Sexual Difference and Collective Identities:
The New Global Constellation

Postmodernism and globalization

In retrospect, the term *postmodernism*, which dominated discussions in the humanities and social sciences in the 1980s and announced a new spirit of the epoch, appears to have captured a play at the level of surfaces only. Postmodernism heralded the end of history, understood as a cumulative, progressive, coherent sequence; postmodernism announced the end of man and reduced the anthropological subject to a vanishing face in the sand, a disappearing signifier, a fractured, centerless creature; postmodernism trumpeted the end of philosophy and of master narratives of justification and legitimation. Certainly, there were distinctions between postmodernism and poststructuralism. While the former designates a movement with wide currency in many different fields, the latter refers to a specific moment in the evolution of high theory, in the European — but particularly French — context, when Marxist and psychoanalytic paradigms, as well as the models of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ferdinand de Saussure, which had dominated French theory construction from the early 1960s onward, came to an end. Judith Butler (1992) and Chantal Mouffe (1992) are correct in remarking that one should not lump together Michel Foucault,

Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida, as if they all represented the same philosophical tradition. Nonetheless, each of these thinkers, in different ways, contributed to the set of cultural sensibilities that were associated with the term *postmodernism* in the 1980s.

Fredric Jameson (1991, 37–38, 48 ff.) was one of the few social and cultural critics to point out that postmodernism's fixation on incommensurabilities, conflicts, and antagonisms at the level of surfaces was failing to account for processes of uniformization and homogenization occurring at deeper levels. Jameson sought to establish links between late capitalism's developmental stage and postmodernism. Contingency at the surface is necessity at a deeper level, he argued; antagonism at one level is subservience to the same forces at another, less visible level. Jameson was right: there is little question that the surface antagonisms, conflicts, and agonisms noted by postmodernists were accompanied by deeper forces of economic, military, technological, and communications and information integration — in short, by what we have come to call *globalization* in the nineties. If *fragmentation* was the code word of the eighties, *hybridity* is the code word of the nineties; if *incommensurability* was a master term for the eighties, *interstitiality* is one for the nineties; if the *clash of cultures* was the horizon of the eighties, *multiculturalism* and *polyglotism* are the framework of the nineties.[1]

It is my thesis that the new constellation formed by the coming together of global integration and apparent cultural fragmentation is the contemporary horizon against which the project of contemporary feminism must be rethought. Our contemporary condition is marked by the melting down of all naturalistic signifiers in the political and cultural realm and a desperate attempt to recreate them. The decline of superpower polarism and the end of the Cold War have brought with them a dizzying reconfiguration of the map of Europe. But elsewhere in the world as well, contradictory pulls are at work: as globalization proceeds at a dizzying rate, as a material global civilization encompasses the earth from Hong Kong to Lima, from Pretoria to Helsinki, worldwide integration is accompanied by cultural and collective disintegration. India and Turkey, among the earliest and oldest democracies of the Third World, are in the throes of religious struggles and ethnic strife that at times call into question the very project of a secular representative democracy. Need one mention the civil war in the former Yugoslavia and the simmering nationality conflicts in Chechnya, Azerbai-

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[1] "Political empowerment and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause," writes Homi Bhabha, "come from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective" (1994, 3).

jan, Macedonia, and Rwanda? As the markers of certainty at the economic, geopolitical, and technological spheres decline and can no longer be used to create hierarchies among nations and cultures, new signifiers are generated to fill their place — signifiers that seek to renaturalize historical and cultural identities by presenting them as if they were racially and anthropologically deep-seated distinctions.[2] The worldwide resurgence of ethnic and nationalist movements, at a time of the decline and weakness of nation-states everywhere, is a further testimony to this process. What does this mean for contemporary feminism? How can we think of sexual difference in the context of new struggles around collective identities?

Debates around identity, which have always played a crucial role in the women's movement, are now dominating nationalist, separatist aspirations worldwide. The purpose of this article is to engage in a retrospective analysis of identity debates within feminism of the past two decades, while keeping in mind the insights and dangers inaugurated by the new global constellation. The "paradigm wars" of feminist theory, which have raged among critical and poststructuralist feminist theorists in particular, lead me to draw some general analytical conclusions about identities, be they personal, gender, or national. I propose a narrative model for conceptualizing identity at all these levels, and, by toggling back and forth between global political considerations and the concerns of feminist theory, I hope to outline a viable model for thinking about identities in the context of radical democratic politics.

The problem of the subject revisited

In my view, the most important theoretical issue to emerge from the feminism/postmodernism debates of the 1980s remains the problem of the subject. This problem comprises several others: First, how do we reconceptualize subjectivity in light of the philosophical contributions of feminism? How does feminism alter our understanding of the traditional epistemological or moral subject of western philosophy — the *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes or the Kantian rational moral agent who is free only insofar as he can act in accordance with a universal law that he, as a rational being,

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[2] The new literature on Islamic movements and, in particular, the use of terms such as *jihad* to designate all aspirations in the contemporary world for ethnic, religious, and cultural particularisms, even if well intentioned, unfortunately contribute to the portrayal of "Islam" as the enemy of the West. After the end of the Cold War, Islam has become the new archenemy. For instance, the title, when not the substance, of Benjamin Barber's well-known book *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (1995) succumbs to these tendencies.

legislates to himself? Has the feminist emphasis on embodiedness, inter-subjectivity, caring and empathy, sexuality and desire subverted the categories of the tradition? If so, what has it brought in their place?[3] Second, what is the relation between subjectivity and political agency? Can we think of political/moral/cultural agency only insofar as we retain a robust conception of the autonomous, rational, and accountable subject, or is a concept of the subject as fragmentary and riveted by heterogeneous forces more conducive to understanding varieties of resistance and cultural struggles of the present?

These issues have been at the heart of my ongoing public disagreement and dialogue with Judith Butler over the processes of identity formation, an exchange that has been reproduced in the volume *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (Benhabib et al. 1995).[4] My position was that in *Gender Trouble* (1990) at least, Butler subscribes to an overly constructivist view of selfhood and agency that leaves little room for explaining the possibilities of creativity and resistance. I objected that the term *performativity*

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[3] See Louise M. Anthony and Charlotte Witt's important new collection of works by analytically oriented feminist philosophers (1993).

[4] One of the more exciting and incisive contributions to our exchange is a recent article by Amanda Anderson titled "Debatable Performances: Restaging Contentious Feminisms" (1998). Anderson passes some unfortunate judgments about the motives as well as the context of the publication of this work, naming us "an elite 'gang of four'" (1). Despite some unwarranted rhetorical side-flourishes, Anderson defends a "more capacious model of dialogue, one that can accommodate different forms of political practice, particularly disruptions of spectacle, performance" (2). Defending Habermas against me, or my earlier work against my exchanges with Butler, Anderson attempts to show how communicative ethics can be made compatible with processes "of radical *disidentification*" (2). I find this an interesting argument; however, I remain skeptical on two counts. First, as I argue in the body of this article, disidentification only works against a background of identification constituted through narrative. Otherwise, disidentification may not be in the service of the self, but it can further the dissolution of a strong sense of self. Second, I am skeptical about the "transformative-political" potential of such performative disidentifications. As Anderson notes, I am a civil libertarian on a whole range of issues relating to pornography, sadomasochism, etc., but I do not share the optimism of the artistic avant-garde of the modern period, since the Dadaist movement of this century, that the performative disruptions of artistic life must also produce good politics. The politics of culture must always be judged against the background of the culture of politics in any given country. The United States, since the 1960s, has managed to produce an avant-garde artistic culture in arts, theater, dance, music, and literature that is the envy of the world without managing to solve the problems of corrupt campaign financing, blockages in legislative processes, misguided foreign policy, and lack of universal health care coverage, parental leave, decent housing, and education for all who live in this polity. It is my sense of these discontinuities and contradictions between culture and politics, and not some "cultural purism," that leads me to be skeptical about the "cultural politics of the performative."

appeared to reduce individuals to masks without an actor or to a series of disjointed gender enactments without a center. Butler clarified subsequently that she had meant *performativity* to invoke not a dramaturgical but a linguistic model. She writes in *Bodies That Matter,* "Performativity is . . . not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (1993, 12). Relying on Derrida's appropriation of speech-act theory, Butler sees performativity as a reenactment, as an iteration that in the process of enunciation also transforms what it iterates or enunciates. Repetition and innovation, necessity and contingency are brought together in an interesting fashion here. I have little quarrel with this view of linguistic agency; however, I think that one needs a stronger concept of human intentionality and a more developed view of the communicative-pragmatic abilities of everyday life to explain how speech acts are not only iterations but also innovations and reinterpretations, be it of old linguistic codes, communicative or behavioral.

This philosophical disagreement concerning the nature of language and human intentionality was not always at the forefront of my earlier exchanges with Butler. Her recent work in *Excitable Speech* helps articulate these differences more sharply. In this work, Butler explores, among other issues, Derrida's critique of J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts (Butler 1997, 146–55). What she fails to note, and what is of crucial importance in our dispute, is that Derrida and Jürgen Habermas agree that the Austinian theory of speech acts is too conventionalist, that is, that it identifies performativity with the fulfillment or satisfaction of a given social code or norm (Habermas 1987, 194–99). Derrida and Habermas concur that the most interesting aspects of language-in-use occur in situations in which there are no stipulated social rules or codes. Such situational understanding is quite distinct from fulfilling a norm or following a convention. In his critique of John Searle, Derrida complains that Searle's "speech act" theory cannot account for the "surfeit of meaning" that transcends the boundaries of mere conventionality. There is always "more" in language. Derrida writes: "I do not believe that iterability is necessarily tied to convention, and even less, that it is limited by it. Iterability is precisely that which — once its consequences have been unfolded — can no longer be dominated by the opposition nature/convention. It dislocates, subverts, and constantly displaces the dividing line between the two terms. It has an essential rapport with the force (theoretical and practical, 'effective,' 'historical,' 'psychic,' 'political,' etc.) deconstructing these oppositional limits" (Derrida 1988, 102). For Habermas, this "more" in language comes about through

the communicative competence of social actors in generating situational interpretations of their lifeworld through communicative acts oriented to validity claims. For Derrida, the "surfeit" of meaning, the subversions that transform iterations, are part of the bounty of language itself. For Habermas, this surfeit is part of the bounty of communication — not merely of language, but of language-in-use. The crucial issue is this: Can there be resignification without communication among members of a language game? If, as Derrida argues and Habermas concurs, speech acts are acts not only, or not primarily, because they reproduce a set of established norms and conventions but because they reinterpret and resignify, modify, and discursively challenge such norms and conventions, then how does one know, how does anyone know, that such resignification and reinterpretation have taken place?[5] In the Derridian model of speech as enunciation, the surplus of meaning seems to reside in the almost oracular quality of utterances themselves. In the model of communicative pragmatics, by contrast, the same proposition — let us say, "The moon is made of green cheese" — can be treated as incorporating different speech acts depending on the validity claims raised by the speaker and accepted or rejected by the hearers. For example, is this statement to be understood as a scientific claim about the material composition of the moon or as an expressive-poetic claim about one's emotions concerning the moon? Or is it a normative statement, exhorting us to accept as correct that we should view the moon as if it were made of green cheese? In communicative pragmatics the intentions of the speaker and the negotiations about these intentions between speaker and hearer are articulated through the various validity claims that the same proposition can embody. These are the claims to truth or falsehood, rightness or wrongness, sincerity and deception, and intelligibility. The validity claims of propositions cannot be identified independently of the intentions of their speakers.

As Butler's *Excitable Speech* makes admirably clear, views of political agency and legal accountability are inextricably bound up with our philosophical understandings of linguistic activity. Nevertheless, this account still offers no explication of how regimes of discourse/power or normative regimes of language and sexuality both circumscribe and enable the subject. As Allison Weir observes, "What's lost here is any recognition of the

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[5] Martin Jay (1992) sees these different orientations to language as the central issue of contention among critical theorists and poststructuralists. For an exploration of the complex issues of understanding (*Verstaendigung*), reaching understanding (*Einverstaendnis*) and consensus (*Konsens*) in universal pragmatics, see the exchange between myself and David Hoy on Habermas's theory of universal pragmatics (Benhabib 1996a; Hoy 1996).

perspectives of the participants in these performances, and hence, any meaningful differentiation among unreflective, deliberate, dogmatic, defensive, anxious, ironic, playful, and parodic performances of gender, and any understanding of the ways in which these interact and conflict in specific performances and particular subjects. What's lost then, is any meaningful concept of agency, and any meaningful concept of subversion" (1996, 127). I would like to suggest a "narrative" model of subjectivity and identity-constitution in place of the "performativity" model.[6] My contention is that the narrative model has the virtue of accounting for that "surfeit of meaning, creativity and spontaneity" that is said to accompany iteration in the performativity model as well but whose mechanisms cannot actually be explained by performativity.

I will introduce this narrative model first by an excursus into Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and, second, through a detailed examination of Charles Taylor's views on the constitution of identities through "webs of narratives." There is an interesting convergence of literary and philosophical perspectives here: both Woolf and Taylor outline a notion of a "core" self, the constitution of which Woolf leaves mysterious and Taylor tries to account for in several ways. My own views of narrativity develop in interlocution with their writings.

The narrative model of identity constitution I:
Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*

Narrativity and identity, or the manner in which the telling of the story of the self reinforces or undermines a particular understanding of self, is a major preoccupation of high modernist literature from Marcel Proust to James Joyce, from Robert Musil to Virginia Woolf. Due to her incisive disentanglement of the confluence of one's sense of self with fantasies and expectations about one's sex/gender, Woolf's work remains a beacon for navigating the stormy waters of identities.

In October 1928, the month during which Woolf delivered the two

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[6] I would like to caution that I am using these terms in the specific senses that they have acquired in this debate. At some level, all narratives are performatives, and many performatives involve a narrative dimension. Nonetheless, at the level of identity-constitution these terms suggest distinct theoretical options. Also, the term performativity has been used to refer to a theory of individual identity constitution as well as to a theory of sexual identity formation. In this article I am dealing with individual and collective identities and not with sexual identity alone. I thank Doris Sommer for alerting me to possible misunderstandings in the uses of these terms.

lectures that were to form the basis of *A Room of One's Own* (1929), her novel *Orlando* appeared.[7] An exuberant, fantastic, lyrical, satiric novel, *Orlando,* in the words of one critic, "stages the mobility of fantasy and desire; it is a narrative of boundary crossings — of time, space, gender, and sex" (Lawrence 1992, 253). This biography begins in the late 1500s as the story of a beautiful and talented young man of noble descent, good fortune, and great promise. In fact, so bright is the future held in store for this young man that Queen Elizabeth takes a fancy to him and showers him with amorous advances. After falling madly in love with a mysterious and fickle Russian princess, Sasha, Orlando agrees to be sent to Constantinople as the crown's ambassador; there he falls into a deep trance that lasts several days and awakens to find himself a woman: "Orlando had become a woman — there is no denying it," writes Woolf. "But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same. His memory — but in future we must, for convention's sake, say 'her' for 'his,' and 'she' for 'he' — her memory then, went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle. Some slight haziness there may have been, as if a few dark drops had fallen into the clear pool of memory; certain things had become a little dimmed; but that was all" (107).

The last phrase, "that was all," conceals the extent to which the entire novel is a meditation on the complex themes of personal identity, sexual difference, the construction of gender, and the quest of the artist to discover the innermost sources from which creativity, art, imagination, and fantasy spring. "Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since" (107). Woolf's narrative defies easy categorization in terms of androgyny, bisexuality, or the polymorphous perversity of all sexual desire. It is "an exuberant and fantastic sexual ideal" (Lokke 1992, 236), a story of multiple and transgressive sexuality. Dedicated to Woolf's lover, Vita Sackville-West, and composed during Sackville-West's travels to the Near East, *Orlando* is both "public and private, directed to an audience of one and many" (Lawrence 1992, 257).

Having survived the sarcasm, hypocrisy, and baseness of the savants of the eighteenth century, personified by Pope, Addison, and Dryden, Orlando faces the repressive gender roles of the nineteenth century: "One might see the spirit of the age blowing, now hot, now cold, upon her cheeks. And if the spirit of the age blew a little unequally . . . her ambiguous position must excuse her (even her sex was still in dispute) and the

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[7] All unattributed parenthetical references in the text are to Woolf 1977.

irregular life she had lived before" (181). Fixed sexual identity, as defined by rigid gender roles and categories, is not central to the core identity of the self, Woolf intimates. The sources of the self as a unified being, if there are any at all, suggests Woolf, lie deeper. Looking through her shirt pockets, Orlando discovers a "sea-stained, blood-stained, travel-stained" (181) manuscript of her poem "The Oak Tree." She had started working on this back in 1586, close to "three hundred years" before the point at which the narrator finds her/himself in the second half of the nineteenth century (181). Meanwhile, as she looks through the pages of the manuscript, she realizes "how very little she had changed all these years. She had been a gloomy boy, in love with death, as boys are; and then she had been amorous and florid; and then she had been sprightly and satirical; and sometimes she had tried prose and sometimes she had tried drama. Yet through all these changes she had remained, she reflected, fundamentally the same. She had the same brooding meditative temper, the same love of animals and nature, the same passion for the country and the seasons" (181).

"Yet through all these changes she had remained, she reflected, fundamentally the same." What is the meaning of this sameness of the self? Through what sets of characteristics or activities, patterns of consciousness or behavior, do we say of someone that she is "the same"? In philosophical language, how is the identity of the self that remains self-same to be thought of?

Woolf gives no unequivocal answer to this question — perhaps it allows none. Sometimes she suggests that the core identity of the self is formed by a set of gender-transcending characteristics that in old-fashioned language would be called "character": Orlando had "the same brooding meditative temper, the same love of animals and nature, the same passion for the country and the seasons." It is these moral, cognitive, and aesthetic dispositions, Woolf intimates, that constitute her as "fundamentally the same."

The narrative model of identity constitution II:
Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*

Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* is an attempt to disentangle philosophically the relationships between a sense of core identity and a set of dispositional attitudes, or "strong evaluative commitments," also cherished by the self. Two metaphors dominate Taylor's lucid analysis of identity: "horizons" and "webs of interlocution." Of horizons Taylor writes, "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose."

"To know who I am," he emphasizes, "is a species of knowing where I stand" (Taylor 1989, 27). A horizon of strong evaluations or of strong evaluative commitments is for Taylor "integral" to human personhood.[8]

The metaphor of "webs of interlocution" suggests a different approach, one more consonant with a narrative view. It describes, Taylor writes, "the sense in which one cannot be a self on one's own. . . . I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self understanding — and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'" (1989, 36). The answer to the question of who I am always involves reference to "where" I am speaking from and to whom or with whom.

The dialogic narrative view, which I share with Taylor and which I shall distinguish from the more essentialist model of "strong evaluative commitments," is the following: To be and to become a self is to insert oneself into webs of interlocution; it is to know how to answer when one is addressed; in turn, it is learning how to address others. Of course, we never really "insert" ourselves but rather are thrown into these webs of interlocution, in the Heideggerian sense of *Geworfenheit*. We are born into webs of interlocution or into webs of narrative — from the familial and gender narratives to the linguistic one to the macronarrative of one's collective identity. We become who we are by learning to be a conversation partner in these narratives. Although we do not choose the webs in whose nets we are initially caught or select those with whom we wish to converse, our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives and fragments of narratives a life story that makes sense for us, as unique individual selves. Certainly, the codes of established narratives in various cultures define our capacity to tell the story in very different ways; they limit our freedom to "vary the code."[9] But just as it is always possible in a conversa-

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[8] Surely, though, this claim is far too specific to a certain ethos of modernity to be generalizable throughout the history of culture. The language of strong evaluations and strong evaluative commitments implies an ethics of autonomy and an ethos of disenchantment. Since our moral and value universes have become disenchanted in characteristically modern ways, we are thrust into the position of making strong evaluations and strong evaluative commitments. In an enchanted universe these evaluations are not "mine," they simply are "part" of my being by virtue of the constitutive identity that I share with others. They are mine because they are a part of my value universe. The language of strong evaluative commitments, with its Kantian and Weberian overtones, would be curiously out of place here. Joel Anderson (1996) analyzes the tensions between Taylor's "expressivism and his moral realism."

[9] It is thanks to Toni Morrison's tremendous contributions in giving voice to Black Americans, and African-American women in particular, that we have learned something about the

tion to drop the last remark and let it crash on the floor in silence, or to carry on and keep the dialogue alive and going, or to become whimsical, ironic, and critical and turn the conversation on itself, so too do we always have options in telling a life story that makes sense to us. These options are not ahistorical; they are culturally and historically specific and inflected by the master narrative of the family structure and gender roles into which each individual is thrown. Nonetheless, just as the grammatical rules of language, once acquired, do not exhaust our capacity to build an infinite number of well-formed sentences in a language, so socialization and accumulation processes do not determine the life story of any unique individual or his or her capacity to initiate new actions and new sentences in a conversation. Donald Spence, a psychoanalyst, formulates the link between the self and narration perspicaciously: "It is by means of a continuous dialogue with ourselves — in daydreams, partial thoughts, and full-fledged plans — that we search for ways to interact with our environment and turn happenings into meanings, and we organize these interactions by putting our reactions into words. . . . Language offers a mechanism for putting myself into the world, as Heidegger might phrase it, and for making the world part of me; and language very likely determines the way in which experience will be registered and later recalled" (1987, 134).

Are there really significant distinctions between the dialogic and narrative understanding of the self and the view of "strong evaluations" that Taylor also adumbrates? Indeed there are, and spelling them out will give one a firmer grasp of the postmodernist objection that any conception of a "core identity" is essentialist, ahistorical, and implausible. Consider some postmodern objections to the concept of "strong evaluations": certainly, the experiences of fragmentation and collage, the senseless being next-to-each-other in space and time of individuals, are authentic. They express and articulate a material and lived reality of our social and cultural world. Particularly postmodern selves seem to suffer from the inability to make strong evaluative commitments. What implications does this have for Taylor's theory? In the face of cultural forms of possible selfhood that contradict his theory, Taylor could give two answers: one response could be that individuals do have strong evaluative and constitutive commitments, although these may not be known to them. It is only the standpoint of the observer or the philosophical analyst or the psychotherapist that could disclose these. A second response could be that individuals whose lives lack

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variability of "narratives and codes" across groups and cultures and genders. The comparative study of narrative voices and codes would contribute to a philosophical understanding of selfhood across racial and gender divides. Morrison's work also demonstrates the indispensability of narrative for the *empowerment* of oppressed and marginal groups.

strong evaluative commitments also lack the essential conditions of what Taylor refers to as "integral, that is, undamaged human personhood" (1989, 27). Taylor entertains both options; it is the second claim that I find particularly problematic and would like to focus on.

How plausible is it to argue that strong evaluative commitments are essential to human personhood — as essential, let us say, as the capacity to be a conversation partner in a web of interlocution? I think that there is a confusion of levels in Taylor's argument at this point: Taylor confuses the *conditions of possible human agency* with a *strong concept of moral integrity*. But it is possible to think of the first without the second. Consider two human types: the seducer and the ironist. The one goes through life accumulating conquests, love affairs, and broken hearts and is unable to make strong commitments or even state where or for what she or he stands. The other, vigilant and self-reflective, self-critical and whimsical, retains a distance from all commitments and thrives on not making strong evaluations or strong evaluative commitments. Of course, Taylor could respond that the strong evaluations out of which the seducer acts are those of narcissistic self-gratification in having others fall for her or him, whereas, for the ironist, a certain sense of sovereign control and not giving oneself too much to any one thing is the secret horizon of strong evaluation. If the philosopher were the psychotherapist for these individuals the task would consist in revealing to them what they implicitly presuppose. One could shift from the language of self-description and self-identification to the language of observational assessment to sustain Taylor's view of strong evaluations.

Undoubtedly, in many instances in human life and interaction, such a shift in perspective from the standpoint of the agent to that of the observer is justifiable and valid. Nonetheless, it cannot be that there is always and necessarily a disjunction between the language of self-evaluation and description and that of the third-person observer's point of view. I think we can entertain the possibility that there are human lives that lack a horizon of strong evaluations and evaluative commitments. Such lives may lack a certain depth, a certain integrity, a certain vibrancy and vitality, but we know that they can be and are lived by some. It just seems wrong to say that they are not human life stories at all; should we rather not say that they are not very desirable, deep, or worthwhile ones? What is at stake here?

We have to think of the continuity of the self in time not through a *commitment to a specific set of evaluative goods* but through the *capacity to take and adopt an attitude* toward such goods, even if, and particularly if, this attitude means noncommitment. There can be self-identity without moral integrity; the core identity of a self is better defined through the second-order attitudes and beliefs that this self has toward making first-order com-

mitments. In the language of narration, it is not what the story is about
that matters but, rather, one's ability to keep telling a story about who one
is that makes sense to oneself and to others. Strong evaluative commit-
ments may or may not be part of such narratives or fragments of narratives.
Spence writes of the self as a "signature," a "fingerprint": "The way a life
is conceived or described tells us something important about the teller that
he very likely does not know himself. . . . The concept of self reminds us
that a certain structured constellation of attitudes, principles, and values
contributes to our view of everyday happenings and affects the way these
happenings are represented in memory and recovered in time" (1987,
132–33). This "certain structured constellation of attitudes" may or may
not entail strong evaluations or evaluative commitments. It is the signature
that matters, not the document that is signed. Or, to remain at the level of
metaphor, what matters are the marks left by the fingerprint, not the ink
or what the marks are imprinted on. Taylor's view of the self is not about
the signature, however, but about the document, and not about the im-
print but the ink and the object on which it is left. This, I am arguing, is a
confusion of levels of analysis.

Ironically, objections to views such as Taylor's concept of "strong evalu-
ations" on the grounds that they are essentialist also succumb to the same
confusion: they assume that any conception of identity suggests the fiction
of a stable, frozen, and fixed subject, preceding in time the multifarious
performatives of gender and language, social roles, and individual postures
through which we become who we are. The language of strong evaluative
commitments suggests a "doer who precedes the deed" (Nietzsche). Yet if
we think of the identity of the self in time not in terms of a set of strong
evaluative commitments but rather in terms of an ability to make sense, to
render coherent, meaningful, and viable for oneself one's shifting commit-
ments as well as changing attachments, then the postmodernist objection
loses its target. The issue becomes whether it is possible to be a self at all
without some ability to continue to generate meaningful and viable narra-
tives over time. My view is that, hard as we try, we cannot "stop making
sense," as the Talking Heads urge us to do. We *will* try to make sense out
of nonsense.

Are there constraints, then, on what makes sense? Put differently: What
if strong assumptions about narrative with their inevitable overtones of
beginning, unfolding, and resolution—the classical model of a tragedy
from which we can draw lessons for life—find their way into this model
and thus push the illusions of coherence, continuity, and fixity from one
level to the next? I would like to suggest that "making sense" does not
involve an Aristotelian or Victorian model of narrative, with a coherent

beginning, unfolding, and ending. It involves, rather, the psychodynamic capacity to go on, to retell, to re-member, to reconfigure. Retelling, re-membering, and reconfiguring always entail more than one narrative; they occur in a "web of interlocution," which is also a conversation with the other(s). Others are not just the subject matters of my story; they are also tellers of their own stories, which compete with my own, unsettle my self-understanding, and spoil my attempts to mastermind my own narrative. Narratives cannot have closure precisely because they are always aspects of the narratives of others; the sense that I create for myself is always immersed in a fragile "web of stories" that I as well as others spin.[10] Psychoanalytic feminism both challenges and supplements the narrative model. "The shadow cast by the other subject," in Jessica Benjamin's words, is permanent.

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[10] Margaret R. Somers and Gloria D. Gibson write: "Above all, narratives are *constellations of relationships* (connected parts) embedded in *time and space,* constituted by *causal emplotment*" (1994, 59). Emphasizing that the narratives within which social actions are embedded can only be intelligible against a background, Somers and Gibson attempt to connect views of social structure and social agency through the narrative paradigm: "Narrative identities are constituted by a person's temporally and spatially variable 'place' in culturally constructed stories comprised of (breakable) rules, (variable) practices, binding (and unbinding) institutions, and the multiple plots of family, nation, or economic life" (67). This view of narrative is metatheoretical, or second order, in that it does not prejudge the content of the culturally constructed stories, practices, and institutions that constitute narrative identities, and it should not be confused with theories of relationality and the "relational self" (e.g., the work of Carol Gilligan). Relationality is *one form* of narrative emplotment. Furthermore, in that culturally constructed stories are composed of rules, this view of interlocutive narratives is compatible with universal pragmatics, which seeks to analyze such rules as they would undergird all cultural constructions, insofar as the narratives are reproduced only by the communicative competence of ordinary actors. Equally significantly, although they are experienced by social agents through narrative emplotment, practices and institutions are not narratives themselves; they constrain narratives and limit the agent's abilities to vary the code. As Somers and Gibson write, "Although we argue that social action is intelligible only through the construction, enactment, and appropriation of narratives, this does not mean that actions are free to fabricate narratives at will; rather, they must 'choose' from a repertoire of available representations and stories. Which kinds of narratives will socially predominate is contested politically and will depend in large part on the distribution of power" (73). In this essay, I am developing a metatheoretical, or second-order, perspective for conceptualizing narratively constituted identities. Although the details of the social-theoretical implications of this perspective will need to be elaborated in future work, my thesis is that narrativity and critical social theory based on the communicative action paradigm are mutually compatible. The pitfalls of moving too quickly from a metatheoretical perspective on narratively constituted actions and identities to prescribing social science methodologies is incisively analyzed by Sayres S. Rudy (Rudy, in press).

Psychoanalytic feminism: The limits of narrativity

If we view the human child as a fragile, dependent creature whose body needs to be cared for, sustained, and nurtured and whose various needs have to be satisfied, we must take seriously the psychoanalytic insight that there is a corporal, somatic memory, that is, the unconscious. This is the point at which the insights of psychoanalytically inspired feminism aid in developing the narrative model further. Every story we tell of ourselves will also contain another of which we may not even be aware; and, in ways that are usually very obscure to us, we are determined by these subtexts and memories in our unconscious. The self is not sovereign, or as Freud famously put it, "Das Ich ist nicht Herr im eigenen Haus" (the ego is not master in its own house) (Freud 1974, 143). Poststructuralist/discourse feminists, alert to the oppressive language of *Herrschaft/Knechtschaft* in Freud's formulation, follow Nietzsche and Foucault in arguing that the *Ich* — the ego — is something we must get rid of altogether. They translate the psychoanalytic insight that the sovereignty of the "I" is never unlimited but always dependent on contexts, conscious and unconscious, that the I cannot master, into a call to get rid of the I as an instance of coherent mastery and ordering altogether. The I becomes instead an instance of repression, and its sovereignty is viewed as a striving after a form of repressive and illusory unity. Hence identity is viewed as a suspect category. Perhaps, though, we can think of the phrase "Das Ich ist nicht Herr im eigenen Haus" in quite a different way.

The I can never be master in its house because a household is composed of other beings whose needs, desires, and concrete identities always make claims on one and remind one of the inevitable perspectivality and limits of one's own point of view. Only the male subject could consider itself "the master of the household." All others — women, children, domestics, other dependents such as the elderly — have always known that there are limits to mastery and agency. The view that only one perspective dominates could only be the view of the master; the others know how to view themselves as they appear to the master, to each other, and to themselves. A household consists of multiple, complex perspectives and voices often in contest with each other, arguing with each other. Webs of interlocution are often family brawls, and only some family brawls succeed in making good conversations. More often than not they fail. The individual is thus always already situated in a psychosomatic context that we can define as the psychic economy of the household that one is born into and grows up in. Although we can never extricate ourselves from the material and spiritual webs in which these beginnings implicate us, we can nonetheless weave them together

into a narrative of the many voices within us and the many perspectives that have constituted our field of vision.

This, however, is an interminable task, for narration is also a project of recollection and retrieval. We can only retrieve more or less, retell more or less those memories ingrained on the body, those somatic impressions of touch, tone, and odor that defined our early being-in-the-world. They can only be relived in the present, as meaningful within our present narrative. They are only "for us"; our access to them can never be "in itself," or *an sich*. The attempt to relive these memories outside the temporal horizon of the present would put the self in danger of regression, dissipation, and loss of ego boundaries. For an individual whose childhood was one of abuse and systematic mistreatment, the present may be a constant process of warding against being overwhelmed by memories and by the pull of the past. Yet there may also be ways of recuperating these memories in the present so as to generate new and future horizons of meaning. Personal identity is the ever fragile achievement of needy and dependent creatures whose capacity to develop a coherent life story out of the multiple, competing, and often irreconcilable voices and perspectives of childhood must be cherished and protected. Furthering one's capacity for autonomous agency is only possible within a solidaristic community that sustains one's identity through listening to one, and allowing one to listen to others, with respect within the many webs of interlocution that constitute our lives.

Complex subjectivities, the politics of difference, and the new constellation

The intuition that certain views of identity and subjectivity are closely linked with collective politics is an old one. At least since the work of the Frankfurt School, which attempted to explain the rise of fascism in Europe through a mix of Marxist and psychoanalytic theory, we have had access to the insight that one's inability at the psychic level to acknowledge the otherness within oneself will, more often than not, manifest itself in the urge to split the "other" off and project it onto an external figuration outside oneself.[11] This projected or "abjected" other is thus excised from oneself; placing it outside, the self feels secure in maintaining the boundaries of its own identity without being threatened by dissolution into otherness. The other is the stranger, the foreigner, the one who is "alien" and "unlike" us. All authoritarian and fascist movements of our century (and not only of

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[11] Julia Kristeva (1993) has also explored these links.

ours) manipulate this fear of losing ego boundaries and self-identity by making a group of collective others the bearers and carriers of certain naturalistic traits that are said to be different from and a threat to one's own identity. Already in the sixteenth century, during and after the Spanish Inquisition against the Jews of Spain, the doctrine of *la limpeaza de la sangre* (the cleanliness of blood) was practiced (Netanyahu 1973). The divider between the Jews and the Catholics was not doctrinal belief or religious practices but a biological category, itself only a phantasmagoric figment of the imagination. How does one prove "cleanliness of the blood"? In the case of the Spanish Inquisition, this meant not only that those who had intermarried with other Jews but also all others who had some Jewish descendants had to be eradicated. It is hard to imagine — but historically documented — the mechanisms of state control and persecution that had to be mobilized in a sixteenth-century society in order, first, to establish the fact of Jewish blood in one's lineage and, second, to carry out the extermination or forced conversion of those so identified.

Think now of a more recent example. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina it was reported that Bosnian Serb soldiers in several instances not only raped Bosnian Muslim women but detained them in special camps where they were subjected to continuous rapes so that they would become pregnant. To view women as the booty of war is an ancient human practice. However, reflect for a moment on the ethnic genocide behind this act of impregnation. The reasoning of Bosnian Serbs appears to have been the following: Since the Serbs refused to acknowledge a separate Muslim Bosnian identity — since, in their eyes, the Bosnian Muslims were an insignificant and bastard category, a people who should never have been granted official recognition — the Serbs took themselves to be ending this group's identity by impregnating its women. Muslim women would now bear Bosnian Serb offspring. Yet the bizarre blindness in this act is the apparent lack of recognition that these offspring would be half-Serb and half-Muslim; by virtue of being born to a Muslim mother they would continue her ethnic lineage. Paradoxically, then, the attempt to eliminate ethnic otherness results in the creation of more "ethnic bastardization" or "hybridization," and these children of war become the purest examples of collective impurity and hybridity.

The narrative view of identity regards individual as well as collective identities as woven out of tales and fragments belonging both to oneself and to others. While narrativity stresses otherness and the fluidity of the boundaries between the self and others, authoritarian and repressive movements respond to the search for certainty, for rigid definitions, for boundaries and markers.

"The shadow of the other subject": Jessica Benjamin's intervention

In an impressive contribution titled "The Shadow of the Other (Subject): Intersubjectivity and Feminist Theory," Jessica Benjamin deepens understandings of the homologies as well as disanalogies between processes of interpsychic and intrapsychic recognition: "The question whether a subject can relate to the other without assimilating the other to the self through identification corresponds to the political question whether a community can admit the Other without her/him having to already be the same, or become the same. What psychoanalysis refers to as omnipotence is thus always linked to the ethical (respect) and the political (non-violence)" (1994, 240). Omnipotence is the name for the fantasy that I can mold the world and others to fit my desires, that I can control them so completely that I will never be rendered vulnerable, dependent, frustrated, and needy. Classical political philosophy named the fantasy of omnipotence the "regime of tyranny."

Yet despite this homology between accepting the other within and respecting the other without, intrasubjectivity in the psyche and intersubjectivity in the political world cannot be mapped onto each other. "The psychological relations that constitute the self" cannot be collapsed "into the epistemological and political positions that constitute the subject of knowledge or history" (Benjamin 1994, 234). For each individual, the process of "splitting," as an ongoing active process of idealization and defense performed with respect to the other, has a unique trajectory and logic. The other is significant in this story only insofar as he or she is introjected by the self in a particular manner and imbued with certain meanings. Whether the political other is conceived as the enemy or the liberator, as the oppressor or the redeemer, as the purifier or the seducer—to play with only some permutations—will depend not only on the cultural codes of the public world but on the individual psychic history of the self as well.

Benjamin makes the important observation that "the opposition recognition/negation is therefore not precisely the same opposition as mutual recognition/breakdown. All negotiation of difference involves negation, partial breakdowns. Breakdown is only catastrophic when the possibility of reestablishing the tension between negation and recognition is foreclosed, when the survival of the other self, of self for other, is definitely over" (1994, 241). An individual may become incapable of establishing and sustaining this tension because he or she is delusional and violent or completely rigid and fragmented. In either case, the ability to "narrate" proximity and distance, intimacy and alienation is lost or impaired. Using the analogy advisedly, one can say that, politically, a regime of recognition without negation would correspond to despotism. In the eyes of the despot all are one and equal, but there is no democratic sphere of jostling and

collaborating, competing and cooperating. That is why despotism is like the death of the political body: it eliminates the possibility of negation.

What is surprising in Benjamin's illuminating contribution is her insistence that "identity is not self. To include without assimilating or reducing requires us to think beyond the binary alternatives of self-enclosed identity and fragmented dispersal to a notion of multiplicity. What kind of self can sustain multiplicity, indeed, the opposition to identity that the relation with the different other brings?" (1994, 247). Benjamin understands identity as sameness, indeed as the compulsory re-creation of sameness. However, precisely because, as I have sought to argue, the self cannot be viewed as a substrate that remains self-same over time, other models of identity have been suggested in the Western philosophical tradition. The narrative model of identity is developed precisely to counteract this difficulty by proposing that identity does not mean "sameness in time" but rather the capacity to generate meaning over time so as to hold past, present, and future together. In arguing that inclusion "calls for difference, not synthesis," Benjamin repeats some of the postmodernist prejudices against the narrative search for coherence. Inclusion, I would argue, does not call for symbiosis, but it does call for some kind of synthesis.[12] Retaining the degree of separateness and otherness that the permanent struggle for recognition pushes selves into requires a strong sense of respect for the autonomy of the other and for his or her equal right to retain such difference.[13] When some such

[12] The question of "synthesis" — i.e., whether all attempts at unity and searches for some general rule shared by all particulars are inherently oppressive and repressive — has been at the center of recent debates in critical theory. Formulated very generally, these debates involve critical theorists who seek to defend the possibility of "synthesis without violence" and poststructuralists, beginning with Jacques Lacan in his work on the ego, who deny this possibility. For a general statement of the epistemological problem see Wellmer 1991. Joel Whitebook gives an incisive and extensive discussion of different ideals of the ego and of synthesis prevalent in critical theory and poststructuralism while exploring the ambiguities of Adorno's position (1995; see esp. 119–65). Philosophically we are dealing with the same issue of how to understand activity that — be it linguistic or epistemological, psychic or social — is rule governed but creative, innovative, and playful in contextually implementing the rules rather than being dogmatically subservient to them.

[13] Benjamin misunderstands my use of the term "autonomy" in the debate with Judith Butler when she writes, "The autonomy and intact reflexivity that Benhabib wants to rescue have been revealed to be an illusion, based on the denial of the subject's social production, on a break that conceals and represses what constitutes it" (1994, 233). She also claims that there is a contradiction between the conception of autonomy I use in the debate with Butler and my position in my 1992 essay "The Generalized and the Concrete Other" (Benjamin 1994, 251, n. 5). Benjamin confuses autonomy with autarchy — only an autarchical conception of autonomy would deny the "subject's social production." Since *Critique, Norm, and Utopia* (Benhabib 1986), I have subscribed to the notion that autonomy is not autarchy but rather the ability to distance oneself from one's social roles, traditions, history, and even deepest

synthetic narrative is not available, then recognition can indeed break down altogether and result in violence and civil war, armed conflict or silent confrontation. As Benjamin succinctly observes, "Owning the other within diminishes the threat of the other without, so that the stranger outside is no longer identical with the stranger within us" (1994, 250). This capacity to own up to the "strange" within and the "stranger" without presupposes the capacity for narrative synthesis: the capacity to generate individual and collective stories of the many voices within us, reflecting the fragility as well as the complexity of the webs of interlocution that constitute us.

The vocation of the feminist theorist: A cultural broker?

During historical periods such as ours, in which economic-technological and political changes effect a restructuring of millions of lives, the search

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commitments and to take a universalistic attitude of hypothetical questioning toward them. This is the salvageable and still valid kernel of the Kantian injunction to consider ourselves as beings who, through our actions, could legislate a universally valid moral law. Indeed, the "intersubjective" turn of Kantian ethics, initiated by Karl Otto-Apel and Jürgen Habermas, has been at the center of my concerns for the last decade. In this discourse ethics model, "universalizability" is understood in procedural terms as the ability to take the standpoint of the other in an actual and idealized moral dialogue through a process of reversing perspectives. As Thomas McCarthy has observed, "The emphasis shifts from what each can will without contradiction to be a general law, to what all can will in universal agreement to be a universal norm" (1978, 326). My contribution to this general program has been the insistence, thoroughly inspired by feminist moral theory and psychoanalysis, that taking the "standpoint of the other" in real and virtual moral discourse be understood as including the "concrete," and not only the "generalized," other. This conception of autonomy requires no denial of the heteronomy of the subject, i.e., of the fundamental dependence of the self on the webs of narrative interlocution that constitute it. Only, to be "constituted" by narrative is not to be "determined" by it; situatedness does not preclude critical distantiation and reflexivity. As I wrote in *Critique, Norm, and Utopia,* "The ideal community of communication corresponds to an ego identity which allows the unfolding of the relation to the concrete other on the basis of *autonomous* action" (342). I see no reason to retract this claim. In these postutopian times, we have become more sensitive to the breakdown of recognition and communication. We have come to see the recalcitrance of alterity, the violence always lurking in human relationships, the potential for breakdown of communication, and the disappointment and hurt that accompany unrequited recognition and love. But in these hard times as well, the task of critical philosophy is to think beyond the given to the regulative limits of our concepts. "Autonomy" in action, conduct, and thought that is generated through critical reflection and a principled moral stance, is one such limit-concept of modern philosophy. It must not be confused with the fantasy of "autarchy," which also inhabits the early bourgeois male imagination and which I have discussed in "The Generalized and the Concrete Other" (Benhabib 1992a).

for certainty grows. The more fluid the environment becomes, the more unpredictable and opaque it grows and the more we retreat into the walls of our certainties, into the markers of the familiar. Hence globalization is accompanied by demands for isolationism, for protectionism, for raising even higher and making even sturdier the walls that divide us and them.

Theories of fragmentary and dispersed subjectivity, which were so fashionable at the height of postmodernism, ignored these demands for stability and understanding. The dispersal of the subject—yes, indeed, the "death" of the subject—was thought to be a good thing. Yet the search for coherence in an increasingly fragmentary material and cultural world and the attempt to generate meaning out of the complexities of life stories are not wrong, or unjust, or meaningless. The challenge in the new constellation is the following: Can there be coherent accounts of individual and collective identity that do not fall into xenophobia, intolerance, paranoia, and aggression toward others? Can the search for coherence be made compatible with the maintenance of fluid ego boundaries? Can the attempt to generate meaning be accompanied by an appreciation of the meaningless, the absurd, and the limits of discursivity? And finally, can we establish justice and solidarity at home without turning in on ourselves, without closing our borders to the needs and cries of others? What will democratic collective identities look like in the century of globalization?

One consequence of the new constellation for issues of sexual difference and collective identity is a renewed respect for the universal. The feminist movement in the 1980s lived through a "hermenuetics of suspicion." Every claim to generalization was suspected of hiding a claim to power on the part of a specific group; every attempt to speak in the name of "women" was countered by myriad differences of race, class, culture, and sexual orientation that were said to divide women. The category "woman" itself became suspect; feminist theorizing about woman or the female of the species was dubbed the hegemonic discourse of white, middle-class, professional, heterosexual women. We are still reeling from the many divisions and splinterings, the amoeba-like splittings, of the women's movements.

I sense, however, a new awareness afoot—a recognition of interdependence among women of different classes, cultures, and sexual orientations;[14] more significantly, I detect a renewed respect for the moral and political legacy of universalism out of which the women's movements first

[14] The work of María Lugones on *mestizaje* (1994) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 1990) and Norma Alarcón (1990) on cultural interstitiality deal with parallel themes. I would like to thank my student Edwina Barvosa (1998) for drawing my attention to Chicana women's writing and multiplex identities.

grew in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Consider the remarkable "Universalism" issue of the journal *differences*. In "French Feminism Is a Universalism," Naomi Schor writes,

> And yet just as some women have resisted the critique of universalism, so, too, universalism has clung to life. This refusal simply to fade away gracefully is indicated by the recent return of the universal among some of the feminists and postmodernist theorists who at other times and in other situations wholeheartedly embraced the critique of universalism. I count myself among them. . . . If Auschwitz dealt the Enlightenment ideal of universalism — a notion rejected by fascism — a death blow, what may pass for the repetition of Auschwitz, the ongoing ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, has if not revived universalism then called into question the celebration of particularisms, at least in their regressive ethnic form. (1995, 28)

A further consequence of the new constellation is a reconceptualization of the position of the feminist theorist as a critical intellectual. In *Situating the Self* I used the metaphor of the exile to explicate the possibility of social and cultural criticism, which, while being situated and context-bound, nonetheless aspired to transcend its own parish walls. I argued that "the social critic who is in exile does not adopt the 'view from nowhere' but the 'view from outside the walls of the city,' wherever those walls and those boundaries might be. It may indeed be no coincidence that from Hypatia to Diotima to Olympe de Gouges and to Rosa Luxemburg, the vocation of the feminist thinker and critic has led her to leave home and the city walls" (Benhabib 1992b, 228). The metaphor of exile to describe the vocation of the feminist critic has received a spirited objection from Rosi Braidotti in her provocative *Nomadic Subjects*. Braidotti agrees with me that we must empower women's political agency without falling "back on a substantialist vision of the subject," but she objects to my emphasis on exile:

> The central figuration for postmodern subjectivity is not that of a marginalized exile but rather that of an active nomadism. The critical intellectual camping at the city gates is not seeking readmission but rather taking a rest before crossing the next stretch of desert. Critical thinking is not a diaspora of the elected few but a massive abandonment of the logocentric "polis," the alleged "center" of the empire, on the part of critical and resisting thinking beings. Whereas for Benhabib the normativity of the phallogocentric regime is negotiable and reparable, for me it is beyond repair. Nomadism is therefore also a

gesture of nonconfidence in the capacity of the "polis" to undo the
power foundations on which it rests. (1994, 32)

This is an eloquent characterization of some fundamental differences.
However, Braidotti has an unrealistic conception of identity. For her, mat-
ters of identity seem infinitely deconstructable figurations. She defines no-
madic consciousness as "not taking any kind of identity as permanent. The
nomad is only passing through; s/he makes those necessarily situated con-
nections that can help her/him to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the
limits of one, national fixed identity. The nomad has no passport—or has
too many of them" (1994, 33).

Yet there is an enormous difference between having no passport and
having too many. The refugee, the illegal immigrant, the asylum seeker
who has no passport also has no protection from the collective and orga-
nized power of her or his fellow human beings. She or he is at the mercy of
border patrols, emigration officials, international relief organizations (see
Benhabib 1998). She has lost, in Hannah Arendt's famous words, "the
right to have rights"—that is, the right to be recognized as a moral and
political equal in a human community (1951, 290; see also Benhabib
1996b). In a century in which statelessness and the condition of being a
refugee have become global phenomena, this is not a matter to be taken
lightly. To have too many passports is usually the privilege of the few.
Nation-states are still loath to recognize the status of dual citizenship; it is
only rare circumstances of family, work, and political history that place one
in this situation. I would agree with Braidotti that the complexity of our
cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic identities and heritages are not reflected
in our passports, in our identities as nationals of this or that state. How-
ever, we must have the right to become members of a polity, and the rules
of entry into a polity must be fair and in accordance with human dignity.
To achieve this, we must indeed renegotiate the normativity of the "logo-
centric polis." The feminist theorist at the present is one of the brokers in
this complex renegotiation of sexual difference and new collective
identities.

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Having started with Virginia Woolf, let me end by returning to *Orlando*
once more. It is Thursday, the eleventh of October, 1928, and Orlando is
driving past Old Kent Road to the family estate of four hundred years.
Orlando, now a mother and writer, calls to Orlando at the turn by the
barn, but Orlando does not come. However, she has many other selves to

choose from: "A biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many as thousand" (235). For some unaccountable reason, complains Woolf, sometimes the conscious self wishes to be but one self. "This," she observes, "is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all" (236). Having winked in the direction of the Nietzschean-Freudian critique of the unitary self as the captain self with the master key, Woolf then bows toward Taylor's theory of strong evaluative commitments: "And it was at this moment, when she had ceased to call 'Orlando' and was deep in thoughts of something else, that the Orlando whom she had called came of its own accord. . . . The whole of her darkened and settled, as when some foil whose addition makes the round and solidity of a surface is added to it, and the shallow becomes deep and the near distant; and all is contained as water is contained by the sides of a well. So she was now darkened, stilled, and became, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self" (249).

These are not the last lines of the novel, and I do not want to leave the impression that they are. In the last pages of the book, Orlando experiences moments of intense recollection and ultimate reconciliation, uttering, "ecstasy" as she catches a vision of her seafaring captain husband, Shelmerdine, now returned. A quaint, romantic, we might even say regressively traditional female ending to a novel so daring! But I shall resist the temptation to draw a single, coherent philosophical conclusion from Woolf's complex narrative, for I frankly do not know that there is a single conclusion to be drawn. The mark of a great work of art is to hold together in a single intuition those complex conceptual relationships that it is the task of philosophical reflection to disentangle.

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