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A Critical Cartography of Feminist Post-postmodernism

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The Return of the Masters' Narratives

At the end of postmodernism, in an era that experts fail to define in any meaningful manner because it swings between nostalgia and euphoria, in a political economy of fear and frenzy,[1] new master narratives have taken over. They look rather familiar: on the one hand the inevitability of market economies as the historically dominant form of human progress,[2] and on the other biological essentialism, under the cover of 'the selfish gene'[3] and new evolutionary biology and psychology. Franklin aptly names the latter: the genetic social imaginary.[4]

The common trait of these new master narratives is the return of different forms of determinism, be it the neo-liberal or the genetic brand: the former defends the superiority of capitalism, the latter the despotic authority of the DNA. Their joint impact has caused both inflation and reification of the notion of 'difference'. For instance, on the right of the political spectrum in Europe today, contemporary neo-liberalism is a differential ideology: it celebrates rather than denies differences. In this conservative discourse, however, differences of identity, culture, religion, abilities and opportunities are defined in a very deterministic manner. They get attached to firm beliefs about national, regional, provincial or at times town-based parameters of identity formation (see the French National Front, the Italian Northern 'lega', the Vlaamse Blok and, in the Netherlands, the Pim Fortuijn phenomenon). Such firm beliefs about national and cultural identities are organised in a hierarchical scale of cultural development, which is not only deterministic but also exclusive and xenophobic. In this context, 'difference' is indexed on a hierarchy of values which is governed by binary oppositions: 'us and them' on a micro, as well as a macro scale. What this hierarchical differential ideology conveys is the necessity to reassert differences as markers of specific forms of cultural — and even civilisational — belonging. In other words, the reassertion of differences introduces structural patterns of mutual exclusion at the national, regional, provincial or even more local level. These master narratives are not 'new' in any historical or theoretical sense, but they have gained a renewal of interest and a new momentum in the present context, under the combined impact of the new technologies and the triumph of the market economy.

Nothing expresses this cultural climate better than the media's insistence on celebrating, with an insuppressible glee, 'the end of ideologies'. For the last 20 years I have sat through regular waves of celebration of the multiple deaths of every available 'ideology'. So much so, that I am almost tempted to define ideologies as movements that never cease to end. When will a new one actually be born? The emphatic reiteration of the decline of

'ideology' finds its latest incarnation in the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall. It inevitably translates into a one-way political model, namely that all programs of change have failed, especially Marxism, communism, socialism and feminism—hence people can now relax and carry on with the normal task of minding their own business. A hasty and, in my opinion fallacious, dismissal of radicalism results in reasserting the banality of self-interest, as a lesser and necessary evil. This moral apathy is the necessary component of neo-conservative political liberalism.

Alain Touraine describes this phenomenon as *la pensée unique*, that is to say a de facto hegemony of a neo-liberal orthodoxy, which denies 'the existence of autonomous social actors capable of influencing political decision-making'.[5] Arguing forcefully that globalisation has not dissolved our collective capacity for political action, Touraine calls for renewed social activism. Cultural identities and legal citizenship constitute the 'immaterial' elements of global capitalism[6] and therefore can also provide the sites for active forms of political resistance. In the same political spirit, Donna Haraway stresses the quasi-monopoly exercised upon our cultures by: 'the status of bio-technology in the transition from the economics and the biology of the Cold War era to the New World Order's secular theology of enhanced competitiveness and ineluctable market forces'.[7]

Paradoxes, however, multiply all along the way. The very same post-industrial culture that triumphantly asserts the end of ideology, defined as the desire for social justice, simultaneously frustrates and defeats the very conservative dreams that it so perversely aroused. For instance, the much-celebrated phenomenon of globalisation and of its technologies accomplishes a magician's trick: it combines the euphoric celebration of *new* technologies, *new* economy, *new* lifestyles, *new* generations of both human and technological gadgets, *new* wars and *new* weapons with the utter social rejection of change and transformation. In a totally schizophrenic double pull the consumistic and socially enhanced faith in the *new* is supposed not only to fit in with but also actively to induce the rejection of in-depth changes. The potentially innovative, de-territorialising impact of the new technologies is hampered and turned down by the reassertion of the gravitational pull of old and established values.[8]

The other complex feature of these new master narratives is therefore the ability to take 'differences' into a spin, making them proliferate with an aim to ensure maximum profit.[9] Advanced capitalism is a difference engine—a multiplier of de-territorialised differences, which are packaged and marketed under the labels of 'new, hybrid and multiple or multicultural identities'. It is important to explore how this logic triggers a vampiric consumption of 'others', in contemporary social and cultural practice. From fusion cooking to 'world music', the consumption of 'differences' is a dominant cultural practice. Jackie Stacey, in her analysis of the new organic food industry,[10] argues that we literally eat the global economy. Paul Gilroy reminds us that we also wear it, listen to it and watch it on our many screens, on a daily basis.[11]

Fortunately, otherness remains also as the site of production of counter-subjectivities. Feminist, post-colonial, black, youth, gay, lesbian and trans-gender counter-cultures are positive examples of these emergent subjectivities which are 'other' only in relation to an assumed and implicit 'Same'. How to disengage difference or otherness from the dialectics of Sameness is therefore the challenge. Intersecting lines of 'otherness' map out the location of what used to be the 'constitutive others' of the unitary subject of classical humanism. They mark the sexualised bodies of women; the racialised bodies of ethnic or native others and the naturalised bodies of animals and earth others. They are the interconnected facets of structural otherness defined on a hierarchical scale of pejorative differences. The historical era of globalisation is the meeting ground on which sameness

and otherness or centre and periphery confront each other and redefine their interrelation. The changing roles of the former 'others' of modernity, namely women, natives and natural or earth others, has turned them into powerful sites of social and discursive transformation. Let us remember, with Foucault,[12] that power is a multi-layered concept, which covers both negative or confining methods (*potestas*) as well as empowering or affirmative technologies (*potentia*). This means that the paths of transformation engendered by the 'difference engine' of advanced capitalism are neither straight nor predictable. Rather, they compose a zigzagging line of internally contradictory options. Thus, human bodies caught in the spinning machine of multiple differences at the end of postmodernity become simultaneously disposable commodities to be vampirised and also decisive agents for political and ethical transformation. How to tell the difference between the two modes of 'becoming other' is the task of cultural and political theory and practice.

Neo-liberal Post-feminism

In such a political context, gender politics is dislocated. In institutional settings, feminist activism is replaced by the less confrontational policy of gender mainstreaming. In society at large, the 'post-feminist' wave gives way to neo-conservatism in gender relations. The new generations of corporate-minded businesswomen and show-business icons disavow any debt or allegiance to the collective struggles of the rest of their gender while the differences in status, access and entitlement among women are increasing proportionally. Even in the so-called advanced world, women are the losers of the current technological revolutions.

Post-feminist neo-liberalism is a variation on the theme of historical amnesia in that it expresses the rejection of the sense of a common connection to other women. Its defining features are the following: firstly, it considers financial success or status as the sole indicator of the status of women. Social failure is accordingly perceived as a lack of emancipation as money alone is taken as the means of freedom. Secondly, it celebrates the global value of profit as the motor of women's progress, in keeping with neo-liberal principles. This implies that even the most basic social democratic principle of solidarity is misconstrued as old-fashioned welfare support and dismissed accordingly.

Thirdly, post-feminist liberal individualism is profoundly ethnocentric: it takes the form of a contradictory and racist position, which argues along civilisation or ethnic lines.[13] It is complicitous with a neo-liberal discourse about white supremacy, namely that our women (Western, Christian, mostly white and raised in the tradition of secular Enlightenment) are already liberated and thus do not need any more social incentives or emancipatory policies. 'Their women', however, (non-Western, non-Christian, mostly not white and alien to the Enlightenment tradition) are still backwards and need to be targeted for special emancipatory social actions or even more belligerent forms of enforced 'liberation'. This simplistic position, defended by people as different as Cherie Blair in Britain, Oriana Fallacy in Italy and Ayan Hirsi Ali in the Netherlands, to name but a few, reinstates a worldview based on colonial lines of demarcation. It fails to see the great grey areas in between the pretentious claim that feminism has already succeeded in the West and the equally false statement that feminism is non-existent outside this region. As far as I am concerned, those in-between degrees of complexity are the only ones that matter and they should be put at the centre of the agenda. This position fails to take into account, for instance, the precious, patient and pragmatic work accomplished by the women's movements in the world over the last 30 years, also and especially in the non-Western world, such as the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA).

Neo-liberal ethnocentrism entails some formidable lapses of memory, which take the form of ignorance of the history of women's struggles and of feminist genealogies. This is expressed, for instance, in the transformation into feminist heroines of women who had explicitly chosen to keep distant from the women's movements in the radical years. This approach has its creative moments, when a posteriori feminist credentials are granted to strong individual personalities, mostly women artists, like Louise Bourgeois, Yoko Ono or, for that matter, Madonna. It can also empower public figures who happen to be women, like Madeleine Albright, Benhazir Bhutto or Princess Diana. I would draw the line at Mother Teresa, but some feminist friends have reprimanded me for this lapse into old-fashioned secularism.

The tendency to fabricate new feminist heroines becomes more problematic, however, when it flattens out all other political considerations in order to stress the individual value of women like Margaret Thatcher or Condoleeza Rice, independently of their politics and values. In other words, the post-feminist master narrative of neo-liberalism has re-introduced the syndrome of 'the exceptional woman', which was a recognised *topos* before the women's movement introduced more egalitarian principles of interconnection, solidarity and teamwork. The pernicious part of this syndrome is that it not only denies the history of women's struggles but also fosters a new sense of isolation among women, and hence new forms of vulnerability.

Even more problematic is the next step in this process, when the quest for strong and exceptional figureheads stretches back in time, causing revisionist re-writing of history. Right-wing women like Eva Peron are being re-formatted as feminist heroines in contemporary popular culture. The most blatant case to date is the reappraisal of the German Nazi sympathiser and filmmaker Leni Riefenstal and the attempts to pass her off as a model of emancipation. A convinced and unrepentant Nazi, but also a film director and artist of great talent, after the fall of the Nazis, Riefenstal was singled out for the de-Nazification program and her work was banned. She was made to pay for her mistakes far more than Martin Heidegger and other Nazi supporters. Nevertheless, I feel moral repulsion and strong political opposition to a single-minded reappraisal of this character solely on the ground of gender politics. Riefenstal's Nazi sympathies, her personal bond to Hitler, her refusal to acknowledge or apologise for her responsibilities as the main image-maker of the Third Reich, and her use of concentration camp prisoners as stand-ins is some of her lighter entertainment features are objectionable on all counts. Moreover, the current reappraisal of Riefenstal and her fascist aesthetics perpetuates both the myth and the practice of white supremacy under the spurious guise of the emancipation of women.[14] To disengage feminist politics and genealogies from the issue of racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, domination and exclusion to the point of murderous violence is complicitous with the crimes of the totalitarian regime that Riefenstal helped to create. Individualism pushed to such extremes breeds horror.

Neo-liberal post-feminism is oblivious to the structural injustices that are built into the globalisation process. It thus contributes to the polarised geo-political situation of women. This can be rendered through the caricature of world politics today in the shape of, on the one hand, an allegedly 'feminised', ageing and liberated Western world—the emblem of which is the European Union, with a more masculine United States of America counterpart to supervise this 'clash of civilisations' through its military power and its supreme contempt of international law. In opposition to it there is a more virile, youthful and masculine non-Western world, of which Islamic culture is the standard-bearer. Such a clash of civilisations is postulated and fought out on women's bodies as bearers of authentic ethnic identity. One of the recent emblems of this is the Burka-clad bodies of the

Afghan women in defence of whom such an anti-abortionist, arch-conservative and anti-feminist president as George W. Bush claimed to launch one of his many commercially driven wars of conquest. What cynic would believe the claim that the war was fought to help out the poor oppressed masses of Islamic women? And yet this is the political discourse that circulates in the global economical world disorder: one in which sexual difference defined as the specificity of women's condition is again the terrain on which power politics is postulated. In a context of racism and xenophobia, this type of gender politics results in mutual and respective claims about authentic and unitary female identity on the part of the 'liberated' West and of its allegedly traditionalist opponents. They are mirror images of each other.

The European Dimension

The European Union is written into the neo-liberal master narrative and social text in a number of contradictory ways. The European Union is a new horizon, albeit a very controversial and paradoxical one. As part of the global economy the European Union represents Europe's attempt to create an economic block of its own. As a progressive project, on the other hand, it is an attempt to move the European member states beyond the century-old virus of European nationalism.

Over the last 15 years the feminist communities in Europe have invested a lot of energy into constructing effective networks for gender and women's studies and have contributed to the political struggle for a progressive European social space.[15]

As a major player within the global economy, the European Union is positioned simultaneously as the main ally and the main alternative to the American hegemony in the globalised world. This alone makes the question of defining the 'new' European identity into a very contested notion. The European Union that emerges from the Constitution that Giscard d'Estaing and his 'wise white men' drafted can be seen as a variation on the theme of a self-appointed centre which universalises its own reading of 'civilisation'. The practice of European Union regulations on issues as wide ranging as free education, the right to privacy and gay rights, on the other hand, constitutes a solid social democratic space. This relatively progressive project not only counteracts the United States of America on these key issues but also makes a deliberate attempt to distance itself from Europe's former role as a self-appointed centre.

In my perspective, the process of European unification is a post-nationalistic project which involves a critique of the self-appointed missionary role of Europe as the alleged centre of the world. It consequently promotes a re-grounding of this false universalism into a more situated, local perspective. Feminist epistemologists, especially Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway,[16] have produced the most significant critiques of the false universalism of the European subject of knowledge: science as white man's burden. They have also offered powerful alternative accounts both of subjectivity and of an enlarged sense of scientific objectivity in terms of a situated brand of materialism. By analogy with the critique of philosophical rationality on the part of women philosophers, the new European Union implements a critique of Euro-centrism from within Europe. They are both forms of affirmative deconstruction. This amounts to a re-grounding of Europe no longer as the centre but as one of the many peripheries in the world today.[17] This process of consciousness-raising is a sober awakening to the concrete particularity of the European situation. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the leader of the Green Party in the European Parliament, recently stated that if we want to make this European business work, we really must start from the assumption that Europe is the specific periphery where

we live and that we must take responsibility for it.[18] Imagining anything else would be a repetition of that flight into abstraction for which our culture is (in)famous: at best, it may procure us the benefits of escapism; at worst, the luxury of guilt. We have to start from where we are. This is a plea for lucidity and for embedded and embodied perspectives.

In a progressive perspective, 'the European Union' today means a site of possible political resistance against nationalism, xenophobia and racism, which are endemic to European nationalism. I read this in terms of a becoming-minoritarian of Europe within the post-nationalist project of the European Union. This political strategy supports the claim of European identity as an open and multi-layered project, and therefore as a space of critical resistance to hegemonic identities of all kinds. I refer to this kind of identity as 'nomadic'. Being a nomadic European subject means to be critical of unitary, hegemonic and imperial notions of Euro-centrism. It situates the subject in transit within different identity-formations, but sufficiently anchored to a historical position to accept responsibility for it.

Let me make it perfectly clear that this very definition of nomadic subjects is spoken from, and speaks of, the specific location I have chosen to make myself accountable for. It is an embedded European account of my own traditions or genealogies. In other words, it is only one of many possible locations—in terms of genealogical consciousness and the related forms of accountability—for the kinds of power relations that go with the Continent of Europe. This is neither the only, nor is it the best, of all possible locations. I want to present this kind of embodied genealogical accountability as my prelude to critical political and theoretical practice today.

My position on philosophical nomadism and its corollary: the becoming-minoritarian of Europe is quite the opposite of the metaphorisation processes that Clifford defines as 'pseudouniversal cosmopolitan bravado'.[19] Rather, it is a situated and highly politicised attempt to rethink the subject in terms of his/her embodied singularity. The aim of this affirmative (that is, non-aporetic) deconstruction is to undo the structures of phallo-logocentric power, as Irigaray would phrase it, or the voice of the Majority, as Deleuze would put it, and to subvert it. The becoming-minoritarian, or becoming-nomadic is the pattern of subversion, which is open to both the empirical members of the majority (the 'same') and to those of the minority (the 'others'). Both need to relinquish their ties, but they do so in dissymmetrical ways, respecting their specific histories and geo-political locations. As Deleuze and Guattari argue: the centre has to deconstruct its powers and let them lie, while the margins are the motor of active processes of becoming.

Nomadic Activism

To demonstrate the political efficacy of nomadic, post-nationalist European identity and multicultural citizenship, let me refer to some concrete practices. The first is the project of itinerant cross-border activism by women in former Yugoslavia. The project is called 'Trans-européennes' and in 2002 it assembled a caravan of itinerant militant feminists who travelled in a sort of pilgrimage through the sites and the territories of the Yugoslav war atrocities. The written and visual documents that followed this are very telling,[20] as they mark the persistent presence of the internally displaced people (IDP) throughout the territory of that ancient multicultural and intra-religious culture which was Yugoslavia. The insanity of extremist nationalism and the atrocities it entailed are exposed by the proliferation of internal borders among the different portions of that once-unified country. As the spokeswoman for the caravan writes, as they cross the border between Macedonia and Kosovo:

> We move off without knowing what we have just passed through: a checkpoint in a country at war? A border in a country at peace? A non-border between two non-countries? An emerging border between two emerging countries? The status, or lack of status, of Kosovo, or of any given territory, is strikingly reflected in the treatment of its borders. They exist mentally, even if they cannot be defined geo-politically or geographically, let alone physically, on the ground. We've just passed through ... we don't know what.[21]

This kind of contemporary nomadic activism combines two features that are crucial to my project of nomadic subjectivity: the notion of border crossings and that of embodied political practices. This nomadic brand of cross-border activism emphasises the fact that one of the striking features of the European space under the impact of the European Union is the return of a sharpened sense of territoriality and hence also of borders. This paradoxical development is in keeping with the schizoid logic of expansion and contraction, mobility and control, homogenisation and differentiation, which is definitional of the global world order. The construction of the new European social space marks a movement of both expansion and erasure of borders within the selected member countries.[22] It also means, however, the simultaneous return of borders and an increased form of control between the European Union and its non-member states. This schizoid and paradoxical re-spatialisation of the European territory under the impulse of the transnational entity of the European Union reflects the internally contradictory process of European unification itself. This can be seen simultaneously as the constitution of fortress Europe, but also as the effort aiming to end nationalistic disputes among European nation-states. In so far as the colonial legacy of European power is concerned, this same process can be read as the continuation of a self-fulfilling prophecy of Europe as the centre of civilisation. On the other hand, it can also be seen as the retreat from the imperialist fantasy into a more self-conscious effort to 'provincialize Europe'.[23]

The concrete existence of borders comes to bear on my argument about the 'becoming-minor' of Europe in the sense of a post-nationalist European space. This project rests on two sets of premises: both political and historical. Politically, on the Continent, the great resistance against European union, as well as the American suspicion of it, is a defensive response to a process that aims at overcoming the idea of European nation-states. The short-range effect of this process is a nationalistic wave of paranoia and xenophobic fears that is simultaneously anti-European and racist. Late postmodernity functions through the paradox of simultaneous globalisation and fragmentation. As if the law of excluded middle did not hold, one thing and its opposite can simultaneously be the case.[24] Thus, the expansion of European boundaries coincides with the resurgence of micro-nationalistic borders at all levels in Europe today. Unification coexists with the closing down of borders; the common European citizenship and the common currency coexist with increasing internal fragmentation and regionalism; a new, allegedly post-nationalist identity, coexists with the return of xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism.[25] The disintegration of the Soviet empire marks, simultaneously, the triumph of the advanced market economy and the return of tribal ethnic wars of the most archaic kind. Globalisation means both homogenisation and extreme differences of power.[26]

Strong opposition to the European Union is also voiced, however, by the nostalgic left, which seems to miss the topological foundations for international working-class solidarity. The cosmopolitan tradition of socialism militates against the European dimension: solidarity with the Third World always carries politically correct consensus, whereas an interest in European matters is often dismissed as vain and self-obsessive. Speaking as a

left-wing feminist intellectual, I must say that the left has often been unable to react with energy and vision to the historical evidence that is the dislocation of European supremacy and the coming of the American empire.[27] The left is also slow in understanding the non-dialectical and schizophrenic nature of advanced capitalism.[28]

The paradoxes of the new Europe are racially inflected as well, as we learn from the work of anti-racist feminists like Philomena Essed, Avtra Brah and others.[29]

The simultaneity of these internally contradictory efforts does not detract from their immense power and influence. It does call, however, for renewed and more appropriate forms of analysis. As is often the case, artists and activists respond more promptly to the call for more creativity than professional academics do. Thus, the Swiss artist and activist Ursula Biemann makes a point of investigating:

> the logic of particular human economic circuits in a changed world order: the female teleservice industries in India, illegal refugee boats entering the Mediterranean Sea, the European industrial prison complex, the smuggling paths across the Spanish–Moroccan border. These sites and non-sites speak of a re-articulation of the relations between social and territorial conditions.[30]

This results in a project that traces the routes of new mobile forms of subjectivity in the midst of the politics of global mobility. It produces an alternative relational geography, which assumes as the starting position the diasporic identity of multi-located subjects, and not a unitary subject position. Technology such as satellite surveillance and reconnaissance and border-patrolling video and electronic devices play a central role in Biemann's embodied and embedded new geography of power relations.

A concrete example of this approach is an art project called 'Frontera Sur RRUT—Europe's Southern border in real remote and virtual time'. It examines the implications created by the enlargement of the European Union in the Spanish-Moroccan enclave of Ceuta and Melilla, which happen to be physically located on the African continent. The project explores both the continuation of a colonial legacy of European occupation of Northern Africa, and the transformation of the Southern borders in order to uphold the new European identity. Again, concludes Biemann: 'Europe defines itself by its outermost edge', which in this case is signified by large shopping malls, symbols of both the wealth and the value system of the European Union.[31]

The real function of such a border is to ensure control over the mobility of population and goods, by being crossed. Biemann's art project provides a very detailed logbook of the various types of border crossings that occur in such a liminal, but central, space. These include the routes of container ships, the night boat rides taken by aspiring migrants, the itinerant paths of workers who pick vegetables for the European Union markets, without forgetting the domestic workers, the smugglers, the sex workers and 'the Moroccans who peel imported shrimps for Dutch companies in Tangier'.[32] This cartography draws a micro-geography of power relations that are simultaneously local and global. They rely for their transnational effects on very advanced technologies for the control of human mobility, which encompass radar and satellite technologies, and video and infra-red cameras in order to ensure the safe flow of mobility of the population. Intrinsic to this worldview is the concomitance of the legal and illegal aspects of the economic world order: transiting, entering, and smuggling go hand in hand for local inhabitants, tourists, military personnel, traders and others. To reduce some of these hastily to an 'illegal economy' is a failure to see the deep complicity and mutual implication of many of these lucrative activities. They all practise a cartography of struggle, by different means. On the

side of the legal economies, these transit areas are used mostly to process components and products meant for the European markets.

The second significant art project that Ursula Biemann draws our attention to is the 'Solid Sea Project' by the Multiplicity art collective. This addresses the Mediterranean Sea as an impenetrable block of neo-colonial economic relations, a non-transparent surface inhabited by tourists, immigrants, refugees, and military staff. It is an insurmountable stretch of water, hyper-controlled by both advanced technology and the official navy of the European Union member states. A solid space, strictly regulated in the forms of the crossings it allows. Oil-rig technicians, cruise-ship tourists, sailors, clandestine immigrants, fishermen, smugglers, military—all define their own paths across this solid surface. The art project traces the different routes of the various modes of crossings of this solid space, through a rationalised account of ports, military patrol routes, the itineraries of tobacco and other smugglers and also the complexities of the intricate system of cables and telecommunication networks that allows this system to function.

Feminist Theories Strike Back

In the post-postmodern context of conservatism and schizoid double-bind 'back to the future', feminist scholarship seems in fact to have intensified its efforts to come to grips with the present and to attempt to make a difference in it. It is a well-known fact that progress, in intellectual as in other walks of life, can be measured by the speed with which what was once blasphemy becomes a banality. Such is the case with feminist theorists' critiques of dominant theoretical models. For instance, when I defended my PhD dissertation on women and philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1981, having been previously trained as an undergraduate in Canberra by Genevieve Lloyd, I could pride myself in being able to cover the entire field of feminist scholarship on that topic. As late as the mid-1980s the critical overviews, anthologies and reference texts dealing with feminist philosophy were so few as to constitute collectors' items. By the dawn of the new millennium, however, they abound. The wealth, range and quality of feminist philosophers' output are so enormous that no single-authored synoptical overview is possible.[33] The quantitative growth of feminist philosophies within institutional centres as well as outside raises a qualitative question about the criteria of classification, the use of analytic categories and the canonisation processes. These are key methodology and terminology issues. The need for a systematic meta-discursive approach to the interdisciplinary field of feminist theory is among the top priorities of today, for philosophy[34] as well as women's studies as an established discipline.[35] What was once subversive is now mainstream.

Feminist philosophers have invented a new brand of materialism, of the embodied and embedded kind.[36] The pillar of contemporary feminist theory is a specific brand of situated epistemology (known earlier on as 'the practice of the politics of locations')[37] that attempts to account for the speed and simultaneity of transnational knowledge transfer (previously known as 'travelling theories'). In this regard, Biemann's artwork is emblematic. Feminist theories and practices have also emphasised the structural inequalities that emerge in the age of globalisation (also known as 'scattered hegemonies') and the need to safeguard women's interests, dignity and well-being amidst the dissemination of hybrid and fast-changing ethnic, racial, national and religious identities (a position known previously as 'feminist standpoint theory' or humanist feminism). In this regard, the political strategy of the Trans-européennes project is exemplary.

Feminist theory tries to do justice to both complexity and instability as operational concepts in the constitution of social subjects. It stresses the productive aspects of the dislocation and recasting of identities under advanced capitalism. Feminists have addressed conceptually and methodologically the issues related to (bio)-technological changes. Many stress the need to overcome the binary — nature – culture — and, more specifically, to undo the obsolete opposition — essentialism – constructivism. This has resulted in a new generation of scholars who are re-setting the theoretical agenda. Third-wave feminism is alive and well and has become highly articulate about its philosophical and methodological claims.[38] The long-overdue, global explosion of interest in the radical immanence of philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari[39] grows alongside the new wave of feminist science studies and epistemology.[40] The renewed interest in authors like Darwin[41] echoes in the rise of multiple micro-political investigations of 'life itself'.[42] This transversal convergence between philosophical anti-foundationalism and feminist science studies results in a post-humanist wave that radicalises the premises of postmodernist feminism.

Post-humanism[43] is a fast-growing new intersectional feminist alliance. It gathers the remains of post-structuralist anti-humanism and joins them with feminist reappraisals of contemporary genetics and molecular biology in a non-deterministic frame. Feminist cultural studies of science attempt to disengage biology from the structural functionalism of DNA-driven linearity and to veer it instead towards more creative patterns of evolutionary development.[44] Post-humanism also has some inhumane aspects, thus Vandana Shiva stresses the extent to which the bodies of the empirical subjects who signify difference (woman/native/earth or natural others) have become the disposable bodies of the global economy. A disposable body is a set of organs disengaged from organic unity, consistency or integrity: a collection of organs that is up for grabs.[45] Contemporary capitalism is indeed 'bio-political' in that it aims at controlling all that lives, as Foucault argues. From a feminist perspective, however, bio-power has already turned into a form of bio-piracy in that it aims at exploiting the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes and cells. The self-replicating vitality of living matter is targeted for consumption and commercial exploitation. Haraway recognises this trend and pays tribute to the martyrised body of onco-mouse,[46] as the farming ground for the new genetic revolution and manufacturer of spare parts for other species. Looked at from the angle of the disposable bodies of 'others' of the dominant subject, the ongoing new scientific revolution is neither very new nor particularly scientific.

The call is emerging for a post-secular approach to feminism, in keeping with or as an answer to the return of the different facets of a monotheistic God as a major political player in contemporary world affairs. While it forces a revision of the historical agnosticism of European feminism, this post-secular approach to activism remains distanced from both new age spirituality and the specular forms of fundamentalisms which dominate our public space.

As a variation on this theme, feminist thought has opted for a sort of optimism of the will and has taken a stand against both nostalgia and melancholia. It stresses instead the need for a positive ethics, both in the dominant Kantian mode[47] and in the alternative neo-Spinozist form.[48] It is an ethics based on the necessity of meeting the challenges of the contemporary transformations with creativity and courage. At the start of the third millennium, feminist intellectual and political energies are converging on the ethical project of contributing to the construction of social horizons of hope. The challenge is how to put the 'active' back into activism. In so far as this position entails accountability for one's historical situation, it expresses not only a sense of social responsibility but also an affect. Hannah Arendt used to call it: love for the world.

NOTES

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