

I

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 *Woman* 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 knowledge is an interactive process that brings out aspects of our existence, especially our own implication with power, that we had not noticed before. In Deleuzian language, it 'de-territorializes' us: it estranges us from the familiar, the intimate, the known, and casts an external light upon it; in Foucault's language, it is micro-politics, and it starts with the embodied self. Feminists, however, knew this well before either 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 embedded 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 position 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 categories 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 subjectivities of positive and self-defined others. It all depends on one's locations or situated perspectives. Far from seeing this as a form of relativism, I see it as an embedded and embodied form of enfolded 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), Avtar 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 between cultures to differences *within* the same culture. In other words, one of the features of our present historical condition is the shifting grounds on which periphery and centre confront each other, with a new level of complexity which defies dualistic or oppositional thinking.

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 metaphorical 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

constructs fully immersed in the advanced psycho-pharmacology chemical industry, bio-science and the electronic media. What is equally clear for me is that we need to be vigilant. The techno-hype is over and we need to assess more lucidly the price that we are paying for being so 'high tech'. We got our prosthetic promises of perfectibility – now, let's hand over our pound of flesh, shall we?

Jackie Stacey points out the paradoxes as well as the strengths of contemporary 'body'-culture in her study of cancer. Discourses and social practices around cancer share with other aspects of today's culture both a fear of and fascination with the monstrous, the hybrid, the abject or mutant body. The Gothic parallel between the proliferation of cancerous cells and the centuries-old fear of monstrous births is imaginatively powerful, as well as intellectually stimulating. Cancer is a death-directed proliferation of cells, almost a cruel parody of reproduction. Secondly, as a social phenomenon, cancer engenders a number of significant practices of power. Stacey argues that medical practices of disciplining the body have been applied in a perverted variation on Foucault's theme of 'bio-power'. They have shifted the emphasis to a form of hyper-individualism which places the responsibility for one's well-being squarely into one's own hands. Illness today is related to 'self-management'. This marks the end of the seventies' linguistic paradigm of 'illness as metaphor', which politicized one's lived experience and socialized the sense of both responsibility for and grief about illness. Nowadays, illness is interiorized and socially controlled to the extreme. This paradox of social normativity and of hyper-individualism is linked to the privatization of health and the dismantling of the welfare state in post-industrial societies. This form of micro-management of one's health results in the social currency of medical prevention, which in turn link illness to social practices such as lifestyle, diet, fitness, etc. The 'body' thus emerges as a target for managerial practices of self-health which in turn requires of the social and cultural critic new skills in 'body-literacy' that go beyond what social theory can grant us.

The immediate social consequences of this are, according to Stacey, a decline of public health standards and a free hand for private financial and insurance companies, that is, a return to liberal individualism in the most exploitative sense of the term. In this regard, and in juxtaposition to Stacey's account of her successful recovery from cancer in the UK, I would situate the tragic and premature cancer-related death of Kathy Acker in the USA. Unable to afford private health insurance, Acker succumbed to cancer after having tried a number of cheaper, 'alternative' and highly ineffective therapies. This suggests to me that the health management of the self in post-industrial 'liberalized' societies on the one hand is progressive in that it rests on contemporary biological and bio-molecular redefinitions of the embodied subject.

On the other hand, it is quite regressive in the social implementations and repercussions in so far as it makes for brutal exercises in power and exclusion. These tend to perpetuate some of the more classical forms of discrimination along variables such as class, race, age and gender. As I pointed out at the start, the simultaneous appearance in the social sphere of well-cared-for, expensive bodies like Princess Diana's and the uncared-for bodies of multiple asylum-seekers are two faces of the same coin. They reinstate the body at the centre of contemporary concerns, but they do so in a manner that also re-inscribes them in some of the most persistent power-relations and structural exclusions.

Bodily materiality

The notion of the embodied or enfolded subject is central to my understanding of the kind of philosophical materialism which I support. Historically I see it as one of the most fruitful aspects of Continental philosophy, namely the extent to which it highlights the bodily structure of subjectivity and consequently also issues of sexuality and sexual difference. This tradition offers complex models of analysis for interrelations between the self and society, the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the subject. Reactivated by the social movements of the late sixties and seventies, this tradition of embodied materialism lays the grounds for a radical critique of power and for the dissolution of the humanist subject.

The impact of psychoanalysis has been significant here, and it has resulted in a radical deconstruction of the subject by splitting subjectivity from the supervision of rationality. As a result, the subject is no longer identified with consciousness: 'desidero ergo sum' must replace the old 'cogito'. In other words, the activity of thinking is enlarged to encompass a number of faculties of which affectivity, desire and the imagination are prime movers. Deleuze and Irigaray are especially committed to thinking through the radical immanence of the subject after the decline of metaphysics and of its phallogocentric premises. Equally central to Deleuze's philosophical project, however, is the joyful affirmation of positive and multiple differences, of loving irreverence towards the stately institution of philosophy and the creative empowerment of new ideas and forms of thought.

Foucault, Deleuze and Irigaray emphasize the crucial importance of sexuality – of the subject's 'libidinal economy' – to an understanding of contemporary subjectivity. What matters to me are the implications of this notion for political practice. Politics in this framework has as much to do with the constitution and organization of affectivity, memory and desire as it has with consciousness and resistance. I will return throughout this book to the importance of the embodied self, sexuality, memory and the imagination to the making of political subjectivity. The embodiedness of the subject is a

form of bodily materiality, not of the natural, biological kind. I take the body as the complex interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces: it is not an essence, let alone a biological substance, but a play of forces, a surface of intensities, pure simulacra without originals. This 'intensive' redefinition of the body situates it within a complex interplay of social and affective forces. This is also a clear move away from the psychoanalytic idea of the body as a map of semiotic inscriptions and culturally enforced codes. I see it instead as a transformer and a relay point for the flow of energies: a surface of intensities.

The body has also come back with a vengeance in social practices and discourses as well as in science and bio-technology, in contemporary evolutionary theory, under the impact of information technologies. How to combine all these insights into one coherent theory of embodiment is beyond the means of our historicity. The body remains a bundle of contradictions: it is a zoological entity, a genetic data-bank, while it also remains a bio-social entity, that is to say a slab of codified, personalized memories. As such it is part animal, part machine but the dualistic opposition of the two, which our culture has adopted since the eighteenth century as the dominant model, is inadequate today. Contemporary science and technology in fact have reached right into the most intimate layers of the living organism and the structures of the self, dissolving boundaries that had been established by centuries of humanistic thinking. This means that we can now think of the body as an entity that inhabits different time-zones simultaneously, and is animated by different speeds and a variety of internal and external clocks which do not necessarily coincide. Hence the renewed importance of the issue of temporality, or of bodies-in-time. More on this in chapters 3 and 5.

The embodied subject is thus a process of intersecting forces (affects) and spatio-temporal variables (connections). I take the concept of the body as referring to the multifunctional and complex structure of subjectivity. This is the specifically human capacity for simultaneously incorporating and transcending the very variables – class, race, sex, nationality, culture, etc. – which structure it. This in turn affects the notion of the social imaginary. The process of becoming-subject requires sets of cultural mediation; the subject has to deal with material and semiotic conditions, that is to say institutional sets of rules and regulations as well as the forms of cultural representation that sustain them. Power is negative (*potestas*) in that it prohibits and constrains. It is also positive (*potentia*) in that it empowers and enables. The constant negotiation between the two poles of power can also be formulated in political terms in the notion of subjectivity as power and desire. This view posits the subject as a term in a process, which is co-extensive with both power and the resistance to it. Narrativity is a crucial binding force here, but I interpret it as a collective, politically-invested process of sharing in and contributing to the making of myths, operational fictions, significant

figurations of the kind of subjects we are in the process of becoming. This notion of narrativity cannot be adequately contained within the semiological paradigm but needs to be embedded and embodied in a form of neo-materialism.

In this perspective, 'subjectivity' names the process that consists in stringing the reactive (*potestas*) and the active instances of power (*potentia*) together, under the fictional unity of a grammatical 'I'. The subject is a process, made of constant shifts and negotiations between different levels of power and desire, that is to say wilful choice and unconscious drives. Whatever semblance of unity there may be, is no God-given essence, but rather the fictional choreography of many levels into one socially operational self. It implies that what sustains the entire process of becoming-subject is the will to know, the desire to say, the desire to speak; it is a founding, primary, vital, necessary and therefore original desire to become.

Body materiality and sexual difference

Sexual difference theory, far from being a reactive or critical kind of thought, is also an affirmative one in that it expresses the feminist political passion for both social change and in-depth transformations of the subject. In my vision, feminists posit themselves as female subjects, that is to say not as disembodied entities but rather as corporeal and consequently sexed beings. The female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting any universal, neutral and consequently gender-free understanding of human embodiment. The feminism of sexual difference should be read as emphasizing the political importance of desire as opposed to the will, and of its role in the constitution of the subject. Not just libidinal desire, but rather ontological desire, the desire to be, the tendency of the subject to be, the predisposition of the subject towards being. More on this in chapter 4.

The subject of feminism is thus sexed; he or she is motivated by the political consciousness of inequalities and is committed to asserting diversity and difference as a positive and alternative value. The feminist subject of knowledge is an intensive, multiple subject, functioning in a net of interconnections. I would add that it is rhizomatic (that is to say non-unitary, non-linear, web-like), embodied and therefore perfectly artificial; as an artifact it is machine-like, complex, endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness in the impersonal mode. It is abstract and perfectly, operationally, real, and one of the main fields of operation is sexual difference. The 'feminine' for Irigaray is neither one essentialized entity, nor an immediately accessible one: it is rather a virtual reality, in the sense that it is the effect of a project, a political and conceptual project of transcending the

traditional ('Molar') subject-position of Woman as Other of the Same, so as to express the other of the Other. This transcendence, however, occurs through the flesh, in embodied locations and not in a flight away from them.

The material/maternal roots of subjectivity

Central to sexual difference theory is the insight that the root of the term materialism is *mater*. This implies that the material as the primary and constitutive site of *origin* of the subject, is also the instance that expresses the specificity of the female subject, and as such it needs to be thought out systematically. In the perspective of radical feminist bodily materialism, it is the primary matter and the foundation stone, whose silent presence installs the master in his monologic phallogocentric mode. The feminism of sexual difference argues that women have borne both materially and symbolically the costs of the masculine privilege of autonomous self-definition: they have been physically and symbolically dispossessed of a place from whence to speak. This led to Irigaray's assertion (1974) that sexual difference is that last utopia of our culture, that is to say *u-topos*, the nowhere, or that which so far has had no place for expression. Irigaray has a different emphasis: she reminds us that the material/maternal is the instance that expresses the specificity of female sexuality (Whitford 1991), the sense of a female humanity, and also of her divinity.

Irigaray also significantly points out, however, that the term 'utopia' also contains a temporal dimension, i.e. it means 'not yet', that which has not yet come to pass. This 'not yet' is for Irigaray the virtual feminine, the 'other of the Other', the collectively empowered, self-defined feminist subject. This is embedded in the collective feminist practice which aims at making a difference, that is to say at turning difference into the positive, empowering affirmation of alternative subject-positions for and by female feminist women. The quest for an alternative female genealogy is crucial to this project (Irigaray 1987, 1989), by immersion into the maternal imaginary. For Irigaray this takes the form of the exploration of images that represent the female experience of proximity to the mother's body. This opening out of the feminine towards religious or mystical experiences is central to Irigaray's notion of the 'sensible transcendental', to which I will return.

There is no sentimentality involved in this reappraisal of the maternal/material feminine. Irigaray acknowledges that motherhood is also the site of women's capture into the specular logic of the Same, which makes her subservient to the Masculine. Maternity, however, is also a resource for women to explore carnal modes and perception, of empathy and interconnectedness that go beyond the economy of phallogocentrism. I see this 'other' maternal feminine in Irigaray as linked to the political project of providing symbolic representation for the female feminist subject as a virtual subject-position

that needs to be created and activated. Tamsin Lorraine (1999) quite rightly sees it as the expression of Irigaray's commitment to rethinking the 'corporeal' as well as the 'conceptual' logics of the subject and to harmonize them within an immanent subject of 'becoming-woman' (1999: 222): 'For Irigaray the intrauterine space is an anoedipal space, a space of plenitude rather than lack, singularity rather than universality, and the interactive attunement of singularities rather than the grid of social positioning that pertains to all. The umbilical cord represents desire for this anoedipal space.' As Rouch had suggested (1987), the material/maternal feminine can provide alternative figurations of intersubjectivity, for instance through the complex symbiotic relationship between mother and child. The placenta as well as the umbilical cord can function as an alternative way of figuring interconnectedness. The latter has not escaped the attention of science-fiction writers and filmmakers who have projected the foetus into outer space, superimposing it on the image of the human attached to the spaceship as he floats in the immensity. Thus even the most traditional image, that of mother and child, can be repossessed by strategic repetitions or revisitations, for Irigaray, and by becoming de-stratified and de-territorialized, for Deleuze. The matrix, never static at any point in history, is now set in nomadic motion both in mainstream culture and in the many oppositional counter-cultures of today. I shall return to this in chapters 4 and 5.

Poststructuralist theories of sexual difference become clearer if contrasted to other brands of feminist philosophy. For instance, in the high Hegelian mode of the previous generation of feminist theory, for Beauvoir, *Woman* as the antithesis of the system carries a *yet unrepresented* value, which is misrepresented by male-dominated culture. Deconstructing the dialectical mode of representing gender through the binary Masculine/Feminine couple amounts to a critique of the false universalism of the masculine subject. In poststructuralism, in fact, the subject-position is seen as coinciding with consciousness, universality, masculine agency and entitlement. By dialectical opposition, *Woman* as the Other of this subject is deprived of all these attributes. She is thus reduced to unrepresentability within the male symbolic system, be it by lack, by excess or by perennial displacement of her subject-positions. Even feminine sexuality is defined by Irigaray (1997) as not-one, that is to say multiple and complex and ex-centric to phallic generality. This theoretical premise leads to a political conclusion: through the strategy of mimetic repossession of the feminine by feminist women, a political process is set up that aims at bringing the 'other of the Other' into representation. This is what I have called the 'virtual feminine' of sexual difference feminism. In poststructuralist or sexual-difference feminism, materialism is linked both to embodiment and to sexual difference, and the link is made by the political will and determination to find a better, a more adequate, representation of female corporeal reality, not as given but as

virtual, that is as a process and a project. In this line of feminist thought, great care is taken to disengage the question of the embodied subject from the hold of both orthodox Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxism – the two fundamental intellectual bureaucracies of the last century (as Deleuze so rightly calls them). A vision of materialism as embodied materiality is proposed instead. In so doing, Irigaray intersects with the Deleuzian project, especially his concept of the an-organic body, or body without organs.

As Chanter put it, Irigaray ‘brings the body back into play, not as the rock of feminism, but as a mobile set of differences’ (Chanter 1995: 46). The body is then an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces; it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed; it is a cultural construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous and unconscious nature. The body which, for Beauvoir, was one’s primary ‘situation’, in reality is now seen as a situated self, as an embodied positioning of the self. This renewed sense of complexity aims to stimulate anew a revision and redefinition of contemporary subjectivity. This vision of the body contains sexuality as a process and as a constitutive element.

I want to stress the importance of sexuality in feminist thought, where it is perceived critically as the site of power, struggles and contradictions. But it is re-visited creatively precisely because of its crucial importance as a site of constitution of the subject. In other words, the sexed female feminist is both the subject around which feminists have gathered in their recognition of a general condition, and it is also the concept that needs to be analysed critically and eventually deconstructed.

This means that the quest for a point of exit from phallogocentric definitions of *Woman* requires a strategy of working through the images and representations that the (masculine) knowing subject has created of *Woman* as *Other*: the strategy of ‘mimesis’. Irigaray mimes the undifferentiated universalist bias of the subject. She consequently recognizes the positions to which ‘the feminine’ has been assigned by patriarchal thought – the eternal ‘Other (of the Same)’ – but only in order to undo it. She refuses to separate the symbolic, discursive dimension from the empirical, material or historical one and thus does not dissociate the debate about the ‘feminine’ from the presence of real-life women. Her mimetic relationship to the subject, far from being biologically deterministic, exposes and critiques the essentialism of phallogocentric discourse. Irigaray’s politics assumes that the subversion of identity acquires sex-specific connotations and that consequently it requires sex-specific strategies. In my adaptation of Irigaray’s textual and political strategy of ‘mimesis’, I have argued that it is an affirmative form of deconstruction. That means that it amounts to a collective repossession of the images and representations of *Woman* as they have been coded in language, culture, science, knowledge and discourse and consequently internalized in

the heart, mind, body and lived experience of women. Mimetic repetition of this imaginary and material institution of femininity is the active subversion of established modes of phallogocentric representation and expression of women's experience which tend to reduce it to unrepresentability. The mimetic reassertion of sexual difference challenges the century-old identifications of the thinking subject with the universal and of both of them with the masculine. The feminism of sexual difference challenges such encompassing generalizations and posits as radically other a female, sexed, thinking subject, who stands in an asymmetrical relationship to the masculine. Repetition engenders difference, for if there is no symmetry between the sexes, it follows that the feminine as experienced and expressed by women is as yet unrepresented, having been colonized by the male imaginary. Women must therefore speak the feminine, they must think it and represent it in their own terms; read with Deleuze, this is an active process of becoming. Under the heading of the 'double syntax', Irigaray defends this irreducible and irreversible difference and proposes it as the condition of possibility for an alternative vision of women's subjectivity and sexuality. What then becomes central is the political and conceptual task of creating, legitimating and representing a multi-centred, internally differentiated female feminist subjectivity, without falling into relativism or fragmentation. The politics of location come into play here: if it is the case that the material/maternal site is primary and constitutive of the subject, it can also be turned in to a location of resistance.

Here the distinction between will and desire becomes fundamental: because the implications of the phallogocentric institutionalization of sexuality are written on or in our bodies, they are complex in that they are enfolded. Feminists cannot hope therefore merely to cast off their sexed identity like an old garment. Discursive practices, imaginary identifications or ideological beliefs are tattooed on bodies and thus are constitutive of embodied subjectivities. Thus, women who yearn for change cannot shed their old skins like snakes. This kind of in-depth change requires instead great care and attention. It also needs to be timed carefully in order to become sustainable, that is to say in order to avoid lethal shortcuts through the complexities of one's embodied self. In this respect, the analysis of *Woman* in opposition to but also in complicity with real-life women activates the distinction that separates institution or representation (*Woman*) from experience (women). This distinction opens up a space for a feminist repossession or redefinition of subjectivity. This amounts to no less than a change of civilization, of genealogy, of a sense of history. Feminist counter-genealogies are the inroads to a new symbolic system by women. As Irigaray put it: it is not a matter of changing specific items within a horizon already defined as 'our common humanity', but rather of changing the horizon itself. It is a matter of understanding that our interpretation of 'identity' is theoretically and practically incorrect (Irigaray 1991: 167).

This is the 'virtual feminine' which I set in opposition to *Woman* as Other-than or different-from, that is to say, specularly connected to the Same as its devalued Other. Sexual difference as a political practice is constructed in a non-Hegelian framework whereby identity is not postulated in dialectical opposition to a necessarily devalorized other. There is no such negation: it rather rests upon the working through of many differences between, among and within women. I see 'differences among women' as being constitutive of the category of sexual difference and not exterior or antithetical to it (Frye 1996).

The sexual politics of this project are clear, albeit complex. For Irigaray it is about how to identify and enact points of exit from the universal mode defined by man, towards a radical version of heterosexuality, that is to say the full recognition of the specificities of each sexed subject position (Irigaray 1990, 1993). More specifically, she wonders how to elaborate a site, that is to say a space and a time, for the irreducibility of sexual difference to express itself, so that the masculine and feminine libidinal economies may co-exist in the positive expression of their respective differences. This positivity is both horizontal/terrestrial and vertical/celestial and it entails the (re)thinking through of gender-specific relations to space, time and the interval between the sexes, so as to avoid polarizing oppositions. Issues of 'other differences', notably religion, nationality, language and ethnicity are crucial to this project and integral to the task of evolving towards the recognition of the positivity of difference. Figurations are essential to this political project.

This radically heterosexual project, however, is not heterosexist, nor does it imply the dismissal of homosexual love. E. Grosz for instance refers to Irigaray's advocacy of a 'tactical homosexuality modeled on the corporeal relations of the pre-oedipal daughter to the mother' (Grosz 1994b: 338). This mother-daughter bond aims at exploring and reclaiming bodily pleasures and contacts that have been eradicated from their memory. It thus becomes a tool for undoing the Oedipal plot and allows them to experiment with different approaches to their morphology. Grosz concludes: 'It provides a model of homosexuality not as a substitute for heterosexuality but as its disavowed prerequisite. It makes explicit the intolerable threat of women's desire within a culture founded on its denial' (Grosz 1994b: 338). Although this can be empowering for female homosexual identity, I think it important to stress that Irigaray remains a heterosexual thinker. This constitutes the core of Wittig's and Butler's critique of Irigaray, to which I will return later.

Irigaray is especially keen to prevent the assimilation of female homosexuality to a phallic mode of dialectical opposition to the other and thus of masculine identification. Nor is she dupe to the illusion that a mere choice of another woman as object of desire is enough to allow a woman to escape from the phallic clutches. In either case (homo or hetero), Irigaray is not prescriptive – she just emphasizes the need for a space of experimentation

by women of their desires and specific sexual morphology. Men are called upon to do the same: to reclaim a non-phallic sexuality and re-signify their desires. Sexual difference cuts both ways. The real difference – which produces the ethical passion of ‘wonder’ (Irigaray 1984) – is the escape from sexual sameness, i.e., identification with male phallicity.

I want to defend sexual difference as a theory and a political practice that rests upon and exploits a number of constitutive contradictions, the answer to which can be formal in a logical sense (Frye 1996), but also practical in the sense of pointing to a solution in praxis, in ‘doing’. In my reading, Irigaray’s version of materialism deliberately and self-consciously addresses a number of paradoxes that are constitutive of feminist theory at the turn of the century. Sexual difference theory simultaneously produces and destabilizes the category ‘woman’. It binds together both the notions of embodiment and of sexual difference and the link between the two is made by the political will and determination to find a better, a more adequate, representation of embodied female subjectivity. In this line of thought, great care is taken to disengage the question of the embodied subject from the hold of naturalistic assumptions and to emphasize instead the social and discursive formation of embodied materiality.

Feminist affirmation of sexual difference goes hand in hand with the rejection not only of essentialist identities, but also of the dialectics of negation as the logic of constitution of the subject. Sexual difference thus brings into representation the play of multiple differences that structure the subject: these are neither harmonious nor homogeneous, but rather internally differentiated. Therefore sexual differences force us to think the simultaneity of potentially contradictory social, discursive and symbolic effects. These multiple ‘differences within’ can and must be analysed in terms of power-relations; they constitute overlapping variables that cut across any monolithic understanding of the subject: class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, lifestyle, sexual preferences. In other words, one ‘speaks as’ a woman in order to be politically empowered to act as one, according to the terms of the paradox outlined above. It is a way of acknowledging an identity which can then be put to the task of its own emancipation. The political gesture consists firstly in situating oneself at the crest of the contradictions that are constitutive of the social and symbolic position of women, and secondly in activating them towards the destabilization of the socio-symbolic system and more especially of the asymmetrical power-relations that sustain it. Because of this, I see it as perfectly suitable to a nomadic vision of subjectivity.

The transatlantic disconnection

Considering the wealth, political charge and sophistication of sexual difference theory, I do wonder why its reception has been so mixed. Sexual

difference is a very pragmatic political philosophy of the subject, which takes sexuality as a major point of reference. In the light of this commitment to empowering women, it seems very puzzling to me that so many feminists have rejected the emphasis on the feminine as alternatively too obvious, too deterministic or too irrelevant. It makes me think that 'femino-phobia' is alive and well, even among feminists. By the late 1990s, in academic and especially philosophical circles, the theory was marginal at best, half-forgotten and in general assessed negatively. As Tina Chanter (1995) brilliantly argues, the ideas of Irigaray and of sexual difference have received quite a superficial reception in the USA; opposition to it generally coalesced around the concept of 'gender', which was constructed in direct opposition to Continental theories of sexual difference. I find that the charges made against sexual difference (Felski 1997) are very similar to the general critiques that are made of poststructuralism across the big transatlantic divide. They rest on three crucial points: essentialism (sexual difference is allegedly a-historical and deterministic and thus leaves no room for social change); universalism (it makes over-general claims and disregards cultural diversity) and heterosexism (it plays down the creative subversive force of lesbian and homosexual desire). I do think it important to stop and ponder about the nature of the opposition to sexual difference instead of just putting it down to 'misreadings' and basic lack of familiarity with Continental philosophy.

Some contextual considerations come immediately to mind. The North American reception of sexual difference in philosophy – as opposed to literary and cultural theories – was often reductive and often ill informed. Tina Chanter makes this point:

The likes of Hegel, Heidegger, and Derrida were regarded at best, with mild suspicion, at worst as charlatans who had little to say about the real world – little more than a series of self-indulgent esoteric musings. The result was that Kristeva and Irigaray were judged in terms of the liberal discourse of equal rights and the ideal of sameness that, however inexplicit, tended to accompany it. Not surprisingly, French feminists were found wanting by these standards. (Chanter 1995: 35)

Moreover, the historical context for the philosophical reception of these theories in the USA was far from ideal. Whereas the 1980s in Europe was a period of expansion of social democracy that saw the collapse of the Berlin Wall, in the USA it was the era of Reagan and Star Wars: a period of generalized backlash which was hardly favourable to critical thought. While on the Continent feminism was experimenting with writing, eroticism, and the exploration of ways and means of making difference as effective tools for social policy and legislation, in the USA the 1980s was the era of the feminist 'sex-wars'. Documented by scholars like Hester Eisenstein (1983), Carol Vance (1984) and Ann Snitow (1983), the American feminist discussion

on sexuality took a very negative turn. Monopolized by the quarrel over pornography and prostitution, sexuality came to be identified with issues of violence and domination, that is to say negatively. This was the case with campaigners like Andrea Dworkin, as well as in the polemical and often parodic reappraisal of sexual transgression by the lesbian sado-masochists and eloquently expressed by Pat Califia (1988) and other sexual radicals. The mainstream 'liberal feminist' organizations like NOW (National Organization of Women) increasingly skirted the issue, focusing instead on the socio-political and economic agenda. Exit sex.

In her analysis of the backlash feminism, significantly called 'American Gothic', Margaret Walters (1997) singles out the repressive moralism and the anti-sexuality campaign initiated by MacKinnon and Dworkin (1976) as a specific form of internal backlash and a threat against feminism. In Walters' estimate, American feminism through the nineties made sexuality the sole and central source of women's oppression. This results in under-playing the more structural elements of patriarchal power; it also denigrates women's capacity for sexual agency and self-determination.

This left all issues related to bodies, pleasures, eroticism and the specific ways of knowing of the human flesh hanging nowhere. Jane Gallop (1997), in one of the most remarkable cartographies of the era of the sex-wars, denounced the situation. She criticizes the extent of the sexophobic approach to the body which led some of the anti-pornography feminist campaigners to strike an alliance with the right-wing Moral Majority in order to ban pornography and criminalize prostitution. Gallop also points out that this wave of aggression could not fail to affect the women's movement from within. Gallop defends a position that I partly share, namely that in the USA in the 1990s, sexual harassment has replaced pornography as the key feminist issue. Both have produced what strikes me as a dogmatic and primitive type of feminist practice, which stigmatizes sexuality. I share the belief that this is yet another form of repressing women's desires.

The other significant point Gallop makes, though she pushes it to conclusions about sexuality in the classroom that I do not share entirely, is that the feminist pursuit of knowledge mobilizes the whole of the woman's self – body as well as mind. There is a fundamental aspiration towards non-dualistic thinking in feminist theory, a rejection of binaries on theoretical as well as political grounds. Feminist consciousness re-unites that which has been disconnected under patriarchy; knowledge and/as pleasure therefore become all one. 'I learnt that desire, even desire unacted upon, can make you feel very powerful. And the place where I learned desire – where it filled me with energy and drive – I call feminism' (Gallop 1997: 19).

In his analysis of Gallop's case of lesbian sexual harassment, Patton (2000) adopts a Deleuzian frame, which produces an interesting and positive assessment of the case. Arguing, with Spinoza and Deleuze, that the empowering

notion of sexuality which Gallop defends entails a positive experience of power, Patton concludes that desire, in such a collective encounter between teacher and students, coincides with a mutual increase in the capacity to act in the world: a kind of rise in the degree of one's *potentia*, or joyful affirmation of one's enjoyment of being of and in the world alongside others. Patton concludes with a very ethical statement:

Gallop's experience shows how the feeling of power obtained by contributing to the power of others may be indistinguishable from an intense experience of desire, and vice versa. If this is so, then it matters little whether we speak of desire or the feeling of power. What matters is the manner in which we act upon the actions of others, and the kinds of assemblage in which and through which we desire.

Unfortunately, this not being the best of all possible worlds, Gallop's joyful experimentation with desire, knowledge and power resulted in a law-suit against her. *Potestas* and its corollary of negative passions strike back. Gallop emphasizes that it is an aberration to target feminist knowledge practices and the sexual experimentation which they entail for sexual harassment law-suits. After all, such legal action was intended to stop abuses of power and disadvantage, not as an end to sexuality and pleasure. Sexual harassment cases are all the more violent when they take place among women, especially feminist women across the generational student-teacher divide.

I must admit that a European feminist reading Gallop's account of a sexual harassment law-suit by lesbian students against their bisexual professor does lead one to wonder if she has landed on a different planet. As a matter of fact, throughout the nineties sexuality in the USA lost ground in the political arena but it scored highly in the courts of law. Racialization was built into this script: witness the escalation of sexual harassment law-suits from Mike Tyson to O.J. Simpson, to culminate in the string of White House 'white trash' sex scandals up to the Monica Lewinsky case. Be this as it may, if I were to attempt a translation of this into the language of feminist theory, I would say that 'the body' in USA feminism cannot be positively associated with sexuality in either the critical or the public discourse. Sexuality, which is the fundamental paradigm in the critical discourses of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, simply has no place in American political discourse: it became side-lined, erased or strangled. Moreover, by virtue of the climate of political conservatism on the one hand, and on the other the increasing importance of legal litigation in American public and political life, the debate around sexuality was cast in the USA almost exclusively in terms of social rights. However crucial issues of right and entitlement may be to the discussions of sexuality, I think they are far from providing adequate cover for the complexities and the diversity of feminist discourses

and practices of sexuality. In such a context it is not surprising that Europe-based theories of sexuality, psychoanalysis and sexual difference, which proved so inspirational in literary theory, struck at best a marginal, 'radical chic' note in philosophical and social theory circles. What chance, then, did Irigaray have?

The state of gender theory did the rest. In mainstream American feminist discourse, the sex/gender dichotomy swung with a vengeance towards the pole of gender, embracing it under the joint cover of liberal individual 'rights' and social constructivist 'change'. Neither sex nor sexuality were high on the list. It was left to the gay, lesbian and queer campaigners to try to rewrite sexuality into the feminist agenda. In this framework, sexuality is almost always synonymous with transgression. For instance, T. de Lauretis (1994) returns to issues of psychoanalytic desire in order to provide a foundational theory for lesbian desire as something specific in its 'perverse' and non-procreative or non-maternalist logic. Judith Butler (1990) also makes an important intervention, pointing out that the distinction sex/gender is, in fact, untenable. If anything, argues Butler, it is the always already sexualized matter that constructs the possibility of this dichotomy in the first place. I will return to this point.

A proper, scholarly, comparative analysis of the transatlantic disconnection about sexuality in the eighties and nineties and of the ways in which it fuelled the opposition between 'gender' and 'sexual difference' would deserve more time and care than I can give it here.² In any case, at the dawn of the new millennium, it is accepted that gender has become too polyvalent as a concept to be universally really helpful (Hawkesworth 1997). This implies that the understanding of 'sexual difference' that emerges from American poststructuralist feminism, be it Butler, de Lauretis or Scott – and that which generates from the Continental tradition – are not merely polemically at odds with each other, but also conceptually different. The term 'sexual difference' in each of these traditions neither means the same, nor refers to similar theoretical assumptions. As Butler recently noted (1999), her own poststructuralist reflection grows from and feeds on the Anglo-American sociological and anthropological tradition of sex/gender. It thus differs considerably from the French accounts of sexual difference. This constitutive ambivalence makes for an interesting case of a location that appears as Eurocentric in the USA and as highly Americanized in Europe. Far from pleading for any purity in the matter, I think that these nomadic streaks in contemporary feminist theory are very positive and could be explored and exploited further. In order to do this, however, I think we need cartographies, that is to say embedded and embodied genealogical accounts of our own respective theoretical practices. We also need open and fair discussions. This could lay the grounds for a new set of transatlantic exchanges in the context of a culture that is becoming 'g-local' also within feminism.

The American reception of sexual difference is framed by reference to gender theories and more especially on the sex/gender paradigm best exemplified by Gayle Rubin's interpretation of Levi-Strauss's paradigm of the exchange of women and its role in the constitution of the patriarchal order. In this conceptual framework, 'gender' refers specifically to the heterosexist matrix of power which constructs personal identities, social relations and symbolic representations. As Butler put it: 'normative sexuality fortifies normative gender' (1999: xi), hence her politically-minded question of analysing how gender hierarchy supports compulsory heterosexuality. Accordingly, 'sex' becomes an effect of gender and therefore sexual difference is just a consequence of large power-relations that encompass all kinds of other variables. This framework differs considerably from classical social-constructivist definitions of gender. It is also noticeably antagonistic, however, to post-structuralist emphasis on the primacy of *sexuality* and therefore of sexual difference as a socio-symbolic institution that effects the subject-construction. Gayle Rubin's focus on the heterosexist matrix of power differs seriously from my understanding of sexuality and of its role in shaping identities. In the Continental tradition I claim as my legacy, the Anglo-American 'sex/gender' distinction is far less relevant than the complex, interactive and power-driven web of relations around the sexuality/sex nucleus.

In her important critique of the sex/gender distinction, Moira Gatens (1996) stresses the extent to which gender theory tacitly assumes a passive body on which special codes are imprinted. Thus, the social-psychology-inspired model of gender is diametrically opposed to the insights of psychoanalysis. The points of divergence concern firstly the structure of human embodiment: passive for gender theory, dynamic and interactive for post-structuralist theory. Secondly, the notion of sexuality and of its role in the constitution of subjectivity which is of great importance for poststructuralism, is not so for social-psychological gender theories. I think it is precisely the priority given to the sexual as the site of subject-formation that makes feminist thinkers like Irigaray, Grosz, Chanter, Gatens, myself and others state the constitutive and primary importance of sexual difference.

In my reading of poststructuralist philosophies of difference, from Foucault to Irigaray and Deleuze, the main emphasis falls on the material, sexualized structure of the subject. This sexual fibre is intrinsically and multiply connected to social and political relations; thus, it is anything but an individualistic entity. Sexuality as a social and symbolic, material and semiotic institution is singled out as the primary location of power, in a complex manner which encompasses both macro- and micro-relations. Sexual difference – the sexualized bipolarity, is merely a social implementation of the political economy of sexualized identities, which is another word for power in both its negative or repressive (*potestas*) and positive or empowering (*potentia*) meaning. Sex is the social and morphological assignation of

identity and suitable form of erotic agency to subjects that are socialized and sexualized in the polarized dualistic model of the special institutions of Masculinity/Femininity. Gender is a generic term to describe the kind of power-mechanisms involved in this complex interplay of forces. With Deleuze, I would say that gender dualism is the position of the Majority, who thus consolidate the interests of an Oedipalized political economy that structures our material and imaginary social framework. I will return to this.

The point here is that, far from marginalizing sexuality, in my conceptual framework it is a central point of reference which acts as the matrix for power-relations in the broad but also most intimate sense of the term. The theoretical genealogy that I claim runs from Levi-Strauss through to Lacan and beyond. In this line, sex/gender is not as relevant a distinction as sexuality/sex, and consequently also sexual difference as a distributor and organizer of social and symbolic differences. Again, the comparison with social-psychologically-inspired gender theories is important. For poststructuralist thought, sexuality is the constitutive socio-symbolic cast in which human subjectivity is thrown. It is dynamically interrelated to cultural codes and therefore co-extensive with questions of power, in both the reactive (negative) and affirmative (positive) sense. I do think that this conceptual dissymmetry is crucial to the transatlantic exchanges around the paradoxes of materialism. I would like to propose that instead of letting this important discussion sink into stale polemics, more attention should be paid to the respective differences between the sex and gender and the sexuality and sex paradigm. What is at stake is a hard-core theoretical difference, not just a matter of terminology. It is a divergence well worth exploring.

Gender materialism

The tradition of gender materialism refers back to Simone de Beauvoir, who made significant interventions to disengage materialism from the double burden of its opposition to idealism and its dependence on Marxist theories of historical materialism. Caught in the transatlantic disconnection, Beauvoir's work becomes framed in ways which are often contradicted by her own texts (Moi 1994). Beauvoir's work is also caught in the debate which, since the 1980s (Duchen 1986), has opposed the neo-materialism of Monique Wittig (1973, 1979a and b) and Christine Delphy (1975 and 1984) to the strategic essentialism of the sexual difference theorists Hélène Cixous (1975, 1977, 1986a and b, 1987) and, more importantly, Luce Irigaray (1974, 1977, 1980, 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1989, 1990). I shall explore this in more detail.

Wittig is one of the major spokeswomen of the French materialist school which launched the campaign of denigration of sexual difference (Fuss 1989). She was among the first to coin the term 'essentialism' to refer pejoratively to the kind of feminism that took into account the unconscious, sexual

difference and feminine writing, that is to say the whole repertoire of feminist poststructuralism. Paradoxically enough, her work as a creative writer, especially her novel *Le Corps lesbien* (Wittig 1973), contributed greatly to the radical redefinition of female sexuality and lesbian desire. She is, however, opposed to the emphasis that both Cixous and Irigaray place on what they carefully define as 'female homosexual libidinal economy', and the specificity of feminine morphology, sensibility, sexuality and creativity, especially writing that goes with it.

Wittig builds on the classic sex/gender distinction and turns it into a radical critique of heterosexism. She emphasizes the need to free female sexuality from its subjugation to the signifier *Woman*. In her view *Woman* as the privileged other of the patriarchal imaginary is an idealized construction of the same order as the Phallus: it is a man-made notion and as such is ideologically contaminated and untrustworthy. Wittig radicalizes de Beauvoir's point about the constructed nature of femininity. She proposes that we dismiss the signifier woman as epistemologically and politically inadequate, and suggests that we replace it with the category of 'lesbian'. The lesbian is not a woman because a lesbian has subtracted herself from identities based on the Phallus.

Wittig's position, while attractive in that it aims at empowering women, is problematic in that it universalizes the lesbian into a new model of normativity. This leaves no room for alternative definitions of lesbianism, such as, for instance, A. Rich's idea of the lesbian continuum (1985) and Irigaray's notion of a 'female homosexual libidinal economy' (1977). Moreover it certainly excludes a priori the possibility of freely chosen or optional heterosexuality. This option is seen as co-extensive with domination and it consequently leads to voluntary servitude, a position that is reminiscent of Andrea Dworkin (1976) and the most extreme anti-sexuality wing of USA feminism.

As Antoinette Fouque (1982) astutely observed, the opposition is paradoxical: on the one hand female sexuality as the foundational theory for a new vision of subjectivity (sexual difference) and on the other, a radical anti-foundationalism that results in the ultimate dismissal of the feminine (lesbian neo-materialism). I prefer to define these as two opposing strategies of deconstruction of traditional femininity: on the one hand, the strategy of extreme sexualization through embodied female subjectivity: Irigaray's 'transcendence via radical immanence', on the other hand the rejection of femininity as the heterosexual power-matrix in favour of a position 'beyond gender'. To these different positions there correspond different understandings of 'materialism': for Irigaray it has to do with *mater/matter* and the sexed body, hence her emphasis on morphology, but also verticality or transcendence; for Wittig it is a naive social constructivism which paradoxically works with an idealist position on language and social changes.

Both the gender materialism and the bodily materiality of sexual difference aim at empowering women to act as authoritative speaking subjects, but they do not go the same way about it. Irigaray works through affirmative deconstruction, Wittig through her conviction of the potentials of the plasticity of language. Contrary to Irigaray, who sees the subject-position as structurally masculine, Wittig believes that women can enter into the subject-position and repossess it and redefine it for their own purposes. Wittig therefore encourages women to use language to express their own meanings, without falling into the deconstructive complexities of Irigaray's 'écriture féminine' or quests for an alternative symbolic. In other words, she is vehemently anti-poststructuralist in rejecting two key ideas: the structure of the non-unitary or split subject and the constitutive non-transparency of language.

Wittig's work has proved inspirational for the lesbian and queer theories that have developed in the USA. Thus, Butler emphasizes the fact that for Wittig 'gender' is not a substantive reality, but rather an activity. Inspired by Rubin, she then proceeds to re-interpret Wittig's notion of 'gender' as a performative utterance that constructs categories such as 'sex', 'women', 'men', 'nature' for the specifically political purpose of reproducing compulsory heterosexuality. Gender is the process by which women are marked off as 'the female sex', men are conflated with the universal and both of them are subjugated to the institution, as defined by Foucault (1977a), and of compulsory heterosexuality, as defined by Rich (1985). In so far as the lesbian refuses this process, she is subversive because she problematizes the whole scheme of sexuality. The strategy supported by Wittig is, according to Butler, to allow other kinds of gendered identities to proliferate: the lesbian is the first step towards exploding the monolithic structures of gender.

All other differences notwithstanding, Butler retains from Wittig two crucial notions, which she opposes to the feminism of sexual difference. The first one is that gender is performative: it creates the very categories and sexed identities which it purports to explain. Having taken over from Wittig the idea of the co-extensivity of gender with the regulatory discourse of heterosexuality, Butler develops a hermeneutics of suspicion against the notion of 'gender' – and more especially towards the category of 'women' as the foundation of feminist politics. Butler emphasizes both the normativity and the limitations of the category 'women' which fails to be exhaustive simply because gender intersects with 'racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities' (1991: 3).

Consequently, Butler aims at elaborating a 'critical genealogy of the category woman' to contest and prevent the reification of female identity. The key question then becomes: 'what kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?' (1990: 32). Butler proposes a strategy of parodic repetition, that is, the politically motivated

exposure of the masquerade. Differently from Wittig, though in the same vein, – Butler proposes that we explode the category ‘women’ by letting many other alternative genders proliferate: not one, not two, but as many genders as there are individuals. Not just lesbian, the ex-woman will be trans-sexually dislocated in many possible directions: if biology is not destiny, if the body is construction, then any sex goes. Butler concludes in a more cautious tone, speaking in the conditional tense about the politics of the parody, and asking what feminist politics *would* look like if genders *were* allowed to proliferate so as to explode the classical binarism. She takes her distance from Wittig, as she does from Irigaray; for reasons of universalism, both universalize something: Wittig the lesbian, Irigaray the woman. What Butler longs for is a strategy by which she can leave behind the regulatory fictions of sexuality – this is her particular brand of political utopia. In the long run, she may be closer to Foucault than to any feminist thinker.

Recently Butler has re-adjusted her position and, with the privilege of hindsight, has shown much more sensitivity to the role that fantasies, personal histories and unconscious factors play in fastening an embodied subject on a certain kind of sexuality. She has stated (1999: xiv): ‘The performance of gender subversion can indicate nothing about sexuality or sexual practice. Gender can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorienting normative sexuality at all. Sometimes gender ambiguity can operate precisely to contain or deflect non-normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep normative sexuality intact.’ It would be indeed naive to believe that the mere rejection or destabilization of gender dualism is exclusively or necessarily a subversive position. I think that a great deal of contemporary conservative or neo-liberal discourse takes the form of a spurious celebration of ‘differences’ in the pluralistic mode. Often cross-referring to biological or genetic sciences, the praise of plural differences is neither a sufficient nor a necessary pre-condition for the subversion of identity predicated on the sovereignty of the One and the political economy of the Same.

A telling example of what I would define as a conservative rejection of gender dualism for the purpose of erotic pleasures is Mario Vargas Llosa’s diatribe against it (1997) in a chapter significantly called ‘The rebellion of the clitorises’. Varga Llosa makes an interesting – albeit contradictory – argument: on the one hand he deflates the over-emphasis that is usually placed on morphological differences between the sexes. Having a penis or a clitoris is thus reduced to mere biological accident, or statistical data. On the other hand, Vargas Llosa turns gender pluralism into a weapon to defend the uniqueness of the individual as a socio-political entity.

Enlisting in support of his position the leading feminist epistemologist Anne Fausto-Sterling, Vargas Llosa defends at least five different genders, including different degrees of intersexuality. Faithful to his liberal attachment to individualism, Vargas Llosa takes gender plurality, or intersexuality,

as evidence of the rich variety of the human species whose fundamental entitlement is to liberty.

In what strikes me as a flawed argument, Vargas Llosa wants his cake and eats it too: his defence of multiple genders barely conceals the sexual dualism that is intrinsic to the definition of the individual and of individual rights, which he defends. This indicates to me that there is nothing inherently subversive or even transformative at stake in this otherwise noble and erotic praise of multiple sexual pleasures. The numerical multiplication of gender options does nothing to alter the balance of power and the political economy of sexual dialectics, which is one of the motors of the phallogocentric regime. Moreover, I think that both sexuality and sexual difference are so central to the constitution of the subject that they cannot be eradicated merely by reversing socially-enforced gender roles. Instead, in-depth transformations or metamorphoses need to be enacted.

Against the revival of phallogocentric gender pluralism, I think it important to move beyond polemical divides within feminism. Thus, I want to stress that the alleged distinction between the sex–gender and the sex–sexuality traditions of thought within feminism is not one between heterosexuality and lesbian theory, but it rather takes the form of a disagreement within lesbian theories and practices of female homosexuality. Sexual difference theorists like Cixous and Irigaray posit lesbian desire in a continuum with female sexuality, starting with the attachment to the mother. In the case of Irigaray, this is referred to the anti-Freudian tradition in psychoanalysis which tends to defend both the specificity of the female libido and, contrary to Melanie Klein's theory of aggression against the mother, the continuity between mother-love and lesbian desire. Cixous and Irigaray radicalize the idea suggested by Horney and Klein about the structuring power of the pre-Oedipal relationship to the mother, and also eroticize it fully. They break away from the Freud–Lacan line that over-emphasizes the figure of the father and the power of the Phallus in the constitution of human desire. In this tradition, female homosexuality is a necessary moment in the development of female sexual identity.

Of course, the various brands of this theory have quite different aims. Cixous argues for a magnificent and somewhat grandiose brand of female homosexual aesthetics rich in cosmological appeal. Irigaray, on the other hand, pleads for a radical brand of heterosexuality based on the mutual recognition of each sex by the other: in other words, a new feminist universal. They both agree, however, on the rejection of lesbianism as a separate identity, a distinct sexuality and a political subjectivity. Wittig, however, and recent works inspired by Wittig, such as de Lauretis, argue for the specificity of lesbian desire. This is disengaged from the continuum with female sexuality, psychoanalytic feminist renditions of female homosexuality and also desire for the mother. The disagreement rests on the notion of

lesbian desire as the site of a possible epistemological break, or categorical divide. Wittig is militant about it: her assertion that the lesbian is somewhat outside the binary gender system and thus does not count as a woman being provocative at best. After this outrageous statement split the collective *Questions Féministes* in Paris, throwing historical Beauvoir-inspired feminists like Christine Delphy into the greatest disarray (Duchen 1986), Wittig emigrated to California and engaged in a very productive dialogue with de Lauretis, Butler and others.

Psychoanalysis minus the unconscious

Throughout the nineties, as Jacqueline Rose had predicted (1986), feminist theory has mastered the jargon of psychoanalysis while turning its back on the unconscious, thus taking a rationalistic and voluntaristic turn. Psychoanalysis is crucial in theorizing and representing a non-unitary vision of the subject, but in my reading it also highlights the enflashed, sexed and contradictory nature of the human subject. Fantasies, desires and the pursuit of pleasure play as important and constructive a role in subjectivity as rational judgement and standard political action. I would like to try to reconnect the wilful agency required of politics with the respect that is due, both theoretically and ethically, to the affective, libidinal and therefore contradictory structures of the subject. Sexuality is crucial to this way of thinking about the subject, but unless it is coupled with some practice of the unconscious, though not necessarily of the Freudian kind, it cannot produce a workable vision of a non-unitary subject which, however complex, still hangs somehow together. Unconscious processes, memories, identifications and untapped affectivity are the invisible glue that sticks together that bundle of contradictions that is the subject.

I am not arguing here that psychoanalysis has all the answers, far from it, but it does leave some space for unconscious processes to play their role. Anticipating the anti-Freudian move that Deleuze and Guattari make in relation to the unconscious, I would like to point out, however, that whereas in the psychoanalytic tradition these internal crevices are often the stuff that nightmares and neuroses are made of, they need not be so. I would like to take the risk of arguing that internal or other contradictions and idiosyncrasies are indeed constituent elements of the subject, but they are not such a tragedy after all.

If it is the case that paradoxes and contradictions are historically constructed and socially embedded in practices of power and resistance, we may accept them with less anxiety (Scott 1996). I take the unconscious as the guarantee of non-closure in the practice of subjectivity. It undoes the stability of the unitary subject by constantly changing and redefining his or her foundations. I see it as a constant return of paradoxes, inner contradictions

and internal idiosyncracies, which instill instability at the heart of the self. A nomadic subject is marked by a structural non-adherence to rules, roles and models. Taking unconscious structures into account is crucial for the whole practice of feminist subjectivity precisely because they allow for forms of disengagement and disidentification from the socio-symbolic institution of femininity.

How does dis-identification work? By opening up intervals, a sort of internal distance that allows one to take stock of one's position; a moment of stasis, an interval between the predictability of social models and the negotiations with one's sense of self. These in-between spaces, these spatial and temporal points of transition, are crucial to the construction of the subject and yet can hardly be rendered in thought and representation, given that they are what supports the process of thinking in the first place. The intervals, or in-between points and processes, are facilitators and, as such, they pass unnoticed, though they mark the crucial moments in the whole process of becoming a subject.

Social and cultural norms or normative models are external attractors, stimulants or points of reference. They act like magnets that draw the self heavily in certain directions and stimulate the person accordingly. The social imaginary functions in terms analogous to discursive glue that holds the bits and pieces together, but in a discontinuous and contradictory manner. I will not however approach the working of these 'ideological' formations following the classical Althusserian mode. Nor will I follow the schemes of social psychology and the kind of gender theory it has inspired. Thus, I do not see the impact of images or representations in terms of 'internalization', because I find this theory too dualistic in the way it splits the self from society, the 'inside' from the outside of the subject. I am far more interested instead in thinking about the extensive web of interconnections between the two. Power in the coercive or negative sense (*potestas*) as well as in the empowering or positive sense (*potentia*) is another name for this web of co-extensivity of self with society.

Accordingly, I would agree that a great deal of the 'appeal' of social roles or norms is clearly due to their coercive impact, but it is also the case that a lot of psychic space is willingly surrendered by the subject in the pursuit of social visibility and acceptance. This affects my understanding and assessment of the role and impact of the 'social imaginary' as a process of two-way flows between a nomadic subjectivity and a web-like field of social actualizations of potentially contradicting desires. By extension, interpellations of the conscious and the unconscious kind are heterogeneous and internally contradictory, but nonetheless formidable. Non-unitary identity implies a large degree of internal dissonance, that is to say, contradictions and paradoxes. Unconscious identifications play the role of magnets, building blocks or glue. They can also become equally active, however, in processes of

resistance to social roles and norms. A political strategy of affirmative feminist mimesis requires the open-ended unconscious structures as an element that may be mobilized to enable the subject to take some distance from the socially imposed models. Desires are political and politics begins with our desires.

In other words the recognition of the non-coincidence of the subject with his or her consciousness need not be played back to the old familiar tune of anguish and panic at the thought of incipient psychosis or imminent implosion. Orthodox Lacanians like Kristeva have excelled of late in these panic exercises, whether it is in her analysis of horror and monstrous others, of ethnic diversity and, inevitably, of loss and melancholia. There is often a semi-religious tone of tragic solemnity in these accounts of the dangers of the collapse and destabilization of the self – not to speak of civilization – under the attack of the abject others who seem to creep in from everywhere. Any spectator of David Cronenberg's films will know, however, that this knee-jerk conservative reaction is eminently comic and it can be dispelled as easily as an outburst of laughter. Nostalgia is not merely politically conservative, but is also a deterrent to serious analysis of contemporary culture, as I will try to show in chapters 4 and 5.

I want to go on to defend the sexual difference approach because, as I have argued before, it combines wilful and unconscious elements in a manner that does justice to the complexity of the subject. Following Irigaray, the most adequate strategy consists in *working through* the stock of cumulated images, concepts and representations of women, of female identity, such as they have been codified by the culture we are in. If 'essence' means the historical sedimentation of many-layered discursive products, this stock of culturally coded definitions, requirements and expectations about women or female identity – this repertoire of regulatory fictions that are tattooed on our skins – then it would be false to deny that such an essence not only exists, but is also powerfully operational. History is everyone else's and hence also women's destiny. In other words, because of this history and because language is all we have, before we relinquish the signifier 'woman' we need to re-possess it, to revisit its multi-faceted complexities. These complexities define the one identity we share – as women. And that is the starting-point, however ambiguous and limited it may be. Consequently, the theoreticians of the radical dismissal of the signifier 'woman' in favour of lesbian or of multiple sexuality, strike me as being in a psychoanalytically *perverse* position – that is to say a position of wilful denial. Wittig should know that identity is not just volition, that the unconscious structures one's sense of identity through a series of *vital* (even when they are lethal, they are vital) identifications. The unconscious is imbued with traces of bodily morphology; thus feminists who are committed to bodily materialism should know better than to confuse wilful choice – political volition – with unconscious

desire. Wittig's and Butler's attempt to undo the foundations for the politics of identity does not answer the question of subjectivity, i.e. of how one is also and primarily the subject of one's own unconscious. The corollary is that the way out of this psychic reality is not by wilful self-naming (at best that is an extreme form of narcissism, at worst it is the melancholic face of solipsism) but by careful repetitions, by working through.

In her more recent work, Judith Butler pursues and clarifies her position on identity, sexuality and power. In keeping with the earlier premises of her work on queer theory, she defends a vision of the subject which, however much in process and non-essentialized, requires the workings of consciousness as a regulatory entity. Hegel casts a long and maybe even growing shadow over Butler's work. Thus, for instance, the question of the separation between the psychic and the social, and the complex task of joining them or setting them in relation, emerges as central to Butler's political project of recasting agency in the mode of performative subversions. A Derridian definition of repetition is at the heart of this notion of performativity as alternatively (1993: 2): 'the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' and that which 'describes the relations being implicated in that which one opposes' (p. 241). If the frame of reference is deconstructivist, however, Butler's passion is fundamentally political. Hence the recurrence of the question of how the subject can be subjected to the kind of interpellations which constitute her or him in power. I read Butler's work primarily as a determined and self-conscious effort to seek for a correspondence between the psychic and the social. This becomes also a quest for interconnections between the psychoanalytic theory of desire as lack and the social practices of enforced normativity, prohibitions and exclusion. In ways which at times strike me as hasty or even reductive, Butler sets up an equation between psychic foreclosure and social repression. She can thus ask the key question: how did certain social practices, like heterosexuality, come to acquire a symbolic primacy? For Butler, following Rubin and the gender paradigm that is dominant in US feminism, power in fact is cast as the heterosexual matrix which attributes sexed identities on a hierarchically ordained binary scale aiming at the disavowal of homosexual desire.

Butler's question concerns not only an analytic dimension: how did the symbolic inscription of heterosexuality come about? It also implies a normative aspect – on how effective change can be achieved. Because Butler's work is framed by a discourse about social and legal rights, this normative dimension is dominant in her thought, which means that Butler at times sacrifices conceptual consistency for the sake of political effectiveness. One significant example of this is the discussion on the transferability of the phallus. In outlining Butler's case I want to argue that her deconstruction of the political myth of phallic supremacy, coupled with the social practice of

compulsory heterosexuality, paradoxically ends up down-playing the embodied nature of the subject. Let me explain.

Butler's argument runs as follows: Lacan's notion of the Phallus as the symbolic operator of differences constitutes a radical disjunction from the conventional notion of the penis as empirical referent. For Butler this confers on the Phallus a sort of plastic quality, a transferability which leaves it open to appropriation and re-signification by others, especially lesbians (1992: 168, note 19):

Although I am clearly in some sympathy with the project of deauthorizing the male Imaginary, my own strategy will be to show that the Phallus can attach to a variety of organs, and that the efficacious disjoining of Phallus from penis constitutes a narcissistic wound to phallogormorphism and the production of an anti-heterosexist sexual Imaginary. The implications of my strategy would seem to call into question the integrity of either a masculine or a feminine Imaginary.

For Butler the Phallus is merely the idealization and inflated representation of morphology. It aims to reinstate the primacy and insuperability of heterosexuality and of heterosexist identifications and the necessary erasure and defilement of lesbianism and homosexuality.

The very notion of the transferability of the Phallus suggests moreover an ease about changes and in-depth transformations of the self, which I find problematic both conceptually and ethically. As far as I am concerned, psychoanalysis is not only another philosophical system, but also a cure, that is to say an intervention in the complexity and pain of one's subjectivity. This implies that such interventions are neither easily accessible, nor free of pain. In other words, changes hurt and transformations are painful; this does not mean that they are deprived of positive and even pleasurable side-effects, of course.

My position consists in stressing that the pain involved requires respect and that I find insufficient respect for the pain of in-depth changes in Butler's account of the transferability and negotiability of the Phallus. I see in it a sort of reduction not only of the Phallus to its penile support, but also of the erotic body as a whole to the status of a prosthetic device. Accordingly, Butler reduces morphology and body contours to discursive practices, namely to the views of biology, physiology, and hormonal and bio-chemical disciplines. These act as interpretative matrices which both affect and limit access to bodily materiality. This means that organs are mere 'imaginary effects and that the relation between language and materiality is an undecidable unity of elements that are neither fully identical nor fully different' (Butler 1992: 151). The imaginary here stands for the Marxist idea of false consciousness, something intrinsically unreliable. Because the imaginary is both constitutive and false, Butler cannot entrust it with the political mission of

activating change or resisting hegemonic formations of the subject as Irigaray does. She thus falls back on a classical equation of the political subject with wilful, conscious activity. This begs the question for me of how a feminist political subject can achieve change at the in-depth levels of her sexual economy. Gender trouble is indeed no guarantee of sexual subversion.

I find Butler's position both on sexual difference and on psychoanalytic theories of the original/originary loss that lies at the heart of the subject to be quite contradictory. I think Butler both acknowledges and denies the insight of psychoanalysis, namely that at the origin of the subject there is the constitutive loss of the primary object of desire – the mother. As I argued earlier, however, for Irigaray motherhood, and the maternal-feminine site of subjectivity, is never only the reactive specular other of the same. In her political project of re-configuring the corporeal materiality of alternative feminist subjects, the maternal is the laboratory for the elaboration of the 'other of the Other', that is to say the virtual feminine which is activated by feminists in a process that is both political and conceptual. Butler does not agree with this reference to an 'other' corporeal or embodied maternal feminine which escapes or is in excess of adequate representation within the phallogocentric economy.

This is a very consistent move by Butler, in keeping with the gender-framework which I outlined earlier, especially Gayle Rubin's interpretation of Levi-Strauss and the theory of the heterosexual matrix (Rubin 1975). In opposition to this I want to stress again that poststructuralist thinkers like Irigaray and Deleuze, propose quite a different reading of the subject. Bodily matter, sexuality and reproduction are indeed central to their way of thinking, but they are also de-essentialized. The emphasis on sexuality and filiation, or the materiality of human reproduction, lies at the heart of the discussion of both the kinship system and the social field. In this tradition of thought, issues of sexuality and filiation are so fundamental that they cannot be reduced to a sociology of gender roles. I would rather say that the difference rests on one crucial point: we need to consider the co-presence of morphological and social power-relations and their joint impact on the positioning of the subject.

Thus, Butler takes her leave from poststructuralist theories of sexual difference because she does not recognize the transformative power of the feminine in subverting the representational economy of phallogocentrism. For Butler, as for Rubin, de Lauretis and others, the exclusion of the feminine and/as the rejection of the maternal is accordingly neither primary nor foundational. It is rather presented as an *a posteriori* hallucinatory projection that covers the sense of loss, and this sustains the subject in the delusional quest for coherence and self-consciousness.

My position on this issue is aligned to the psychoanalytic insight that the split from or the loss of the mother is a crucial step in the process of

constitution of the subject. With Irigaray I would argue that the loss of the mother's body entails for the little girl a fundamental lack of primary narcissism as the scar of the wound due to the separation. This originary loss also forecloses access to the mother as primary object of desire, thus depriving the female subject of fundamental ontological grounds for self-assurance. The little boy, on the other hand, is 'compensated' later for the loss of the mother by having his desire deferred to, and displaced to another woman. He may lose the original love object, but inherits the earth in return: men draw all sorts of advantages from their position of representatives of the phallic signifier. For the little girl, however, there is only economic and symbolic misery.

The implication for me of this view of the original separation is that it is the whole of female subjectivity and eroticism, the entirety of her body, that is short-circuited in the process. As Deleuze would say, the little girl's body is 'stolen' from her, as the whole of her sexuality is coerced into the phallogocentric regime. I think it important to stress here the extent to which Deleuze and Irigaray share the same conceptual matrix and of how radically it differs from the paradigm of gender in Gayle Rubin, who is the main source of inspiration for Butler. The little girl's 'stolen body', according to Deleuze, marks her exclusion from symbolic representation. It is the 'capture' of her body by the Oedipalizing vampire of phallogocentrism. Both Irigaray and Deleuze stress that it is the specific materiality of the female flesh that is erased by the phallic regime. This primordial erasure is the condition of possibility for the subsequent kidnapping of the Symbolic order by the masculine.

Butler, on the other hand, interprets this ontological kidnapping of the little girl's erotic subjectivity exclusively in terms of the foreclosure of homosexuality. This is the direct and coherent implication of the theory of gender that Butler works with, one which assumes the constitutive and *a priori* erasure of homosexuality by a gender system which invents (hetero)sexual normativity and imposes it on living bodies. This is in my eyes, however, both a reduction of the psychoanalytic insight and an unfounded theoretical assumption about the process of sexualization of the subject.

Butler shares the Lacanian assumption that entry into language or access to the Symbolic requires the separation from and loss of the maternal body. She goes on, however, to the next step of her argument (1992: 145): 'Insofar as language appears to be motivated by a loss it cannot grieve, to repeat the very loss it refuses to recognize, we might regard this ambivalence at the heart of linguistic iterability as the melancholy recesses of signification.' From this originary loss, which can only be rendered *a posteriori* as the fantasy of a lost origin, Butler derives the – for me unfounded – conclusion that materiality of the body as a whole denies any pre-discursive validity. For Butler it is an *a posteriori* construction, which is always already sexed.

The fact that such loss is always and already caught within language has the paradoxical effect of depriving it of any foundational materialist value for Butler: if all is language, then anything goes. From here there follows a systematic devaluation of the feminine as the site of loss and consequently as genesis of the subject.

The implication inherent in Butler's position is that the 'mother' in question in this originary loss is in fact the site and the object of homosexual love. This is true as far as it goes, but in my opinion that is not far enough. This discussion needs in fact to take into account the impact of fantasy in any account of the 'origins' of the subject. To accept that any theory concerning the origins is fantasmically-loaded may not make it any less fantasmic, of course, but at least it would have the advantage of self-reflexivity. I find such self-reflexivity lacking in Butler's critique of psychoanalysis, with the result that her interventions can easily be challenged by alternative accounts, which are not less fantasmic, but more self-consciously so. For instance, let me evoke a counter-hypothesis in reaction to Butler's lesbian reading of the originary loss of grounding for the subject.

It is the case that most mothers are somebody else's lovers – and this fundamental triangulation of the couple and the child alone lends complexity and ambiguity to the alleged 'exclusiveness' of the mother–child/daughter bond. Moreover, at least statistically and for the time being, most mothers' partners tend to be men – humans of the opposite sex. The presence of the sexual other is not negligible: even if the mother is alone, or is actually a lesbian, the morphological, biological and symbolic presence of the other sex in her – be it just sperm or semen – is not nothing. Taking once again the risk of strategic essentialism, I think it important to inscribe at the heart of the narrative of the subject's origin the principle of not-One, that is, of incommensurable difference.

Regardless of the sexual identity and the gender of one's partner, the traces of heterosexuality on us all are undeniable. One can clearly choose to disguise this fact, to avoid all the morphological wrappings of sexual difference, such as a penis actually attached to a desiring male body, biblical-style penetration, fecundation of the ovum via penetration of sperm-carrying penis into the vagina. One can sing the praises of masquerades and polyvalence, such as lesbian cross-dressers who pump iron; one can choose to emphasize all kind of prosthetic or technological alternatives, such as women with strap-on dildos and penis-less men, but that will not suffice to erase sexual difference. A mere shift in the empirical referent cannot alter the somatic and psychic traces of sexual otherness. These traces are encrypted in the flesh, like a primordial memory, a genetic data-bank that pre-dates entry into linguistic representation. In the beginning, there is difference in the positive sense of 'not-One', that is to say there is flesh that is engendered as the effect of the encounter of two others, whatever their sexual morphology

and gender identity may be. In the beginning, there is live flesh that longs for living, breath that yearns for breathing. Although the temptation to cast this into Christian iconography is strong, I would plead for resisting and for attempting instead a secular, bodily materialistic account of this process. The implication is clear: the virtual possibilities which have been foreclosed by entry into a phallic regime of signification which has kidnapped the little girl's body and sexuality cannot be retrieved by mere parodic repetitions: a much deeper, more affirmative type of mimesis is needed, to mobilize more archaic structures. This return to the flesh stresses the limits of semiological or linguistically-based models of repetition and subjectivity. This is one of the main reasons why I appreciate Irigaray's sober appeal to a radical re-appraisal of heterosexuality as the recognition of incommensurable differences, outside the dialectical scheme of hegemony by a sovereign consciousness. All that sexual difference stands for, here, is the fundamental importance of the principle of 'not-One' at the origin of the subject.

Whereas Butler would take such a statement as further evidence of the constituting force of heterosexuality and the *a priori* erasure of homosexuality from our psychic horizon, I see it as pointing instead to the enfleshed and highly material foundations of our bodily selves. Butler takes the linguistic turn, I go nomadically the way of all flesh. I think that sexual difference is written on the body in a thousand different ways, which includes hormonal and endocrinological evidence. This discussion raises the issue of the limits of embodiment and of how much liberty we can take with the empirical, embodied self. Just how 'negotiable' is one's embedded and embodied subjectivity, considering that the subject is an assemblage of constitutive relations supported by social conventions and power structures? As Deleuze asks, what can a body do? I want to argue that the empirical is the specific location of an entity: it is spatial, even geo-political, but also temporal, both in the sense of linear, historical time (*Chronos*) and of circular, genealogical time (*Aion*). Each entity has its own in-built temporality as an organism, as well as its more complex, forward-looking temporality as a nomadic subject; more on this in chapter 2.

Moreover, the psychoanalytic scheme of triangulation of desire argues for the importance of the mother as the fantasmic love-object for *both* homo- and heterosexual love. If Freud's much-discussed (and for Butler highly suspicious) remark that all humans are polymorphous and perverse means anything, it points to the constitutive, all-encompassing sensual presence of the mother and the primacy of the bond with the mother in the life of the subject. But there is no evidence or necessity for this love and the bond that ensues from it to be homosexual or lesbian, *or to ever have been so*. We need to re-instate here the notion of fantasy.

I think that the function of the Law signified by the phallus is not only to provide a sense – albeit delusional – of coherence for the subject through

inscription into the culturally dominant codes. It is also and primarily a principle of management of the phantasy of the original loss. This means that we need to re-inscribe at the heart of human subjectivity the presence of a third dimension, a third party, an 'outside' that is constitutive precisely because it is not bilateral, but plural. This triangulation of desire is the centre-piece of the Hegelian core of psychoanalysis. The third party intervenes between the mother and the child and it multiplies the subject's sense of splitness accordingly: it literally floods the subject with the 'outside', the social, the symbolic, the cultural, and all the avalanche of affects which they convey.

Whether this 'other' – the object of the mother's attention and desire – is a man or another woman changes little in the function of the third party as the psychic organizer of differentiation between mother and child. This third party merely expresses the fundamental psychic truth that the mother's desire is elsewhere, that it does *not* coincide with the child's total demand and totalizing expectations of it. Hence the delusional character of the child's wish to be the mother's Phallus, that is to say to be 'everything' for her. Recognizing this delusion is a necessary step in the process of constitution of an autonomous and well-functioning self, and as such it marks the subject's capacity to distinguish between fantasy and reality. This shock of recognition entails loss, mourning and melancholia. But this is the price to pay, the pound of flesh to be sacrificed for entering ethical and emotional adulthood. Literally, you can't always have what you want.

Kaja Silverman offers an interesting alternative angle here; she points out (1992) that the Phallus may well be a monological system, but it functions differentially, that is to say by producing complementary binary sets. Thus, what Lacan significantly defines as 'The name-of-the-father' also and simultaneously expresses the desire of the mother. This desire is not merely for the penis, though it is part of it, but for all it represents erotically – the promise of plenitude and *jouissance* – as well as culturally and socially – namely privilege and security. On all these accounts, the symbolic Law of the father will split the child from the mother and force *both* to surrender the fantasy of plenitude which marks their bond. The symbolic function of separating mother from child is considered by Lacan as the gateway to psychic sanity in so far as it breaks through the potentially totalitarian hold of the one over the other. It does so by installing the Phallus as the marker of the loss of the child's desire to be the total object of desire for the mother. I think it important to stress the fact that feminist critics of Lacan like Irigaray do not challenge the psychic function of a symbolic signifier as a principle of order, separation or differentiation. Conservative Lacanians like Kristeva consider such a symbolic function as vitally necessary, moral and even sacred. Irigaray's quarrel is with Lacan's insistence that this symbolic function can only and must be fulfilled by the Phallus. As we shall see

in the next chapter, Deleuze and Guattari are the most radical critics of the concept of the symbolic, which they consider as the despotic signifier of an exploitative political economy of desire. This is not, however, Irigaray's position; she argues that the Lacanian Phallus is the imaginary referent for the penis; it is the symbolic operator of the necessary division of the subject from his or her mother, which inaugurates his or her entry into language. Last but not least it is also the inscription of the paternal metaphor at the heart of the social contract. On all these scores, the Phallus is neither plastic nor easily transferrable, as Butler would have it.

I think Butler confuses and condenses – for political purposes – three separate issues, which are crucial to the process of differentiation or separation from the mother. There are amalgamated:

- separation from the mother
- realization of the heterosexual imperative
- constitutive loss of homosexuality.

These 'moments' in the constitution of the subject neither coincide, nor are they bound together: they require a more sequentially ordained temporal scale in order to unfold. Time needs to play a role here. The loss of the original object is far too total and fundamental a trauma to lead to further speculation on the part of the infant subject who has much to cope with. The realization of sexual difference does occur, of course, but much later. In fact, as far as realizations go, this one will need to be reconstructed *a posteriori* as a fantasy of a forever always-already lost origin. It is a narrative infused with self-protective fantasies about oneself. The separation from the mother as the main organizer of the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the subject does not coincide with the realization of the impossibility of homosexual love, or with the stunned realization that the mother is not homosexual/gay/queer, but a forever-lost heterosexual desiring subject. I want to plead for another temporal sequence between these different moments, one which would allow for some psychic space between the primary loss and subsequent repression of the maternal body and the assignation of sexual difference. Unless such a psychic space is granted, in fact, I do not see how *any* feminist project of transformation of the in-depth structures of female subjectivity can take place. Like Irigaray, I think that the maternal body provides both the site of destitution and of recovery for female feminist subjectivity, understood as a virtual reality of a collectively re-negotiated referential bond. It is the seed of the virtual feminine. The motor of the transformation, however, is temporal. Time, fortunately, is on our side.

Following on from the above, let me turn to the strategic implications. I am with Irigaray and Deleuze in taking the erasure of the feminine, its kidnapping by the Oedipal regime, as the sign for the foreclosure of

women's subjectivity as a whole. The feminine as the foreclosed site of loss becomes the sign for all other kinds of excluded, by now 'virtual only', possibilities. This psychic and symbolic division of labour between symbolic presence (M) and absence (F) comes to construct the social field and the respective role and status of men and women as the empirical referents for the imaginary constructions of masculinity and femininity. This state of affairs has no necessity other than that which emerges from its own long-standing history. With Deleuze you may want to call it an established habit, a sedimented custom, or an institutionalized addiction. This is how I read Lévi-Strauss's statement that exogamy and the exchange of women by men had neither logical nor psychic necessity: it just was so by virtue of historical sedimentation. Of course it could have been the other way around, and the excluded possibilities – say the exchange of men by women – can be raised as a hypothesis, or become retrieved as virtual realities. The problem of how to retrieve them and gain access to them as well as the hypothesis of virtual alternatives, of different locations of subjectivity, amounts to questioning their historically embedded material locations. One cannot change without the other.

For Butler, beyond the maternal feminine there is the always-already lost object of desire: the homosexual same-sex other who plays the role of the constitutive outside. The feminine merely points towards this foreclosed homosexuality, like a road-sign in the middle of the Gobi desert, indicating some living settlement situated thousands of kilometres away. A signifier for the unreachable, a sign of loss and destitution, a recipe for despair, Butler's 'feminine' is reduced to a pathetic effort at simulating signification on the road to nowhere. I clearly disagree with this depreciation of the feminine, both on conceptual and strategic grounds. I think that Butler's argument is very closely modelled on Irigaray's theory, but, whereas Irigaray promotes a deconstructive type of mimesis that would allow both women and men to retrace the steps of the original loss and to retrieve it away from mourning and melancholia, Butler proposes a performative notion of gendered identity which fails to account for unconscious processes.

Biddy Martin has commented on the 'femino-phobia' (my terminology) of Butler's theories and has expressed concern at the erasure of the feminine that is taking place in queer theory (Martin 1994:108): 'First, it limits the scope of feminist inquiry. And second it associates the cross-gender identified lesbian with sexuality, the lesbian-feminist with gender identifications and makes the lesbian femme completely invisible. . . . The woman-identified woman, in much lesbian feminist work, was/is as repressive of femmeness as it is of cross-gender identifications.' It is indeed spectacular how lesbian and queer theories in the USA have eclipsed any notion of 'woman-identified women'. Feminine identifications are really out of the picture; even the feminine-looking/passing lesbian or 'femme' has been censored, unless she

be inscribed in the butch-femme couple. Martin finds the opposition between 'queerness' and the feminine lesbian or woman as too extreme and pleads for more permeable boundaries between the inside and the outside of sexed, embodied subjects. Though body and psyche are shot through with the effects of power, they are not reducible to it; thus a more complex frame of analysis is necessary.

This takes me to my next point: the political implications. The project of sexual difference consists in trying to shift the grounds for the constitution of female subjectivity for both hetero- and homosexual people and thus to re-think the full range of sexual agency for women and men. Irigaray's point about the 'sensible transcendental' is of the greatest relevance here. An essential counterpart of this re-investment of sexuality and the subsequent process of radicalizing heterosexuality concerns the role of men. In order to understand the importance of this point, let me recall my earlier argument concerning the effect of the 'sex wars' in USA feminism: sexuality exited from mainstream feminist agendas. It also returned with a vengeance under the cover of 'minority' sexualities, by women of colour, and especially by lesbian and queer sexualities, in opposition to the moralism and the silence of the liberal majority. The paradoxical result of this is that both heterosexuality and the role of men are doubly silenced: by the liberal feminist majority because, as in the Clinton–Lewinsky case, they literally do not know what to say about white American masculine sexuality; and by queer theorists because they assimilate heterosexuality to power, domination and exclusion. Butler's position shares in some of this: her emphasis on the heterosexual matrix of power has the paradoxical effect of silencing any possible role for heterosexual men, even potentially liberatory ones.

Kaja Silverman, by contrast, pleads for new theorizations of masculinity, by paying more attention to the symbolic function fulfilled by the 'Name-of-the-father' and the ways in which desire is organized through a binary set of signifiers. Whereas Lacan is happy to accept the relocation of male Lack as the site of the female subject in all her symbolic misery, radical Lacanian feminists like Silverman plead for a different sort of wisdom: (1992: 114): 'The only immutable law of desire is the one which denies to each of us the possibility of wholeness and self-presence – the Law, that is, of language. Let us attempt to devise other ways of living this Law than through the differential distribution of Lack.'

Irigaray instead strikes on both registers: firstly she relocates the mother away from the privileged signifier of lack and reconfigures female sexuality as multiplicity and porosity, in opposition to oneness and rigidity. Second, not only does she interpellate men directly, but also empowers them to play their sexuality differently: they can also try to re-embodiment and re-embed their sexuality in a non-phallic manner. Unless both sexes join in the effort to implement non-phallic sexuality, to re-write the script of sexuality away

from the violence of the Phallus, nothing will change. Translated into the language of Deleuze, the majority needs to become minoritarian: we need a polyvalent, fluid, becoming minoritarian of both sexes, men and women included. The alternative would be to assume that heterosexuality is a dirty word and an obsolete practice which needs to be laid to rest once and for all, but what kind of a feminist message would that be for most women?

I find Butler reductive about heterosexual desire, as if it had to do only with domination and exclusion (traces of Wittig) or with the possession of certain organs. I understand that some of this reductive thinking is contextual: in the USA the influence of feminists like MacKinnon and Dworkin has resulted in assimilating heterosexual gender identity with sexual subordination and even victimization. By contrast, I find that Irigaray offers a sober and workable alternative in her attempt to radicalize heterosexuality. Her goal is that of turning the heterosexual encounter into a suspension of dialectical games of domination, a multi-layered space of encounter, admiration and love of the multiple differences embodied in the other. Deleuze offers instead the alternative of polysexuality, as we will see in the next chapter. In any case heterosexuality cannot be reduced only to the desire for a penis or the pursuit of social respectability and normality. For female feminist subjects especially, heterosexuality encompasses a much wider and more wide-ranging perspective of sexual otherness. This need not be a static or hegemonic model, but rather the process of encounter between nomadic sexed positions. I think the patriarchal sexual regime has denied the fullness and symmetry of two sexual economies, confining them both under the burden of phallogocentrism. It follows that for me it is also a radical project to envisage the recomposition of another type of heterosexuality, which would respect the incommensurable difference of a virtual 'two' which needs to be explored and shaped in a dialogue with sexual 'sames' and sexual 'others'.

Beyond mourning and melancholia

In the previous section, questions of repetition and mimesis have repeatedly been raised. Let me explore them further. Butler emphasizes performances, but chooses to play the compulsion to repeat back on to the refrain of negativity and bad conscience. Repetition is not understood in any mimetic, non-Hegelian sense of the term, but in a Derridian sense of the unavoidability of the eternal return of the violence of the signifier. Admittedly, desire does play a role in Butler's thought, but it is a negative, mournful theory of desire, which understates the role and the impact of pleasure on the constitution of the subject and side-steps the question of the unconscious.

Melancholia is crucial to Butler's notion of desire as mortal; her thesis in fact rests on the assumption that 'gender' incorporates the foreclosure of homosexual love, which can only be experienced as always-already lost and

beyond reach. This reflects and deflects Irigaray's idea that the subject is constituted across the original loss of the mother's body and that entry into the symbolic requires the erasure of that primary bond. For Butler the heterosexual matrix is instead such that it requires the repudiation of homosexuality; this traces a psychic itinerary made of constitutive loss. Hence also her emphasis on the death-drive.

Melancholia is characterized by the internalization of constitutive loss. Women, homosexuals, people of colour and post-colonial subjects, who are marginal within the phallogocentric symbolic, are particularly prone to melancholia. This problem goes beyond individual pathology and captures a political dimension, which centres on one's attachment and loyalty to a forbidden or socially unrepresentable and unrecognized love-object. In the absence of a public language and ritual of recognition and hence also of mourning, melancholia assumes a social and political dimension. The unspeakable and unspoken lost object of desire – which for Butler is the homosexual loved one – withdraws into the psyche as a remainder of insoluble grief. To analyse the insoluble nature of such grief amounts to calling into question the political economy of compulsory heterosexuality which engenders it.

This concern for death and loss is problematic. However central it may be to the Hegelian–Lacanian vision of the constitution of the subject, I find that with Foucault, Irigaray and feminist psychoanalytic theories, some empowering alternatives have been offered, for instance the emphasis on pleasure as a constitutive element of subjectivity. What if what kept the subject bound to the power *apparati* which simultaneously construct and constrain it was precisely the surplus value of pleasure? It is pleasure, especially the excessive, transgressive and boundary-breaking pleasure of *jouissance*, that provides the glue which fixes the socially-driven imaginary upon the subject and vice-versa. Žižek understands this addictive force as the irresistible impact of ideology upon the subject. Thinking this through with Irigaray and Deleuze I want to raise instead another possibility: what if the 'fixer' of the psychic landscape were the over-flowing plenitude of pleasure, rather than the melancholy discourse of debt and loss? I think this more Spinozist option has a great deal to offer and I will explore it further in the next chapters.

Admittedly, this emphasis on mourning and melancholia is motivated to a great extent by Butler's concern for the deaths caused in the gay community by the AIDS crisis. More particularly, her work is informed by the question of how to formalize a gay discourse about death and loss in the public sphere. Public rituals of mourning are needed, so as to enforce the recognition of gay grief and have it accepted socially. I think this worthy and humane concern lies at the heart of Butler's investment in the political economy of mourning and loss. It also attaches her more firmly to the Lacanian tradition of thought than her own work would actually allow.

For end-of-millennium Lacanians and psychoanalytically-invested deconstructionists, desire is the margin of excess which is necessarily foreclosed in the instance of structuring meaningful utterances, that is, of making sense. In the Hegelian scheme which dominates Lacan's concept of desire, however, there is an inescapable debt of negativity, an ontological deficit which can never be repaid, or filled up. There is clear evidence of this in Žižek's work on negativity in the socio-political public sphere. 'Fantasy' is for Žižek both the hidden motor of the apparatus of subjectivity and that which cannot be assimilated within it. Akin to Kristeva's 'abject', this notion of fantasy refers to that which cannot be integrated into the symbolic structure, or rather, that whose function is to resist assimilation into the symbolic. Thus 'fantasy' is defined with reference to Hegel's concept of 'negativity' as a systematic and necessary *défaillance* (a failure, or deficiency) at the core of the subject. The fantasy element functions for Žižek like a creative void, the ghostly or spectral foggy bottom of His unsubstantiality. The Gothic imagery is not coincidental: Žižek's texts are full of it, which partly connects to his interest in contemporary cinema and especially low-class genres such as horror and science fiction (about which more in chapter 4), and partly to his vampiristic understanding of the subject. The fantasy element, in fact, feeds upon the plenitude of the subject, sapping it away into a series of delusional and compensatory manifestations of the self.

What is being forced upon the subject is the overwhelming and therefore irresistible forms of compensation or 'enjoyment' of ideologically-conveyed meanings and cultural products which aim at deluding him or her into a coherent and masterful image of Himself. In this respect, I think Žižek stresses the gloomiest aspects of Lacan's theory of subjectivity, by applying to it something which I would describe as an overdose of Hegelian dialectics. The end result is a sad and cynical vision of a subject for whom the lack, guilt and the subsequent discontent are structural, that is to say necessary and therefore inescapable. Peter Dews sums up the situation with admirable clarity when he argues that, contrary to Hegel, for Žižek: 'the loss of the loss does not involve the cancellation, or even relativization, of a limit or a lack, but rather an acceptance of the fact that what appeared to be a reparable loss is in fact a constitutive lack' (Dews 1995: 24).

Predictably enough, such a conservative reading of Lacan has the effect of emphasizing the most traditional definitions, positioning and consequences for Woman as an imaginary construction and, as a consequence, for real-life women. In terms of thinking the feminine, Žižek's work represents an anti-feminist regression that reiterates the whole array of symbolic invisibility and specularity which feminists have been arguing against since the early days of Lacan's work. Butler (1993) has commented critically on this aspect of Žižek's thought, stressing the negative impact of the over-emphasis he places on the register of fantasy and consequently on the Lacanian 'Real', to

the detriment of a more dynamic and positive vision of the subject. I think this has everything to do with the specific notion of 'ideology' that is at work in Žižek's exasperated Lacanianism and which contributes to the depoliticization of psychoanalysis.

The constitutive void that lies at the core of subjectivity and which in turn generates the self as a delusional and compensatory entity has implications for what Althusser used to call the ideological production. This becomes inclusive of absolutely everything and thus it loses any sharp edge of definition. What emerges here is the paradox of the evanescent, disappearing or dead subject which all of poststructuralism brings to the fore of critical theory (contrary to Žižek, I see Lacan as a major poststructuralist thinker). For instance, Deleuze reinscribes this paradoxical non-existence of the subject into the circular logic of proliferation of differences and consequently into a self-contradictory movement of dispersion of the self into a range of consumable others, which is the schizophrenic logic of advanced capitalism. Irigaray analyses the same phenomenon in terms of the growing vampirism of the contemporary subject on a notion of the feminine that has to carry the full burden of materiality, the flesh, birth and mortality, while he dwells upon the misty depths of his ontological crisis. Far less imaginative, Žižek starts by defending the anti-representational vision of ideology, but then retreats into an even worse sense of disempowerment of the subject.

The 'object' of ideology does not quite exist; it is a creative empty place, and what it creates is the illusion of a coherent decisional self. The point is that ideological representations work, whether their content is 'true' or 'false'. The success of ideology, therefore has nothing to do with the truth or falsity of its representation; what matters instead is the subjective position that ideology implicitly creates in the process of enunciation. With this move, Žižek actualizes at the subjective level Lacan's brand of structural linguistics: just as there is no logical or necessary connection between the signifier and its signified content, there is no necessary relation between the content of ideology and its effect. No matter what it represents, the effect is to create a 'slot' or a place of enunciation for the subject, and for Žižek there is no escape from this infernal circular machinery. It is all the more infernal as its operations are non-transparent; although Žižek attempts to define three moments of ideological production: ideology as a complex of ideas and texts, as the external materiality of the state apparatus and the general and widespread production of society at large and especially the media, I think he pushes to extremes the banalization of the notion of ideology to cover all and any forms of representation.

Žižek argues that the 'false' element in the 'false consciousness' induced by ideology is due to a structural impossibility, that of translating into human/social/public language the underlying libidinal forces. Žižek expresses it in the notion of 'fantasy', which is simultaneously driven to seek fulfilment

– and necessarily fails to do so. Both Butler and Žižek share a rather static understanding of the materiality of the embodied subject: matter has neither memory nor dynamic force of its own, certainly none outside a symbolic that is ruled by lack and negativity. The political implications of this infernal circularity are significant: for Žižek we are within ideological space the moment any content, be it ‘true’ or ‘false’, is functional with regard to social relations. Therefore, even attempts at stepping out of what we perceive as ideology is the very form of our enslavement to it, in that our attempts are no less ‘ideological’. Žižek quotes as examples of this circularity the rhetoric of ‘humanitarian wars’ in the Balkans or the self-contradictions involved in trying to beat the media at their own game. The consequence is that in order to be effective, both relations of domination and of resistance to ideology must remain concealed. We can only denounce ideology from a place that must stay empty, not determined by any positive reality, otherwise we would fall back into ideology. As this special place is, for Žižek as for Lacan, that of psychoanalysis, the function of which is to make the subject accept his necessary enslavement, the political double-bind closes upon itself and the end result is a recipe for disempowerment.

The whole capitalist-infused economy of deficit and lack, which invests the Lacanian conceptual machinery and marries it to a certain view of Hegel, is perpetuated by Žižek with a smug pretence at debunking. The ‘illusion’ of consciousness comes down to its intrinsic link with – and unpayable debt to – the ‘Real’: the primordial libidinal matter which constructs social activity by providing the necessarily silenced foundations for what – if anything – can be spoken. This structuring lack is central to Lacan’s ontology of negativity, and gives rise to what Derrida describes as the ‘spectral economy’ of the subject: a constitutive, undecidable present absence, or structurally necessary absence as the only mode in which the subject can be present to him- or herself. As Kear astutely points out (1999: 183): ‘If Ego equals Ghost, then “I am” would mean “I am haunted”’ – in other words, ‘I’ am simultaneously constructed by the introduction of the desire and by the failure of it. This forces ‘me’ performatively to repeat the ‘hauntologically’ primal scene which marks the site of ‘my’ constitutive foundation in loss and lack. I do find this a perfectly Gothic scene, in tune with *fin-de-siècle* gloom. It invites us to wallow in a prolonged and at times ecstatic glorification of loss, mourning and melancholia, thus bringing Lacan’s delusional vision of the subject to some point of implosion. This slightly hallucinated mode of both erasing and affirming the subject strikes me as central to both Lacan’s and Žižek’s melancholic view of subjectivity. Because this concept allows for a performative view of the subject – as the flawed entity that forever pursues that which evades him or her in the very act of constitution of his or her place of enunciation – a strange resonance has emerged between Žižek and Butler. I find the emphasis on the structurally aporetic and fundamentally failed

attempt by the subject to affirm his or her libidinal intensity – this emphasis on lack and negativity – tainted with a comic touch of tragedy. Against the negative passion and the seduction of the aporetic, there has to be an alternative. Translated into nomadic language: I actively yearn for a more joyful and empowering concept of desire and for a political economy that foregrounds positivity, not gloom. Butler's explicit rejection of Deleuze's theory of desire (1987), however, positions her as antithetical to this vision.

What I find even more problematic in this melancholia-oriented twilight of psychoanalytic theory is its blatant obliteration of the radical materialism of both Irigaray and Deleuze. Yet, as early as 1968 (in *Différence et répétition*) in the case of Deleuze and 1974 for Irigaray (in *Spéculum. De l'autre femme*), the objection to the theory of desire as lack had been raised. Namely that desire, this structurally silenced libidinal sub-stratum, was neither of the order of an undecidable temporality, nor of a logical impossibility. The originary moment is in the constitution of the desiring subject as sexed or gendered, in that it displays a strong link to the maternal feminine (Irigaray). It is also however historicized, in that its phallogocentrism reflects an instrumental relation to the material-affective roots of the subject (Deleuze); as such it marks a specific moment in the historicity of subject-construction under capitalism (Deleuze) and patriarchy (Irigaray). I cannot help wondering why the path-breaking agendas of radical materialists like Irigaray and Deleuze are being ignored or silenced by the post-Lacanian discourses about negativity, which triumphed at the end of the second millennium. Why is it that loss, failure, melancholia and the ontological lack continue to dominate views of the subject both inside and outside feminism?

Again, contextual considerations come to mind. The social imaginary of feminism in the 1990s was dominated by the notion of fetishism and the figuration of the trans-sexual body, queer sexuality or in-between genders (Grosz and Probyn 1995). Since the mid-1980s trans-sexuality had been heralded (Baudrillard 1987) as the dominant figuration for contemporary sexuality. This indicates a sort of play with sexual indifferentiation which simultaneously, in my eyes, displaces and confirms the gender polarity. Technology provides a powerful mode of cultural mediation of the trans-sexual imaginary. Prosthetically enhanced, self-consciously artificial, the trans-sexual body is the prototype of the cyborg in that it signifies the symbiosis between the organic, the biochemical, the technological and the surgical. I will return in chapter 5 to analysis of the anthropological but also morphological mutation that seems to be taking place in the organization of postmodern sexualities. For the moment it is important to stress that in gender theory especially, a collective becoming-trans-sexual is a dominant *topos* in the cultural representations of the sexed body. Appeals to Deleuze's body-machines are crucial to this trans-sexual imaginary, as I will argue in the next chapter. Like the character Vaughan in James Ballard's novel *Crash*, a

deep wound seems to mark the contemporary sexual body, making it like: ‘a deranged drag queen revealing the leaking scars of an unsuccessful transsexual surgery’ (Ballard 1973: 201). Postmodern Gothic and post-gender sexualities are haunting the imaginary of post-industrial societies. While acknowledging this phenomenon, I want to argue that far from erasing sexual difference, it makes it for me a more urgent question than ever.

Conclusion: the sensible transcendental

Sexual difference requires opening out towards issues of transcendence and universality – not in the sense of erasing other differences, but rather in the formulation of alternative subject-positions of a more general appeal and value. In my view, the paradox of Irigaray’s position is that, while it is based on a notion of materiality that I find very de-essentialized, it seems to move ineluctably towards issues of transcendence and incorporeal immateriality. Colebrook (2000b: 121) helps to elucidate this point:

Irigaray’s ‘transcendental sensible’ . . . short-circuits the closure of representationalism by showing that the condition which the subject repeats and refigures as his own ground can never be fully comprehended by the subject, precisely because the subject is nothing other than an effect of this repetition. In presenting the origin as object the subject is produced as subject. But this repetition of the origin as presence can never itself be presented. In order to be fully present to himself the subject must negate his corporeal facticity.

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, this negation of material grounds or ‘corporeal facticity’ constitutes metaphysics and founds it on a concurrent rejection of corporeality. This originary violence is sexualized or genderized, and it is intrinsic to the authority of the classical subject in that it grounds him on consciousness. The burden of embodiment is projected on to the maternal feminine and immediately erased. This erasure constitutes the subject and founds phallogocentrism, understood as the empire of the One and the objectification of the Other. Hence Irigaray’s insistence that this ‘difference’ is internal to the logic of the Same and her political determination to disengage the feminine from this one-dimensional road so as to redefine it as the other of the other, that is to say a constitutive not-One.

Although a great deal of this project aims at postulating a social and political contract by and for women, it also contains an equally powerful transcendental charge. By advocating a feminine form of transcendence through ‘radical immanence’, Irigaray postulates a definition of the body not only as material, but also as the threshold to a generalized notion of female being, a new feminist humanity. Irigaray’s work seems to move

ineluctably towards issues of incorporeal materiality. This tendency is explicit in her work on the sensible transcendental and ‘the woman divine’. The embodied materialism of sexual difference, in other words, is the assertion of the importance of a multiplicity that can make sense, by granting symbolic recognition to women’s way of being. Irigaray’s ‘divine’ aims at materializing the *a priori* conditions needed to achieve changes in our symbolic as well as material conditions. It implies re-thinking space, time, nature, the earth and the divine. The issue of the sensible transcendental is crucial to this project. It situates the female embodied subject in a space between transcendence and immanence. This kind of materiality connects the subject to a number of differences within herself and also between herself and others. It does so, moreover, in a non-dialectical and non-oppositional manner.

The female subject can recognize and enact her specificity by granting symbolic importance to her bond to other women as fundamental mediators between herself and the world: this is the idea of a feminine universal as mediation. Colebrook puts it clearly: for Irigaray, ‘the sensible is proximate. Neither the full presence of experience, nor the radical anteriority of a transcendental condition, the sensible is given as the other body whom I recognize as another form of becoming, as a “concrete universal” ’ (2000b: 123). Like the first stone of a new civilization, Irigaray’s ‘divine’ aims at materializing for feminist practice the *a priori* conditions to achieve changes in our symbolic as well as material structures. No bodily materialism without transcendence; no female embodied subject without incorporeality. I think that the position of strategic essentialism invites the reader to dwell on this paradox and not to seek for hasty ways out of this ontological vicious circle.

Olkowski captures this vein in Irigaray’s work (2000: 107):

Woman as becoming is thus anomic, against and outside the rule, the principle and the structure. Her molecules are a powerful contagion, spread by symbiosis and mucosity. And if we succeed in depathologising everything associated with women by constituting a logic and a language of fluidity, all those words that are so distasteful because they express the body of woman – the uteral, the vulvar, the clitoral, the vaginal, the placental, or woman’s luminous body itself – may then enter, for the first time ever, into our knowledge.

The diffuse, flowing, transgressive and cosmic nature of this eroticism codes it culturally as ‘feminine’ – and thus, once again, there is no avoiding the feminization of this theory of desire. Nor is there a way to resolve its in-built contradictions: they have to be enacted and worked through.

On the issue of alterity, Irigaray’s radical heterosexuality postulates the need for a female homosexual nucleus – a primary homosexual bond that is required to re-compose women’s primary narcissism, which has been badly wounded and damaged by the phallogocentric symbolic. The love of another woman is crucial to this process of laying the foundations for the pre-history

of a possible future, which is a complex way of referring both to surviving – in a reactive mode – and to living – in an active and creative manner. The other woman – the other of the Other – is the site of recognition of one's effort at becoming in the sense of pursuing a process of transformation, of deeply-rooted change, of in-depth metamorphoses. This primary narcissism must not be confused with secondary narcissistic manifestations – of which women have been richly endowed under patriarchy. Vanity, the love of appearances, the dual burden of narcissism and paranoia are the signs of female objectification under the power (*potestas*) of the Same. Nor is it *per se* the prelude to a lesbian position: it simply states the structural significance of love for one's sex, for the sexual same, as a crucial building block for one's self-esteem. It is important to emphasize therefore the importance of primary narcissism as some fundamental threshold of sustainability that allows a female subject to undertake first the process of self-assertion and then of transformation. As I have often argued in my work – before one can undo, deconstruct, redefine, or relinquish subjectivity, one has to be a subject to begin with, otherwise, this would be a recipe for self-annihilation. What Irigaray argues is that this process of re-building the foundations (primary narcissism) necessarily requires another woman – this is because we are all of woman born, and the imprint of the mother upon us is of lasting and fundamental importance. Whereas under phallogocentrism, the maternal marks the lack or absence of symbolic recognition, in the 'virtual feminine' proposed by Irigaray, it can be turned into an empowering and affirmative gesture.

Whether in the queer or the radical heterosexual way, I think that a subversive approach to sexual identity and to sexuality is one of the legacies of a feminist, nomadic becoming-woman process. In other words, the object-choice (homo/hetero/'perverse') or the choice of sexual lifestyle is far less important than the structural shifts entailed by this process in the structures of the desiring subjects. I tend to see the erotics of 'becoming-woman' as a vitalistic sensuality, that remains deeply attached to the embodied subject. This is in keeping with the tradition of 'enchanted materialism' that both Deleuze, Irigaray and a great deal of French and Continental culture belong to. That a lot of this tradition is close to libertine literature, or to the *ars erotica* that Foucault regretted had left mainstream culture, only makes it historically all the more interesting. Two key ideas are worth stressing here: firstly the emphasis on the specific intelligence of the enfolded subject; secondly both the continuity and the quarrel with psychoanalysis and the project to disengage desire from lack and negativity to think of it instead as plenitude and abundance. These two conceptual axes make the transcendental empirical of Luce Irigaray and other voices in the sexual difference tradition compatible with the sensualist erotics of 'becoming-woman' in Deleuze. I will pursue this in the next chapter.

This in turn posits feminism as a political and ethical passion, and consequently the feminist subject-position not as a given, but as a project, as something that some women can yearn for and work towards, for the good of all. I would call this an 'intensive' reading of feminist politics which assumes a non-unitary, nomadic subject equally opposed to classical humanism and to liberal notions of the individual. Accordingly it posits the instance of the political not merely in the wilful commitment to the basic pursuit of decency, social justice and human rights, though these remain unfulfilled and desirable aims to date. Politics can also be defined in terms of the passions and values that underscore it. This 'typology' of ethical passions is an approach inspired by Nietzsche and read with Deleuze. It allows us to see volitional choices not as transparent, self-evident positions, but rather as complex, contradictory multi-faceted ones. A dose of suspicion towards one's own 'motivations' or intentionality does not condemn one to cynicism, nihilism or relativism. On the contrary, by injecting affectivity, self-reflexivity and joy in the political exercise, it may return political beliefs to their full inspiration.

I have often argued that what feminism ultimately liberates in those who partake of it is a yearning for freedom, dignity, justice, lightness and joyfulness. These values can be translated into rational beliefs and policies, but they also form a substratum of desire that motivates the entire exercise in the first place. Politics begins with our passions. This was quite clear in the early militant days of the women's movement when laughter and joy were profound political weapons and statements. Not much of this Dionysian force seems to be left in these days of postmodern Gothic gloom, but we do well to recall it. Deleuze has typified the spirit of May 1968 – but I think any radical or transgressive movement would fit the bill – as a lightness of touch, a sense of opening up of possibilities, a profound empowerment of the potentials of life. This heightened sensibility both accompanies and makes possible social change, political and epistemological and other wilfully chosen political measures. In feminism as elsewhere it is crucial however to move beyond the deadly-serious priests of revolutionary zeal and revalorize the merry-making aspect of the processes of social change.

I think this emphasis on positive, empowering passions is another point of intersection between Irigaray's 'virtual feminine' as sensible transcendental and Deleuze's vision of the subject as empirical transcendental. The points in common, as well as the divergences, illuminate the ways in which feminist positions today appeal to Deleuze's thought. That Irigaray criticizes Deleuze's notion of multiplicity and the dispersion of sexed identities as interfering with the affirmation of a new female subjectivity, while Wittig on the contrary welcomes it as a way out of the sexual polarizations of the gender system, gives us a measure of the problem. The point for me, however, is that this 'captation' of Deleuze's work is very welcome and empowering for contemporary critical theory and cultural studies.

The emphasis Irigaray, Deleuze and Guattari place on the embodied and embedded nature of the subject – through the notion of radical immanence – gives to their philosophy a political edge related to power issues. It also opens critical theory to an ethical and an ecological dimension which embeds the subject in social relations of power. Knowledge claims rest on the immanent structure of subjectivity and must resist the gravitational pull towards abstract transcendentalism. For Irigaray, this amounts to a radical exploration of the dissymmetrical forms of embodiment enjoyed respectively by men and women. It is a path of transcendence that goes via and through the body, not away from it. According to Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, the knowing subject has been re-thought in material terms: territories, resources, locations and forces. This is a break from the spatio-temporal continuum of classical humanism. Similarly, it is important to move beyond the reductivism of social constructionism, which tends to underplay the continuity of factors that provide the empirical foundations of the subject and which are mostly related to biology, but also include affectivity and especially memory and desire.

Moreover, a poststructuralist philosophy which assumes a subject that is both non-unitary and embodied/embedded in multiple power-relations also grants to temporality and memory a much more central place in the structuring of the subject. For instance, Irigaray pleads for the specific temporality of women (cyclical, repetitive, fluid) in order to find adequate social representations and applications for it. She also sees feminism as a laboratory for the consumption and transformation of women's genealogies into sources of experimentation, from past symbolic misery into an empowered alternative imaginary. Deleuze's 'nomadology' as a philosophy of immanence, on the other hand, rests on the idea of sustainability as a principle of containment and development of a subject's resources, understood environmentally, affectively and cognitively. A non-unitary subject thus constituted inhabits a time that is the active tense of continuous 'becoming'. Deleuze defines the latter with reference to Bergson's concept of 'duration', thus proposing the notion of the subject as an entity that lasts, that is to say that endures sustainable changes and transformation and enacts them around him or herself in a community or collectivity. In this perspective, even the Earth/Gaia is posited as a partner in a community which is still to come, to be constructed by subjects who will interact with the environment – both social and ecological – differently. Deleuze and Guattari turn to Spinoza to find philosophical foundations for a vitalistic yet anti-essentialistic brand of immanence. They rethink continuities between the subject and his or her context both socially (power-relations) and ethically (contiguity with the Earth). They do so without reference to humanistic or holistic worldviews, in so far as these are the pillars on which the humanist subject used to stand, dialectically opposed to His 'others'.

In this respect, I see in these philosophies of radical immanence a shift of emphasis away from anthropocentrism in favour of biocentric egalitarianism. I shall return to this in chapters 3 and 4. They differ from deep ecology, however, in not underplaying the contradictions and discontinuities between the human and the non-human universe and thus in not romanticizing the interaction between them. Even the most convinced social constructivists today argue that the performances of bodies cannot be ascribed exclusively to social codes or to symbolic and imaginary orders – nor can they be read back into the Holy Scriptures of the DNA Scrolls. Both ‘nature’ and ‘the body’ are slippery categories that tend to slide towards essentialism or get caught into positivist reductions – or in their opposite, new-age naive celebrations. In the age of the politics of bio-diversity, the interdependence of the natural and the social, the distinction mind–body needs to be explored outside classical, dualistic habits of thought. The key term here is ‘radical immanence’, that is to say a deeply embedded vision of the embodied subject. As a materialist theory it can provide an answer in so far as it encompasses the body at all levels, also, and maybe especially, the biological one. In the light of contemporary genetics and molecular biology, it is more than feasible to speak of the body as a complex system of self-sustaining forces. The DNA and the cells communicate effectively with each other, transferring vital information. In terms of bio-diversity, we humans are actively and destructively involved in manipulating our environment. Neuro-sciences have increased our understanding of memory and the extent to which the storage and retrieval of information is essential to the progress of the self. This is evidence which can no longer be ignored by critical, Left-leaning intellectuals. Nor need it be left to the delusions of grandeur of professional scientists and their industrial, financial backers. Feminist philosophical nomadism is a relevant and significant attempt to come to terms with both embodiment and sexual difference as processes of transformation, while foregrounding issues of power, empowerment and accountability.

Consciousness needs to be redefined accordingly in terms of flows of variations, constantly transforming within patterns of continuity. The old mind–body liaison needs to be reconstructed in terms which are not nationally driven, top-down and hierarchical. Processes, flows, in-between-status have to be taken into serious account, that is, into conceptual representation. Continuities and discontinuities alike need to be considered. Internal complexities and non-sequential effects have to be accepted in the order of our thought. To live up to these complexities, we need conceptual creativity and a healthy, non-nostalgic detachment from traditional beliefs about what counts as ‘the knowing subject’.

A feminist project that mobilizes such forces and aspirations will mix them up with the fiery energy of post-*Woman* subjects with the brains of Hillary Clinton, the looks of Madonna, the courage of Anita Hill and the

talent of Kathy Acker. This is also likely, however, to involve the readers in increasing degrees of complexity. It is my passionate conviction, however, that because, and not in spite of, these difficulties, the issues of sexual difference and the quest for alternative feminist subject-positions, not unlike the Princess of Wales, simply won't go away.