

# Nomadic Ethics

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## Abstract

Deleuze's ethics constitutes the core of his philosophy, which proposes a post-humanistic but robust nomadic vision of the subject that respects the complexity of our times while avoiding the pitfalls of postmodern and other forms of relativism. Deleuze's neo-Spinozist ethics rests on an active relational ontology that looks for the ways in which otherness prompts, mobilises and allows for flows of affirmation of values and forces which are not yet sustained by the current conditions. Insofar as the conditions need to be brought about or actualised by collective efforts to induce qualitative transformations in our interactions, it requires the praxis of affirmative ethics. The process of becoming-minor, which necessarily involves becoming-woman, is central to this pragmatic ethical project that includes human as well as non-human actors. This paper addresses this ethics in terms of ontological relationality, affectivity and endurance.

**Keywords:** Deleuze, ethics, becoming-minor, becoming-woman, nomadic subjectivity, relational ontology, affirmative ethics, non-human, endurance, affect

## 1. Introduction

The question of becoming-woman and hence the status of the feminine are central to Deleuze's ethics, which both in his specific monographs on Spinoza's thought and the more extensive engagement with affirmative nomadic ontology, constitutes the core of his philosophy.

Deleuze's radical ontological relationality is neutral in terms of moral norms, but it calls for active engagement in the project of

producing affirmative ethical values. Deleuze's immanence firmly locates the practice of affirmation in the exteriority, the cruel, messy outside-ness of Life itself. Creative chaos, however, is not chaotic, but it is rather the virtual formation of all possible forms (Deleuze 1969). Life is not an a priori that gets individuated in single instances, but it is immanent to and thus coincides with its multiple material actualisations. I refer to this generative force as 'zoe', which is the opposite of Agamben's 'bare life', in that it is a creative force that constructs possible futures.

A nomadic Deleuzian ethics prioritises relation, praxis and complexity as its key components. It accordingly promotes a triple shift. Firstly, it emphasises a radical ethics of transformation in opposition to the normative moral protocols of Kantian universalism. It assumes that ethics is not morality, in that it is not confined to the realm of rights, distributive justice or the law. Ethics is rather the discourse about forces, desires and values that act as empowering modes of becoming.

Secondly, it shifts the focus from a unitary and rationality-driven consciousness to an ontology of process, that is to say, ontological relationality. Otherness is approached accordingly as the expression of a productive limit, or generative threshold, which calls for an always already compromised set of negotiations. Nomadic theory prefers to look for the ways in which otherness prompts, mobilises and allows for flows of affirmation of values and forces which are not yet sustained by the current social and historical conditions. Insofar as the conditions need to be brought about or actualised by collective efforts to induce qualitative transformations in our interactions, they require a pragmatic approach. The praxis of affirmative ethics actualises virtual possibilities and therefore constructs possible futures starting from here and now. This constructive approach transforms the negative conditions of the present into productive preconditions for affirmative practice.

Thirdly, it disengages the emergence of the subject from the logic of negation and attaches subjectivity to affirmative otherness. This makes reciprocity into a gesture of creation, not as the struggle for the recognition of Sameness. An ethically empowering relation to others aims at increasing one's *potentia* or empowering force and creates joyful energy in the process. The conditions that encourage such a quest involve processes of transformation aiming at affirming positivity.

Philosophical nomadism therefore shares Nietzsche's distaste for morality as sets of negative, resentful and life-denying reactive passions. This approach is replaced with Spinoza's ethics of joyful affirmation, which implies accountability, situatedness, and the composition of common planes of active collaborative ethical conduct (Lloyd 1994;

*Deleuze Studies* 7.3 (2013): 342–359

DOI: 10.3366/dls.2013.0116

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1996). Woman, as the privileged site of otherness, is a key component of this affirmative process of counter-actualisation, or intensive becoming.

## II. Becoming-woman

Nomadic theory expresses a process ontology that privileges change and motion over stability. This is also rendered in terms of a general becoming-minority, or becoming-nomad, or becoming-molecular/woman/animal, and so on. The minority is the dynamic or intensive principle of change in nomadic theory, whereas the heart of the (phallogocentric) Majority is static, self-replicating and sterile.

Insofar as man represents the Majority, there is no creative or affirmative 'becoming-man'; the dominant subject is struck with the burden of self-perpetuating Being and the task of keeping up existing patterns. This static orientation acquires a schizoid character in the context of advanced capitalism. This is a 'spinning machine' that fabricates quantitative proliferations of objects, commodities and data which leave the power structures unchanged and unchallenged. A logic of quantitative multiplications – multiples of One – constitutes the core of the political economy of contemporary capitalism. This system has no single centre, but a scattered web of poly-located centres, which punctuate the global economy. Their task is to keep capital flowing in profit-oriented directions. No qualitative value or concern is allowed to stand in the way of profit. Nomadic thought opposes to this self-interested, greedy system an ethics of qualitative transformations, becoming-minor, which rests on the recognition of complexity and affirmation and challenges existing power structures.

By extension this scheme also implies that the subjects of power – the various empirical minorities (women, children, black people, natives, animals, plants, seeds, molecules, and so on) – are the privileged starting point for active and empowering processes of transformative becoming. There is no becoming of the centre, but only away from it. This process, however, is anything but automatic.

The marginal subjects who inhabit the multiple locations of devalued difference have their own task cut out for them, insofar as they too often tend to be caught in dialectical relationships of submission, frozen by the paralyzing gaze of the master – hating him or her and envying him or her at the same time. For instance, in order to shift from this dialectically binding location, the feminist subject needs to activate different counter-memories and actualise alternative political practices. Becoming-nomadic means that one learns to reinvent oneself and to

desire the self as a process of qualitative transformation. Becoming-minor rests on a non-unitary yet politically engaged and ethically accountable vision of the nomadic subject. Both the Majority and the minorities need to overcome the Dialectic of Majority/Minority or Master/Slave and unite the knots of envy (negative desire) and domination (dialectics) that bind them so tightly. In this process, they will necessarily follow asymmetrical lines of becoming, given that their starting positions are so different. For the Majority, there is no possible becoming-other than in the undoing of its central position altogether. The centre is void; all the action is on the margins.

For the real-life minorities, however, the pattern is different: women, black people, youths, postcolonial subjects, migrants, exiles and homeless may first need to go through a phase of 'identity politics' – of claiming a fixed location or a majoritarian position. This is both inevitable and necessary because, as I have often argued, you cannot give up something you have never had (Braidotti 1991). Nor can you dispose nomadically of a subject position that you have never controlled to begin with. I think consequently that the process of becoming-nomad ('minority', 'woman) is internally differentiated and it depends largely on where one starts off from. The politics of location is crucial. In other words, heterogeneity is injected into both poles of the dialectical opposition, which gets undone accordingly. The 'Molar' line – that of Being, identity, *fixity* and *potestas*, and the 'Molecular' line – that of becoming, nomadic subjectivity and *potentia* – are absolutely not the same. They are two dissymmetrical 'others', although within phallogocentrism they have been captured in a dualistic mould. They are differentiated by structural inequalities that impose Sameness in a set of hierarchical relations. Deleuze defines the Molar/Majority as the standard and the Molecular/Minority as the other in the sense of 'the other of the same'. The central challenge to nomadic philosophy, however, is how to undo this dualistic mode and redistribute the power relations of the two terms. More important than either of them, therefore, is the Line of Flight or of becoming. This is always and only a becoming-minor as in woman/child/animal/imperceptible.

This is an internally differentiated movement which overthrows the oppositional dialectics in a parallel yet asymmetrical move: 'There is no subject of the becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority; there is no medium of becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of a minority' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 292).

Thus, an asymmetrical starting position between minority and majority – centre and margins – needs to be strongly emphasised here

(Braidotti 2011a). This means that the process of de-territorialisation is dual and the quantitative minorities can undergo the process of becoming only by disengaging themselves from the unitary identity as others, which is imposed by their opposition to the majority. It is in this sense that 'Woman as 'the second sex' or 'the other of the Same' needs to 'become-woman' in the molecular sense of the process, or 'the other of the Other', as Irigaray put it (Irigaray 1974).

Hence the imperative to become-woman as the first move in the de-territorialisation of the dominant subject (also known as the feminisation of Man). For those who start from the position of empirical minorities, on the other hand, more options are open. If the pull towards assimilation or integration into the Majority is strong for the minorities (hence the phenomenon of phallic women), so is the appeal of the lines of escape towards minor becomings. In other words, you can have a becoming-woman that produces Lady Thatcher and one that produces Lady Gaga: neither of them is 'feminine' in any conventional sense of the term and yet they are as different from each other as the workhorse is from the racehorse.

What matters here is to keep open the process of becoming-minor and not to stop at the dialectical role-reversal that usually sees the former slave in the position of new master or the former mistress in the position of dominant. We need to go beyond the logic of dialectical reversibility. This is especially important for those social subjects—women, black people, postcolonial and other 'others'—who are the carriers of the hopes of the Minorities. The process of becoming-nomadic is not merely anti-essentialist, but also a-subjective, beyond received notions of individuality. It is a transpersonal mode, ultimately collective. You can never be a nomad; you can only go on trying to become nomadic.

One must indeed start from somewhere specific: a grounded and accountable location, and the process of becoming is a time bomb placed at the very heart of the social and symbolic system which has welded together Being, Subjectivity, Masculinity, compulsory Heterosexuality and (Western) ethnocentrism. The different becomings are lines cutting open this space and demanding from us constant remapping: every time it is a question of finding the new coordinates. This is not only a spatial but also a temporal phenomenon. Crucial to this entire process of becoming-molecular, in fact, is the question of memory (*la mémoire*). The Majority—white, heterosexual, property-owning and male—is a huge data bank of centralised knowledge, which is relayed through every aspect of his activities. The Majority Subject holds the keys to the

central memory of the system and has reduced to the rank of insignificant practices, the alternative or subjugated memories of the many minorities. The line of becoming for the Majority is consequently an anti-memory, which instead of bringing back in a linear order specific memories (*les souvenirs*), functions as a de-territorialising agency that dislodges the subject from his or her sense of unified and consolidated identity.

A nomadic, non-linear philosophy of time as a zigzagging line of internally fractured coalitions of dynamic subjects-in-becoming supports a very creative reading of memory and of its close relationship to the imagination. This is especially important in the case of negative or traumatic memories of pain, wound or abuse. This sort of negative capital is an integral component of the consciousness of historically marginalised or oppressed subjects. The pain and negativity that structure the oppositional consciousness of the 'minorities' are a crucial concern for nomadic political theory and practice. While acknowledging this particular location—as a wounded memory of pain as well as a historically grounded space—nomadic political subjectivity defines the political as the gesture that aims at transcending the present state of affairs and empowering creative 'counter-actualisations', or transformative alternatives.

The corollary of this notion of time and of the political is that the specifically grounded memories of the minorities are not just static splinters of negativity forever inscribed in the flesh of the victims of history. Molecular or nomadic memories are also and more especially a creative force that gives the minorities—or 'wretched of the earth' as Fanon put it—a head start towards the world historical task of envisaging alternative world orders and more humane and sustainable social systems. It comes down to a double-consciousness of both the multiple axes of oppression and hence of hurt, humiliation and pain, as well as the creative force they can generate as motors of transversal and collective transformation.

Please note, however, that, whereas in classical dialectics the empirical minorities are automatically positioned as the motor of historical developments and the guiding principle of revolutionary action and ethical agency, in nomadic politics this is not the case. The negative capital of oppression is just a privileged starting point for a process of transmutation of values—to use Nietzsche's rather more heroic rendition of the same idea—that encompasses the minorities themselves: they have to become-minor as well. They also need to activate their memories against the black hole of dialectical counter-identity claims as well as against the grain of the dominant vision of the subject.

This type of nomadic remembrance is not identity-bound, or ego-indexed, but rather impersonal, or post-identification. It is linked to a radical process of de-familiarisation or dis-identification from dominant representational and even self-representational practices. What is at stake in the nomadic theory of becoming is a critique of the centre from the centre. All becomings are minor, that is to say, they inevitably and necessarily move into the direction of the 'others' of classical dualism – dis-placing them and re-territorialising them in the process, but always and only on a temporal basis.

Becoming-woman/animal/insect is an affect that flows, like writing; it is a composition, a location that needs to be constructed together with, that is to say, in the encounter with others. Becomings push the subject to his or her limits, in a constant encounter with external, different others. The nomadic subject as a non-unitary entity is simultaneously self-propelling and hetero-defined, that is to say, outward-bound.

Therefore, it is in the worst possible conceptual taste to even think of being able to separate out the becoming-woman from the other unfolding and deploying of multiple becomings. The process of becoming-nomadic is rather a zigzagging itinerary of successive but not linear steps that, starting from 'becoming-woman', marks different thresholds or patterns of 'becoming-minor' that cross through the animal and go into the 'becoming-imperceptible' and beyond.

'Becoming-woman' is integral to the concept and process of becoming, but there are no systematic, linear or teleological stages or phases of becoming. Each plateau marks a framed and sustainable block or moment of immanently actualised transformations. Thinking across these processes remains the central challenge for critical thought.

### III. Minorities and Becoming-minor

There is a positive and creative tension between the identitarian claims of political movements that are grounded in the historical experience of oppression and the empirical transcendental aspirations of nomadic theory to postulate a new collective transversal bond through multiple processes of becoming.

As I asserted earlier, insofar as Man, the male, is the main referent for thinking subjectivity, the standard-bearer of the Norm, the Law, the Logos, Woman is dualistically, that is, oppositionally positioned as his 'other'. The consequence is that there is no possible becoming-minority of man and that the becoming-woman is a privileged position for the minority-consciousness of all. Man as the privileged referent of

subjectivity, the standard-bearer of the norm/law/logos represents the majority, that is, the dead heart of the system. The consequences are on the one hand that masculinity is antithetical to the process of becoming and it can only be the site of deconstruction or critique; and on the other hand, the becoming-woman is a fundamental step in the process of becoming, for both and for all sexes.

This creates an unresolved knot in Deleuze's relation to the becoming-woman and the feminine, which I have analysed extensively elsewhere (Braidotti 2002; 2006; 2011b). It has to do with a double pull, between on the one hand empowering a generalised 'becoming-woman' as the pre-requisite for all other becomings and, on the other hand, calling for its transcendence and worrying about the potentially despotic effect of such a priority or pole position attributed to women.

On the one hand, the becoming-minority/nomad/molecular/bodies without organs/woman starts from the feminine; on the other hand, it is posited as the general figuration for a process of transformation. Deleuzian becomings emphasise the generative powers of complex and multiple states of transition between, beneath and beyond the metaphysical anchoring points that are the masculine and feminine. But they do not quite solve the issue of their interaction.

Deleuze's work displays a great empathy with the feminist assumption that we have to start from the critique of phallogocentrism. Insofar as woman is positioned dualistically – as the other – in this system, she is annexed to the phallus, albeit by negation. In this sense and in this sense only can it be said that sexual difference is the primary axis of differentiation and therefore must be given priority. On the other hand, nomadic theory aims at a tendency to dilute metaphysical difference into a multiple and undifferentiated becoming. Which prompts my question: what feminist politics follow from nomadic theory's emphasis on nomadic becomings?

Deleuze comes down on the side of basic feminist epistemological distinction between Woman as representation and women as concrete agents of experience, and ends up making analogous distinctions internal to the category of woman herself. Hence also Deleuze's explicit support for a feminist political position:

It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity [...]. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 276)

In spite of such evident support for women's uphill struggle towards achieving full subjectivity, with human and citizenship rights, Deleuze opposes to the 'majority/sedentary/molar' vision of woman as the structural operator of the phallogocentric system the woman as 'becoming/minority/molecular/nomadic'.

The nomadic or intensive horizon is a sexuality 'beyond gender' in the sense of being dispersed, not binary, multiple, not dualistic, interconnected, not dialectical and in a constant flux, not fixed. This idea is expressed in figurations like: 'polysexuality', the 'molecular woman' and the 'bodies without organs' to which Deleuze's de-phallic style actively contributes. This is nomadic queer theory.

Thus, the becoming-woman is necessarily the starting point insofar as the over-emphasis on masculine sexuality; compulsory reproductive heterosexuality; the persistence of sexual dualism and the positioning of woman as the privileged figure of otherness, are constitutive of Western subject-positions. In other words, 'becoming-woman' triggers off the deconstruction of phallic identity through a set of deconstructive steps that re-trace backwards, so as to undo them, different stages of the social-symbolic construction of this and other differences.

#### IV. Deleuze's Critique of Feminism

Deleuze uses also his theory of the becoming-woman of women as the basis for a critique of identity-based feminist politics. All transformative politics should be about becoming-minor and to dissolve the subject 'woman' into a series of processes geared towards a generalised and 'gender-free' becoming. In other words, it is important to keep in mind the broader picture in order to avoid micro-despotisms and the repetition of power concentrations within the minorities.

Feminists, in other words, are conceptually mistaken, though their political heart may be in the right place, when they argue for a specifically feminine sexuality: exclusive emphasis on the feminine is restrictive. Deleuze suggests that feminists should instead draw on the multi-sexed structure of the subject and reclaim all the sexes of which women have been deprived:

For us [...] there are as many sexes as there are terms in symbiosis, as many differences as elements contributing to a process of contagion. We know that many beings pass between a man and a woman, they come from different worlds, are born on the wind, form thizomes around roots; they cannot be understood in terms of production, only in terms of becoming. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 242)

These different degrees of becoming are diagrams of subject-positions, typologies of ideas, politically informed maps, variations on intensive states. Multiplicity does not reproduce one single model—as in the Platonic mode—but rather creates and multiplies differences.

Ultimately, what Deleuze finds objectionable in feminist theory is that it perpetuates flat repetitions of dominant values or identities, which it claims to have repossessed dialectically. This amounts to perpetuate reactive, molar or majority-thinking: in Nietzsche's scale of values, feminists have a slave-morality. For Deleuze, feminists would be subversive if, in their becoming, they contributed both socially and theoretically to constructing a non-Oedipal woman, by freeing the multiple possibilities of desire meant as positivity and affirmation. This new general configuration of the feminine as the post-, or rather un-Oedipal subject of becoming, is explicitly opposed to what Deleuze constructs as the feminist configuration of a new universal based on female specificity or rather an exacerbation of the sexual dichotomy. The former aims at de-essentialised forms of radical embodiment; the latter to strategically re-essentialised embodiment.

#### V. Sexuality beyond Gender

In contrast to Deleuze's ambivalence about feminist politics, feminism strikes a clearer note. Nomadic feminism stresses the theft of the complex, polymorphous and perverse sexuality—in women and in all—and its reduction through the capture of a majoritarian scheme of sexuality that privileges heterosexuality.

As a consequence, nomadic feminism, resting on a relational monistic political ontology, shifts the focus away from the sex/gender distinction, bringing sexuality as process into full focus. The redundancy of the sex/gender distinction for feminist philosophies of the subject had been noted by English-speaking feminists working in Continental philosophy, like Gatens (1991), Grosz (1999), Butler (1991) and Brardotti (1991). Contemporary feminist philosophers argue the same case on different grounds. A renewed emphasis on sexuality, as opposed to classical or queer theories of sex and gender, emerges from the shift of perspective introduced by matter-realist feminism.

In what could be described as a classical exposition of Deleuzian feminism, Gatens and Lloyd (1999) argue that the political ontology of monism, which Deleuze adapts from Spinoza, offers some relevant opportunities for feminist theory. Mind-body parallelism, as opposed to Cartesian dualism, can be rendered in terms of simultaneous effects.



These entail the embodiment of mind as much as the 'embodiment of matter'. There is only one substance: an intelligent flesh-mind-matter compound. This implies that bodily differences are both a banality and a cornerstone in the process of differentiation of variation. The resonances between this feminist project and Deleuze's nomadism are many and many-fold.

Lloyd argues that the parallelism between mind and body and the intrinsically affective or conatus-driven vision of the subject implies that different bodies have different degrees and levels of power and force of understanding. This has clear implications for sexual difference. Given that, on a Spinozist account, the mind is nothing more than the actual idea of the body, sexual difference can reach into the mind as the mind is not independent of the body in which it is situated. If bodies are differently sexed, so are minds.

Lloyd emphasises the extent to which Spinoza recognises that there are distinctive powers and pleasures associated with different kinds of bodies, which then are enacted in different minds. Thus, a female body cannot fail to affect a female mind. Spinoza's mind is not neutral and this, according to Lloyd, has great potential for a feminist theory of female subjectivity that aims at avoiding the essentialist trap of a genuine female nature, while rejecting the idea of the neutrality of the mind.

Although Spinoza gives in to the traditionally subordinate vision of women of his times, and thus excludes women from the polity, Lloyd is careful in pointing out the liberatory potential of Spinoza's monistic vision of the embodied nature of the mind. Its worth can be measured most effectively in comparison with the Cartesian dualistic vision of the mind-body dichotomy, which historically proved more damaging for women than his idea of the sex-neutrality of the mind.

What a female nature is must consequently be determined in each case and cannot be spelled out a priori, because each embodied compound has its own specificity. This is due to the fact that, in a neo-Spinozist perspective, embodied subjects are constituted by encounters with other forces in patterns of affinity or dissonance that gives them very clear configurations which cannot be known in advance.

By extension, they also expose the absurdity of any political project that would aim at 'undoing gender' (Butler 2004). To undo gender would mean to unmake bodies, and much as this aspiration fits in with the consumerist logic of advanced bio-capitalism, it makes very little sense politically.

If for Lloyd and Gatens sexual difference is not a problematic issue, in that it remains of great relevance, for Claire Colebrook (2000) it

is no longer a problem. Sexual difference poses the question of the conditions of possibility for thought as a self-originating system of representation of itself as the ultimate presence. Thus, sexual difference produces subjectivity in general.

According to Colebrook, Deleuze's emphasis on the productive and positive force of difference is troublesome for feminist theory insofar as it challenges the foundational value of sexual difference (Colebrook 2000; 2002). The advantage of a Deleuzian approach is that the emphasis shifts from the metaphysics to the ethics of sexual difference. Deleuze's brand of philosophical pragmatism questions whether sexual difference demands a metaphysics at all.

Colebrook wants to shift the grounds of the debate away from metaphysical foundations to a philosophy of immanence that stresses the need to create new concepts. This creative gesture is a way of responding to the given, to experience, and is thus linked to the notion of the event. The creation of concepts is itself experience or experimentation. There is a double implication here: firstly, that philosophy need not be seen as the master discourse or the unavoidable horizon of thought; artistic and scientific practices have their role to play as well. Secondly, given that ethical questions do not require a metaphysics, the feminist engagement with concepts need not be critical but can be inventive and creative. In other words, experimenting with thinking is what we all need to learn.

This emphasis on the productive nature of desire and the view of sexuality as the vital force that de-territorialises gender and its binary system is the signature of nomadic feminism. Sexuality as the complex, multi-layered force that produces encounters, resonances and relations of all sorts cannot be contained in the power (*potestas*) structures of the dialectic masculine/feminine. It is rather an active space of empowerment (*potentia*) and becoming that is capable of producing spaces of intimacy, experimentation and relation to others.

Sexual difference no longer coincides with the rather narrow field of anatomical and sociological differences between the sexes. This is what I analysed elsewhere (Braidotti 2011a) as the first level of difference. Nor does it stop at level two of the differentiation process – the differences among different categories of women and three – the differences *within* each singular woman. A nomadic process of sexual differing is a permanent fracture and it is a block of becoming positioned outside the gender system, which mobilises untapped forces and energies and sets them to the task of sustaining processes of de-territorialisation.

Given that the only ethical question is the activation of affirmative and sustainable alternatives – then the force of an ethical relation consists

in supporting the actualisation of virtual possibilities geared to the empowerment of higher and larger forms of interrelation with multiple others. If 'empower us to act' is the ethical injunction of nomadic subjectivity, then sexuality as one of the strongest modes of encounter is the necessary premise to the enlargement of one's fields of perception and capacity to encounter and sustain the impact with others. The vitalist force of matter-realist feminism locates sexuality as a concrete and vital resource to both de-centre the individual ego and de-link desire from the restrictions of a gender system that is instrumental to the bio-political management and disciplining of bodies.

The wager is how to bring sexuality to allow the unfolding of ever-intensifying affects and thus to construct sustainable futures of and as becoming-other. Desire as the productive, de-territorialising force of radical encounters is post-identitarian and impersonal. It designs new landscapes of relationality around the face of the beloved, and thus it cannot be restricted to the mere human persona that enacts it. What is needed as the end result of the shift of perspective is a post-individual and non-anthropocentric theory of desire that may do justice to the complexity of materialist and vital nomadic subjects of becoming.

## VI. Conclusion: For Nomadic Feminism

Feminist theory constitutes one of the most significant theoretical innovations, in what later became known as 'radical immanence' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Let me spell out the main reasons for this parallel.

To start with, let us look at the ethical and political underpinnings of Deleuzian feminism. Feminist theory and practice situates embodiment and hence sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core values in the discussion about the politics of contemporary non-unitary subjects. This feminist philosophical critique of political subjectivity rests on two ideas. The first is the emphasis on the embodied and embedded nature of the subject, which results in unlimited confidence in lived experience. This translates in the politics of everyday life and renewed interest in the present. One has to think global, but act local. The second key argument is a focus on the dynamic interaction of Sameness and Difference. 'Difference' is not a neutral category, but a term that indexes exclusion from the entitlements to subjectivity. The equation of difference with perforation is built into the tradition which defines the Subject as coinciding with/being the same as consciousness, rationality and self-regulating ethical behaviour. This results in making entire

sections of living beings into marginal and disposable bodies: these are the sexualised, racialised and naturalised others (Braidotti 2006).

Equally central is the focus on power as both restrictive (*potestas*) and productive (*potentia*) force. It also means that power formations are both monuments and documents—as Foucault teaches us—in that they are expressed in social institutions and in systems of representation, narratives and modes of identification (1975). They are both bound historical categories and flows of boundless energy—as Deleuze and Guattari teach us. Far from resulting in a suspension of political and moral action, the subtlety of this analysis of power becomes the starting point to elaborate suitable sites of political activity. Nomadic thought is the socio-political branch of complexity theory.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the politics of happiness or of feeling at home in one's culture—far from being a regression into narcissism—is an incisive comment on the mindless confrontation of dominant morality and social order. As such it encourages the counter-actualisation of different political economies of affect and desire. The pursuit of political felicity is collective, not individualistic and free of profit motivations, being elevated to the gratuitous tasks of constructing social horizons of hope.

This combination of critical acumen and creative potency is what I value most in feminist practice. Feminism put it clearly by voicing the need for a 'double-edged vision' of critique and creativity (Kelly 1979) that goes beyond complaint and denunciation, to offer empowering alternatives.

The ethical lesson of feminism is that there is no logical necessity to link political subjectivity to oppositional consciousness and reduce them both to negativity. Political activism can be all the more effective if it disengages the process of consciousness-raising from negativity and connects it instead to creative affirmation. In terms of the crucial relationship to sameness and Difference, this means that the dialectical opposition is replaced by the recognition of the ways in which otherness prompts, mobilises and engenders actualisation of virtual potentials. These are by definition not contained in the present conditions and cannot emerge from them. They have to be brought about or generated creatively by a qualitative leap of the collective imaginary.

Feminism draws a crucial distinction between the political and politics. Feminist theorists—from Beauvoir (1949) to Haraway (1990) and beyond—have distanced themselves from the notorious illusion of revolutionary purity, which engenders inevitable flirtations with violence. They were equally suspicious, however, of the universalist

humanistic assumptions and the claim to human rights, or the self-correcting validity of human reason. They stress instead the need for a change of scale, to unveil power relations where they are most effective and invisible: in the specific locations of one's own intellectual and social practice. One has to start from micro-instances of embodied and embedded self and the complex web of social relations that compose the self.

This double emphasis on vulnerability to sovereign power on the one hand and despotic power relations on the other is crucial to a nomadic approach to the political. Activism as a frame of mind consists in connecting philosophy not so much to Politics – as in '*LA politique*' (organised or Majoritarian politics), as to the political – '*LE politique*' (the political movement in its diffuse, nomadic and rhizomic forms of becoming).

This distinction between politics and the political is of crucial importance; in the work of Michel Foucault it is postulated along the double axis of power as restrictive or coercive (*potestas*) and as empowering and productive (*potentia*). The former focuses on the management of civil society and its institutions, the latter on the transformative experimentation with new arts of existence and ethical relations. Politics is made of progressive emancipatory measures predicated on chronological continuity, whereas the political is the radical self-styling that requires the circular time of critical praxis.

In an even more grounded and ascetic tone, Deleuze and Guattari set the desire for transformations or becomings at the centre of the agenda. The crucial distinction for nomadic theory is that of the axes of time and the qualitative degree of affectivity they sustain. Politics is postulated on Chronos – the necessarily linear time of institutional deployment of norms and protocols. It is a reactive and majority-bound enterprise that is often made of flat repetitions and predictable reversals that may alter the balance but leave basically untouched the structure of power.

The political, on the other hand, is postulated on the axis of Aion – the time of becoming and of affirmative critical practice. It is minor and it aims at the counter-actualisation of alternative states of affairs in relation to the present. Based on the principle that we do not know what a body can do, the becoming-political ultimately aims at transformations in the very structures of subjectivity. It is about engendering and sustaining processes of 'becoming-minor'. This specific sensibility combines a strong historical memory with consciousness and the desire for resistance. It rejects the sanctimonious, dogmatic tone of dominant ideologies, Left or Right of the political spectrum,

in favour of a production of joyful acts of transformation. The spontaneous and creative aspects of this practice combine with a profound form of asceticism, that is to say, with an ethics of non-profit to build upon micro-political instances of activism, avoiding over-arching generalisations. This humble yet experimental approach to changing our collective modes of relation to the environment, social and other, is the most pragmatic manifestation of the politics of radical immanence.

The feminist movement is the perfect example of the political in the nomadic sense of the term. Of all the social movements of that period, the women's movement in particular illustrates the self-organising capacity, the organisational energy and the visionary force of a leaderless structure. Historically, the second feminist wave of the 1970s not only was based on the critique of the false universality of the liberal democratic system and the failed promises of its exclusionary humanism; it also interrogated the entrenched masculinism of the allegedly radical Left and of its leaders. Propelled by collectively shared aspirations to freedom, the respect of diversity, the desire for social and symbolic justice, and the 'politics of everyday life', 1970s feminism was a passionate, humorous and politically rigorous movement. Disrespectful of dominant norms, but aware of its responsibility for the masses of women whose rage and vision it embodied, the collective endeavour of the women's movement is one of the most successful political experiments of the twentieth century.

Nomadic feminism is built on the politics of desire as the positive affirmation of a collectively shared longing for plenitude and the actualisation of one's potential, regardless of sex, race, class or sexual preferences. A political form of felicity, this radical aspiration to freedom aimed to confront and demolish the established, institutionalised form of gender identities and the power relations they actualise. The aim of nomadic feminism is the actualisation of a virtual feminine, the structures and parameters of which are to be negotiated and sustained collectively.

Nomadic feminism also renews the task of critical theory. Deleuze (1953; 1962) redefines philosophy in the 'problematic' mode as the constant questioning of the humanistic 'image of thought' at work in most of our ideas with the aim to destabilise them in the 'nomadic' mode.

Deleuze redefines philosophy instead as a radical form of immanence, thus stressing the affective political passions which sustain the theoretical process. Accordingly, Deleuzian feminists are critical of rationality as the dominant vision of the subject and as a human ideal, but, rejecting both the plaintive mode of nostalgia and the glorification of the aporetic,



nomadic feminisms propose instead a radical redefinition of thinking as the activity that consists in the act of creation of new forms of thought and of collective experiments with ways of actualising them.

This engagement with the present – and the spirit of the times – sets the political agenda in a variety of realms, ranging from sexuality and kinship systems to religious and discursive practices. The analyses of these themes are transmitted through narratives – mythologies or fictions, which I have renamed as ‘figurations’ (Braidotti 2002; 2006), or cartographies of the present. A cartography is a politically informed map of one’s historical and social locations, to enable the analysis of situated formations of power and hence the elaboration of adequate forms of resistance. Michel Foucault worked extensively on the notion of genealogy or counter-memories as a tool to draw the ‘diagrams of the present’ in his analysis of the micro-physics of power in post-industrial societies (1975). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari also stressed the importance of immanent analyses of the singular actualisations of concrete power-formations (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Independently of these philosophical notions, feminism also pioneered this method through the practice of the politics of locations (Rich 1985) as a method for grounding activism. It also perfected the strategy of positive renaming and re-signification of the subject. A location is an embedded and embodied memory: it is a set of counter-memories, which are activated by the resisting thinkers against the grain of the dominant social representations of subjectivity. A location is a materialist temporal and spatial site of co-production of the subjects in their diversity. Locations provide the ground for political and ethical accountability. Remembrance, cartographies of locations, political (dis-)identifications and strategic re-configurations are the tools for consciousness-raising which were devised by transformative epistemologies such as feminism and race theory.

In a nomadic perspective, the ‘feminine’ is neither one essentialised entity nor an immediately accessible one: it is rather both an embodied and embedded location and a site of intensive becoming. It is the effect of a project, a political and conceptual project of transcending the traditional (‘Molar’) subject position of Woman. This transcendence, however, occurs through the flesh, into embodied locations and not in a flight away from them.

Femininity is caught in the double bind of late postmodernity by being simultaneously ‘Other’ (of the same) and fully mainstream and integrated in the Majority. Woman today is both the pathetic and a despotic face of white femininity and the scapegoat sacrificial victim of a

phallogocentric political ontology that requires her symbolic absence and her social marginalisation. Becoming-nomadic points towards fruitful paths of qualitative transformation.

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