – albeit risky – style of thinking is related to such convictions. My hope is that what appears to be lost in terms of coherence can be compensated for by inspirational force and an energizing pull away from binary schemes, judgemental postures and the temptation of nostalgia. Whether this succeeds or not, it is important that my readers keep in mind the reasons that led me to adopt this style in the first place.

My refusal to separate reason from the imagination also alters the terms of the conventional pact between the writer and his or her readers. If the philosophical text is to be approached on the model of connection, it is relinquished into the intensive elements that both sustain the connections and are generated by them. The writer/reader binary couple is recombined accordingly, and a new impersonal mode is required as the appropriate way of doing philosophy. This impersonal style is rather 'post-personal' in that it allows for a web of connections to be drawn, not only in terms of the author's 'intentions' and the reader's 'reception', but rather in a much wider, more complexified set of possible interconnections. The complexity of the network of forces that come to bear on the subject is such that it blurs established, that is to say hegemonic, distinctions of class, culture, race, sexual practice and others. The question of style is crucial to this project. As readers in an intensive mode, we are transformers of intellectual energy, processors of the 'insights' that we are exchanging. These 'in'-sights are not to be thought of as plunging us inwards, towards a mythical 'inner' reservoir

of truth. On the contrary, they are better thought of as propelling us in the multiple directions of extra-textual experiences. Thinking is living at a higher degree, a faster pace, a multi-directional manner.

I dedicated *Patterns of Dissonance* to the figuration of the acrobat walking a tight-rope across the postmodern void. In *Nomadic Subjects* I danced through a set of musical and territorial variations. *Metamorphoses* is neither a tight-rope nor a web, but rather the rope of a bungee-jumper, dangling in a tantalizing way in the void, making quick excursions into it, but always bouncing back to safety. It reads like a road-map, marking idiosyncratic itineraries and paradoxical twists and turns around a number of central ideas, hopes and yearnings of mine. It is a map that draws the trajectory of changes, transformations and becomings. The chapters grow from but also apart from each other in a direction that is not always linear. The readers may have to be patient at times and bear with the stress of a journey that has no set destinations. This is a book of explorations and risks, of convictions and desires. For these are strange times and strange things are happening.

1

Becoming Woman, or Sexual Difference Revisited

'I am a violent being, full of fiery storms and other catastrophic phenomena. As yet I can't do more than begin this and begin again because I have to eat myself, as if my body is food, in order to write.'
                    Kathy Acker, 'The end of the world of white men', p. 66

'Imagine, if you will, a lesbian cross-dresser who pumps iron, looks like Chiquita Banana, thinks like Ruth Bader Ginsburg, talks like Dorothy Parker, has the courage of Anita Hill, the political acumen of Hillary Clinton and is as pissed off as Valerie Solanis, and you really have something to worry about.'
        Marcia Tucker, 'The attack of the giant Ninja mutant Barbies', p. 28

Feminism shares with poststructuralist philosophies not only the sense of a crisis of the Logos, but also the need for renewed conceptual creativity and for politically informed cartographies of the present. One of the aims of feminist practice is to overthrow the pejorative, oppressive connotations that are built not only into the notion of difference, but also into the dialectics of Self and Other. This transmutation of values could lead to a re-assertion of the positivity of difference by enabling a collective re-appraisal of the singularity of each subject in their complexity. In other words, the subject of feminism is not *W*oman as the complementary and specular other of man but rather a complex and multi-layered embodied subject who has taken her distance from the institution of femininity. 'She' no longer coincides with the disempowered reflection of a dominant subject who casts his masculinity in a universalistic posture. She, in fact, may no longer be a she, but the

subject of quite another story: a subject-in-process, a mutant, the other of the Other, a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis.

Feminist philosophies of sexual difference are historically embedded in the decline and crisis of Western humanism, the critique of phallogocentrism and the crisis of European identity. The philosophical generation that proclaimed the 'death of Man' led to the rejection of humanism, marked the implosion of the notion of Europe, and also contributed to disassembling the package of geo-political specificity of Western discourses and especially of philosophy. Irigaray broadens the range of her intervention to cover spatio-temporal co-ordinates and a number of many constitutive relations, including ethnicity and especially religion. The fact that the notion of 'difference' as pejoration goes to the heart of the European history of philosophy and of the 'metaphysical cannibalism' of European thought makes it a foundational concept. It has been colonized by hierarchical and exclusionary ways of thinking, which means that historically it has also played a constitutive role not only in events that Europe can be proud of, such as the Enlightenment, but also in darker chapters of our history, such as in European fascism and colonialism. Because the history of difference in Europe has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, it is a notion for which critical intellectuals must make themselves accountable. Feminist ethics and politics of location can be of inspiration in meeting this challenge.

The politics of location refers to a way of making sense of diversity among women within the category of 'sexual difference' understood as the binary opposite of the phallogocentric subject. In feminism, these ideas are coupled with that of epistemological and political accountability seen as the practice that consists in unveiling the power locations which one inevitably inhabits as the site of one's identity. The practice of accountability (for one's embodied and embedded locations) as a relational, collective activity of undoing power differentials is linked to two crucial notions: memory and narratives. They activate the process of putting into words, that is to say bringing into symbolic representation, that which by definition escapes consciousness.

A 'location', in fact, is not a self-appointed and self-designed subject-position. It is a collectively shared and constructed, jointly occupied spatio-temporal territory. A great deal of our location, in other words, escapes self-scrutiny because it is so familiar, so close, that one does not even see it. The 'politics of location' consequently refers to a process of consciousness-raising that requires a political awakening (Grewal and Kaplan 1994) and hence the intervention of others. 'Politics of locations' are cartographies of power which rest on a form of self-criticism, a critical, genealogical self-narrative; they are relational and outside-directed. This means that 'embodied' accounts illuminate and transform our knowledge of ourselves and of the world. Thus, black women's texts and experiences make white women

see the limitations of our locations, truths and discourses. Feminist know-
ledge is an interactive process that brings out aspects of our existence, espe-
cially our own implication with power, that we had not noticed before. In
Deleuzian language, it 'de-territorializes' us: it estranges us from the famil-
iar, the intimate, the known, and casts an external light upon it; in Foucault's
language, it is micro-politics, and it starts with the embodied self. Feminists,
however, knew this well before either Foucault or Deleuze theorized it in
their philosophy.

Where 'figurations' of alternative feminist subjectivity, like the womanist,
the lesbian, the cyborg, the inappropriate(d) other, the nomadic feminist,
and so on, differ from classical 'metaphors' is precisely in calling into play a
sense of accountability for one's locations. They express materially embed-
ded cartographies and as such are self-reflexive and not parasitic upon a
process of metaphorization of 'others'. Self-reflexivity is, moreover, not an
individual activity, but an interactive process which relies upon a social
network of exchanges. The figurations that emerge from this process act as
the spotlight that illuminates aspects of one's practice which were blind
spots before. By extension, new figurations of the subject (nomadic, cyborg,
Black, etc.) function like conceptual *personae*. As such, they are no metaphor,
but rather on the critical level, materially embedded, embodying accounts of
one's power-relations. On the creative level they express the rate of change,
transformation or affirmative deconstruction of the power one inhabits.
'Figurations' materially embody stages of metamorphosis of a subject posi-
tion towards all that the phallogocentric system does *not* want it to become.

A range of new, alternative subjectivities have indeed emerged in the
shifting landscapes of postmodernity. They are contested, multi-layered and
internally contradictory subject-positions, which does not make them any
less ridden with power-relations. They are hybrid and in-between social
categories for whom traditional descriptions in terms of sociological cat-
egories such as 'marginals', 'migrants', or 'minorities' are, as Saskia Sassen
(1994) suggests, grossly inadequate. Looked at from the angle of 'different
others', this inflationary production of different differences simultaneously
expresses the logic of capitalist exploitation, but also the emerging sub-
jectivities of positive and self-defined others. It all depends on one's loca-
tions or situated perspectives. Far from seeing this as a form of relativism,
I see it as an embedded and embodied form of enfleshed materialism. Put in
a more feminist frame with Irigaray, the differences proliferating in late
postmodern or advanced capitalism are the 'others' of the Same. Translated
into a Deleuzian perspective, these differences, whether they are large or
quantitatively small, are not qualitative and consequently do not alter the
logic or the power of that Same, the Majority, the phallogocentric master-
code. In late postmodernity the centre merely becomes fragmented, but that
does not make it any less central, or dominating. It is important to resist the

uncritical reproduction of Sameness on a molecular, global or planetary scale. I don't want to conceptualize differences in a Hegelian framework of dialectical interdependence and mutual consumption of self and other. I do see them instead as being disengaged from this chain of reversals in order to engage in quite a different logic: a nomadic, or rhizomatic one.

The work on power, difference and the politics of location offered by post-colonial and anti-racist feminist thinkers like Gayatri Spivak (1989b), Stuart Hall (1990), Paul Gilroy (1987; 1993), Avter Brah (1993), Helma Lutz et al. (1996), Philomena Essed (1991), Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989) and many others who are familiar with the European situation helps us illuminate the paradoxes of the present. One of the most significant effects of late postmodernity in Europe is the phenomenon of trans-culturality, or cultures clashing in a pluri-ethnic or multicultural European social space. World-migration – a huge movement of population from periphery to centre, working on a world-wide scale of 'scattered hegemonies' (Grewal and Kaplan 1994) – has challenged the claim to the alleged cultural homogeneity of European nation-states and of the incipient European Union. Present-day Europe is struggling with multiculturalism at a time of increasing racism and xenophobia. The paradoxes, power-dissymmetries and fragmentations of the present historical context rather require that we shift the political debate from the issue of differences be-tween cultures to differences *within* the same culture. In other words, one of the features of our present historical condition is the shifting grounds on which periphery and centre confront each other, with a new level of com-plexity which defies dualistic or oppositional thinking.

Feminist theory argues that if it is the case that a socio-cultural mutation is taking place in the direction of a multi-ethnic, multi-media society, then the transformation cannot affect only the pole of 'the others'. It must equally dislocate the position and the prerogative of 'the Same', the former centre. In other words, what is changing is not merely the terminology or meta-phorical representation of subjects, but the very structure of subjectivity, social relations and the social imaginary that support it. It is the syntax of social relations, as well as their symbolic representation, that is in upheaval. The customary standard-bearers of Euro-centric phallocentrism no longer hold in a civil society that is, among others, sexed female *and* male, multi-cultural and not inevitably Christian. More than ever, the question of social transformation begs that of representation: what can the male, white, Christian monotheistic symbolic do for them? The challenges, as well as the anxieties, evoked by the question of emerging subjects-in-process mark patterns of becoming that require new forms of expression and representation, that is to say socially mediated forms which need to be assessed critically. Feminist theory is a very relevant and useful navigational tool in these stormy times of locally enacted, global phenomena, i.e. 'G-local' changes.[1]

Whether in relation to media cases such as that of Princess Diana, or of social phenomena such as poverty and marginalization, one often hears the term 'the feminization' of postmodern and post-industrial cultures. A highly problematic term, if ever there was one; it is symptomatic, in so far as it expresses the crisis of masculinity and of male domination, but it also refers to a normative level of 'soft values', such as flexibility, emotionality, concern or care. These 'soft' qualities clash against but are not incompatible with the rather rigid protocols which still govern the public sphere and reflect not only its male-dominated structure, but also the masculine-saturated imaginary that supports it. That these 'transformations of intimacy' (Giddens 1994) can be expressed in terms of 'feminization', though their relationship to real-life women and their experiences is far from direct, or transparent, is an endless source of wonder for me. I would therefore prefer to translate this allegedly 'feminized' process into the need to develop socially more flexible, multi-layered approaches to access and participation in contemporary technological culture. At both the micro- and the macro-levels of the constitution of subjectivity, we need more complexities both in terms of genders and across ethnicities, class and age. This is the social agenda that needs to be addressed. The inflationary discourse of the 'feminine' has never proved particularly helpful for women and 'others', unless it is supported by a healthy dose of feminist consciousness.

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

In this chapter I will continue building my cartography by focusing on issues of embodiment and immanence, reading especially Irigaray with Deleuze so as to compose my own brand of enfleshed materialism.

Materialism: embodiment and immanence

The body strikes back

If I were to think in figurations and locate the issues of embodiment in my cartography, so as to stress some of the paradoxes of political sensibilities of this end of millennium in Europe, I would pick two contradictory ones: the public's schizoid reaction to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, and the nameless bodies of thousands of asylum seekers in the European Union today.

Alternatively labelled – depending on one's politics – as 'a phenomenon of mass hysteria', or as 'the floral revolution' – analogous to the Eastern Europeans' 'velvet revolution' – the events surrounding the death of Princess Diana have already entered the realm of political mythology. They were also one of the biggest ever media events focused on a single individual. What is most extraordinary about the com/passionate reaction of the British public is the fact that it consisted of an overwhelming majority of young women, gays and people of colour. The excluded or marginal social subjects, those whom Thatcherism had forgotten or swept aside, bounced back in to the political and media arena with a vengeance. It was the return of the repressed, not with a bang but a whimper. It formed a suitable complement to the landslide that had brought 'New Labour' to power in the UK a few months before and to a renewal of respect for emotions, affectivity and the role they can and should play in public and political life. It was also a powerful expression of the continuing potency of the white Goddess as an object of collective worship (Davies and Smith 1999). That it was subsequently denied and repressed as a ritual of collective bonding and outpouring of emotions merely confirms the symptomatic value of the event. One of the things I find relevant about Princess Diana is the fact that she was a woman in full transformation. In other words, she was more interesting for what she was becoming than for what she actually was. I think this dynamic and transformative dimension is crucial to understanding Diana's charisma. As Julie Burchill put it: 'She was never a plaything: she was always a work in progress' (Burchill 1998: 44). This was not lacking in opportunism, as Rushdie suggested, in a less charitable vein: 'Diana was not given to using words like "semiotics", but she was a capable semiotician of herself. With increasing confidence, she gave us the signs by which we might know her as she wished to be known' (Rushdie 1997: 68).

By way of counterpoint, and in order not to confine the cartography of the body within the parameters of the dominant cultural code, I want to turn to another significant case. The second image therefore is that of endless and nameless women, men and child refugees, or asylum-seekers, who have been uprooted from their homes and countries in the many micro-wars

that are festering across the globe, including in Europe, at the dawn of the third millennium. The century-old virus of nationalism combines, in contemporary Europe, with the destabilizing effects created by the post-communist world order, as well as the globalization process. The end result is an influx of refugees and a rise in violence, exclusion, racism and human misery that has no equivalent in post-war Europe. These two examples represent for me two sides of the same coin, which is the saturation of our social space by media images and representations.

This results in positioning embodied subjects, and especially the female ones, at the intersection of some formidable locations of power: visibility and media representations produced a consumeristic approach to images in a dissonant or internally differentiated manner. Female embodied subjects in process today include interchangeably the highly groomed body of Princess Diana (like Marilyn Monroe before her) *and* the highly disposable bodies of women, men and children in war-torn lands.

At both the macro and the micro levels the body is caught in a network of power effects mostly induced by technology. This is the driving force of the globalization system and the trans-national economy which engender continuous constitutive contradictions at the 'g-local' level. Manuel Castells (1996), in his seminal work on network societies, argues that technology is absolutely crucial to the changes that have structured the global societies. Post-industrial societies are operating under the acceleration of digitally-driven 'new' cyber-economies. Whether we take bio-technologies, or the new information and communication technologies, the evidence is overwhelming. Capital flow, undeterred by topological or territorial constraints, has achieved a double goal. It has simultaneously 'dematerialized' social reality and hardened it. Suffice it to think of media events such as Princess Diana's funeral, or the Serbs' ethnic cleansing of Kosovo – which are experienced in the relative quiet of one's living room via the television set – as virtual happenings. The 'virtual' reality of the migrants, asylum-seekers or refugees is not high tech, but rather comes close to an over-exposed kind of anonymity, or social invisibility. The virtual reality of cyberspace is a highly contested social space, or rather a set of social relations mediated by technological flow of information.

Consequently, cyberspace and the 'cyborg' subjectivity it offers are no longer the stuff of which science fiction is made. On the contrary, the blurring of the boundaries between humans and machines is socially enacted at all levels: from medicine, to telecommunication, finance and modern warfare, cyber-relations define our social framework. What I want to emphasize, however, is that the cyborg as an embodied and socially embedded human subject that is structurally inter-connected to technological elements or *apparati*, is not a unitary subject position. The cyborg is rather a multi-layered, complex and internally differentiated subject. Cyborgs today would include

for me as much the under-paid, exploited labour of women and children on off-shore production plants, as the sleek and highly trained physiques of jet-fighter war-pilots, who interface with computer technologies at post-human levels of speed and simultaneity. As a political cartography, or figuration, the cyborg evokes simultaneously the triumphant charge of Schwarzenegger's *Terminator* and the frail bodies of those workers whose bodily juices – mostly sweat – fuel the technological revolution. One does not stir without the other. The cyborg is also, however, an empowering political myth of resistance to what Haraway calls 'the informatics of domination', about which more in chapter 5.

On a more philosophical level, in relation to the embodied subject, the new technologies make for prosthetic extensions of our bodily functions: answering machines, pagers and portable phones multiply our aural and memory capacities; microwave ovens and freezers offer timeless food-supply; sex can be performed over telephone or modem lines in the fast-growing area of 'teledildonics'; electric tooth-brushes and frozen embryos enlarge other bodily functions; video and camcorders, Internet networks and a plethora of simulated images open up a field that challenges the Platonic notion of 'representation' that has been sedimented by centuries of practice. Media images are the never dead, forever circulating reflections of a haunted postmodern vacuum. The technologies have affected the social space of postmodernity by bringing about a dislocation of the space–time continuum. Technologies freeze time in a discontinuous set of variations determined by speed and simultaneity. They thus induce a dislocation of the subject, allowing not only for deferred or virtual social and personal relations, but also for a pervasive social imaginary of ubiquity and timelessness. Hyper-mobility and virtual communities do not fail to make a visible impact on the social fabric – including labour relations – as well as on the culture and the social imaginary.

In such a context it is inevitable that the body of the 'others' will strike back. On an everyday sociological level, the body is striking back with a vengeance. An estimated two million American women have silicon breast implants – most of which leak, bounce off during bumpy airplane flights or cause undesirable side-effects. Millions of women throughout the advanced world are on Prozac or other mood-enhancing drugs. The hidden epidemic of anorexia–bulimia continues to strike a third of females in the opulent world – as Princess Diana so clearly manifested. Killer-diseases today don't include only the great exterminators, like cancer and AIDS, but also the return of traditional diseases which we thought we had conquered, like malaria and TB. Our immune system has adjusted to the antibiotics and we are vulnerable again (Griggers 1997). There is no question that what we still go on calling – somewhat nostalgically – 'our bodies, ourselves' are abstract technological