ily cere-
cahier

cyber-teratologies

rosi braidotti

metamorphoses

TOWARDS A MATERIALIST
THEORY OF BECOMING

ROSI BRAIDOTTI

Polity

4

Cyber-teratologies

'In science fiction films, the hero just flies in at the very beginning. He can bend steel with his bare hands. He can walk in zero gravity. He can see right through lead doors. But no one asks him how he is able to do these things. They just say, "Look! He's walking in zero gravity." So you don't have to deal with human nature at all.'

Laurie Anderson, *United States*

'There's a quality of legend about freaks. Like a person in a fairy tale who stops you and demands that you answer a riddle. Most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They've already passed their test in life. They're aristocrats.'

Diana Arbus, *Diana Arbus*, p. 3

So far, I have been courting with assiduity two interrelated concepts: firstly the cartographic practice of critical theory; secondly the yearning and quest for new styles or figurations for the non-unitary or nomadic subject. The case I am building up is in no way linear, but rather multi-faceted and web-like in its ramifications. This style can be assessed as either admirable or totally opaque, depending on one's politics of location, that is to say on readers' situated and necessarily partial perspectives. I stipulated a different pact with my readers, in opposition to the definition of the author as the unitary notion that keeps the text together by actually owning the key to its meaning. What does this apparently complex dialogical exchange between readers and writer come down to? I would describe it as a mutual pact of tolerance for complexities on both sides. That being the case, internal differentiations must be allowed for. As the author, having passed the halfway

mark, I feel torn between two equally powerful pulls: the first is towards self-explanatory transparency, in spite of my resistance to the clarity fetishism which I sarcastically commented on in chapter 1. The second pull, however, is for a nomadic and flexible approach that would allow readers to make up their own route through my text. I shall accordingly not take them by their virtual hand and guide them through a recapitulation of aims and intentions.

Lest this appeal to readers to fend for themselves be taken as rude, may I remind readers that, if this book were a CD-Rom or an Internet site, they would not hesitate to interfere with it, to manipulate it on the innermost level of techno-intimacy. They would simply take it over, scan it, pick it up, click it, down-load it, print it, cut it and glue it as if it were the most natural course of events. As an author based in the Gutenberg Galaxy, I feel at a double disadvantage. Firstly, I am stuck with the obligation of linearity of the reading process which militates against the joint author–readers' nomadic sensibility that I have been advocating since chapter 1. Secondly, I have to overcome my own frustration at the situation and cultivate the patience necessary to recapitulate, summarize and repeat. I shall consequently do so by providing a minimalist set of road-signs.

About figurations: they evoke the changes and transformations which are on-going in the 'g-local' context of advanced societies. Special emphasis has been given to the dislocations induced by the fast rates of change upon established notions of identity. Figurations are expressive of cartographic readings of the subject's own embedded and embodied position. As such, they are linked to the social imaginary by a complex web of relations, both of the repressive and the empowering kind. The idea of figurations therefore provides an answer not only to political, but also to both epistemological and aesthetic questions: how does one invent new structures of thought? Where does conceptual change start from? What are the conditions that can bring it about? Is the model of scientific rationality a suitable frame of reference to express the new subjectivity? Is the model of artistic creativity any better? How does it act upon the social imaginary? Will *mythos* or *logos* prove to be a better ally in the big leap across the postmodern void? What is the specific contribution of philosophical nomadism to this discussion?

About transitions: the nomadic or rhizomatic mode in critical theory aims to account for processes, not fixed points. This means going in between different discursive fields, passing through diverse spheres of intellectual discourse. Theory today happens 'in transit', moving on, passing through, creating connections where things were previously disconnected or seemed unrelated, where there seemed to be 'nothing to see'. In transit, moving, displacing also implies the effort to move on to the invention of new ways of relating, of building footbridges between notions. This mode of working,

which Isabelle Stengers (1987) calls epistemic nomadism, can only work, in fact, if it is properly situated, securely anchored in the 'in-between' zones. It is therefore crucial to learn how to think about processes and not only concepts. The challenge is in how to represent in-between zones and areas of experience or perception.

About difference: it is both the problem and the solution. This implies a related challenge to the habit that consists in representing changes or trans-formations in pejorative terms. In this chapter, I will present my own carto-graphy of the postmodern Gothic, that is to say the teratological social imaginary of post-industrial societies. I will also outline a number of stand-ard readings of monstrous formations, in keeping with psychoanalysis and semiotics. In the next chapter, on the other hand, I will spell out a nomadic and rhizomic way to approach in a creative manner the cyber-monsters of high-tech societies. Through it all, I will evolve slowly from a cartographic to a more figural way of discussing the central concepts of philosophical nomadism, namely embodiment, materialism and sexual difference.

About sexually differentiated becomings   In the previous chapter, in my ana-lysis of the axis women–insects–technology I raised the issue which is central to this chapter, namely: how to assess the social imaginary that produces such representations. Does it express the deep-seated anxiety of the Majority, or are there other patterns of subversive, becoming-minoritarian at work as well? What's the place of sexual difference in this cultural trend? Is there hope for the new monsters?
    With these sign-posts in mind, let us proceed.

The cyber-monsters of late postmodernity

Postmodernity is notoriously the age of proliferating differences. The devalued 'others' which constituted the specular complement of the modern subject – woman, the ethnic or racialized other and nature or 'earth-others' – return with a vengeance. They are the complement to the modern subject, who constructed himself as much through what he excluded, as through what he included in his sense of agency or subjectivity. Phallogocentrism as an appar-atus of subjectivity works by organizing the significant/signifying differ-ences according to a hierarchical scale that is governed by the standardized mainstream subject. Deleuze calls it 'the Majority subject' or the Molar centre of Being. Irigaray calls it 'the Same', or the hyperinflated, falsely universal 'He'. It is against 'Him' that the social and political movements of the post-war period have concentrated their critical efforts. As Canguilhem put it,

Difference, however, has been rendered in theoretical discourse in negative terms of pejoration. Feminist theory describes this as a sort of 'metaphysical cannibalism' (Braidotti 1991) that feeds on its structurally excluded others. This function is crucial to figures of negative difference such as the deviant or monstrous others. In fact, as I will argue in this chapter, it is in the language of monstrosity that difference is often translated. Because this difference-as-pejoration fulfils a structural and constitutive function, it also occupies a strategic position. It can consequently illuminate the complex and dissymmetrical power-relations at work within the dominant subject-position.

This proliferation of 'differences' can no longer be fitted into a dialectical mode of opposition. For instance the women's movement has marked an indelible scar on the symbolic tissue of phallocentric culture; emergent subjectivities from the post-colonial horizon have displaced the Eurocentred world-view; various brands of fundamentalism as well as both communist and post-communist nationalism have created powerful images of 'threatening alien others'. This process confuses the distribution of values according to self–other dichotomies. To top it all off, ecological disaster spells the end of the drive towards mastery of nature, while the technological revolution makes it all the more urgent to resolve issues of access to and participation in a democracy that is threatened by the informatics of domination.

The emergences of the new critical discourses of psychoanalysis, linguistics and ethnology are both the symptom of a crisis in the classical philosophical discourse and a response to that crisis. They also express the emerging presence of the 'others' of classical humanism. For instance, the woman, as referent for embodied, lived experience, fantasy and desire is at the heart of the discourse and practice of psychoanalysis, much as the ethnic other is the focus of ethnology. And the environment as the non-verbal framework within which human subjectivity is constructed simply breaks through the classical scheme of representation that coded it as 'nature' and requires more subtle forms of mediation. Modern biology, linguistics and anthropology all struggle with the issue of what to do with 'human nature' and in some way organize a sort of division of discursive labour among them.

These discourses draw their disruptive and innovative force precisely from the fact that they embody and express the view of those pejorative, often pathologized and yet structurally necessary 'others' who constituted the boundary-markers of modernity. They are therefore both the symptom of the crisis of dominant subjectivity and the expression of altogether new subject-positions.

Moreover, late post-industrial societies have proved far more flexible and adaptable towards the proliferation of 'different differences', than the classical Left expected. These 'differences' have been turned into and constructed

poly-centred power-relations of post-industrialism have resulted in the marketing of pluralistic differences and the commodification of the existence, the culture, the discourses of 'others' in the mode of consumerism. Popular culture is a reliable indicator of this trend, which sells 'world music', or a savvy mixture of the exotic and the domestic, often in the mode of neo-colonial romantic appropriation of 'difference'. Although ethnicity and race continue to play a major role in organizing the consumeristic appropriation of proliferating differences, the trend is so global as to leave no identity untouched. Just take any product: chocolate-chip cookies or good old American ice-cream, and re-package it with a foreign-sounding name, and you can get that 'global economy' feeling. Contemporary music and fashion fit the bill just as neatly.

An important implication of this situation is that in late postmodernity, advanced capitalism functions as the great nomad, the organizer of the mobility of commodified products. A generalized sense of 'free circulation' pertains, however, almost exclusively to the domain of goods and commodities, regardless of their place of origin, provided they guarantee maximum profit. People do not circulate nearly as freely. It is therefore crucial to expose the logic of economic exploitation that equates nomadic flux with profit-minded circulation of commodities. Given that technologies are so intrinsic to social and discursive structures of postindustrial societies, they deserve special attention. From a critical perspective, the most salient aspect of the technologies is the issue of access and participation: knowing that barely twenty per cent of households in the world have electricity, let alone telephone-lines and modems, well may one wonder about the 'democratic', let alone the 'revolutionary', potential of the new electronic frontier. Thus, access and participation to the new high-tech world is unevenly distributed world-wide, with gender, age and ethnicity acting as major axes of negative differentiation.

Massumi, in his political analysis of the historical condition of postmodernity (1998), describes global capitalism as a profit-oriented mix-and-match that vampirizes everything. Contemporary capitalism functions by 'circulatory stratification': 'It sucks value from pre-existing formations but in killing them endows them with eternal after-life' (1998: 53). The media industry is an integral part of this circular logic of commodification. Images constitute a serious, never-ending, forever-dead source of capital: a spectral economy of the eternal return. This implies also that a generalized sense of schizophrenia marks the social horizons of most cultures at the beginning of a new century. I would argue that the postmodern condition rests on the paradox of the simultaneous occurrence of contradictory trends; for instance, on the one hand the globalization of the economic and cultural processes, which engenders increasing conformism in lifestyle, telecommunication and consumerism. On the other hand, we also see the fragmentation of these processes,

with the concomitant effects of increased structural injustices, the marginalization of large sections of the population, and the resurgence of regional, local, ethnic, and cultural differences not only between the geo-political blocks, but also within them (Eisenstein 1998). Technology is a major factor here.

In fact the 'global' economy is a 'g-local' effect: it is a highly localized and situated phenomenon that consists in packaging and marketing differences as consumable goods. It is this paradox of highly local manifestations of more general trends that makes 'glocal' cultures so difficult to analyse. They simultaneously blur, but also uphold the boundaries between 'home' and 'elsewhere' in ways which call for new types of power analysis. Conceptual creativity is needed because technological postmodernity is also and primarily about structural injustices and inequalities in 'post-industrial/colonial/communist' societies. It is about the becoming-third-world of the first world, while continuing the exploitation of developing countries. It is about the decline of 'legal' economies and the rise of structural illegality as a factor in the world economy – also known as 'capital as cocaine' (Land 1995). It is about the militarization of the technological space, and also about the globalization of pornography and the prostitution of women and children, in a ruthless trade in human life. It is about the feminization of poverty and the rising rates of female illiteracy, as well as the structural unemployability of large sectors of the population, especially the youth. This social order is also about the difficulty of the law to cope with phenomena such as the new reproductive rights, ranging from copyright laws in the use of photocopiers and video-recorders, to the regulation of surrogate motherhood and artificial procreation, not to mention the problem of copyright on Internet and environmental control, this extensive web of micro-relations of power is at the heart of what Foucault calls 'bio-power', that is to a system of diffuse and all-pervading surveillance and over-regulation, that is centreless, and consequently all the more pernicious and effective.

I take the spasmodic and slightly schizophrenic concurrence of these phenomena as the distinctive trait of our age. The proximity and quasi-familiarity of differences has turned the 'others' into objects of consumption, granting them alternatively a reassuring and a threatening quality that by-passes the swinging doors of the dialectics. We have entered instead into a zigzagging pattern of dissonant nomadic subjects. Keeping track of them is the harsh challenge that critical theory is attempting to meet. Expressing the positivity of difference in the age of its commodified proliferation is a conceptual task that, however, keeps on bumping against the walls of dialectical habits of thought.

The social imaginary of late urbanized Western postmodernity is in the grip of teratological or monstrous others. The monstrous, the grotesque, the

mutant and the downright freakish have gained widespread currency in urban post-industrial cultures also known as 'postmodern Gothic'. In his classic analysis, Lesley Fiedler (1979) points out that since the sixties a youth culture has evolved that entertains a strong, albeit ironic and parodic, relationship to freaks. Feminist culture is no exception. Sontag (1976) has noted that the revival of cultural interest in freaks in the sixties' literature and cinema coincides with the outlawing of the famous freak show of Coney Island. The physical suppression of the freaky beings facilitated their metaphoric consumption. Just like other endangered species, the eviction of freaks from their highly policed territories functioned as a licence for their commodification as the subject matter of popular art and culture.

One of the sources of the great popularity of this genre is the fact that this structural ambiguity lends itself to multi-media applications: to visualization, dramatization, serialization, transformation into musicals (Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*, to name but a few) and video-games of all kinds. Early cinema actually swarms with monstrosities of all kinds, like *Nosferatu* and *The Golem*. The shift away from marginality into the mainstream occurs in the seventies with W. P. Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971) and Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) and *The Stepford Wives* (1972). A new generation of accomplished film directors was ready to take up the challenge: Spielberg, Cronenberg, De Palma, Cameron, Lynch, Carpenter, Ridley and Tony Scott, Bigalow and others. The audience was primarily the baby-boomers, that is to say the first post-war generation that grew up with television and its endless re-runs of B-rate films. As Carroll points out (1990), they are also the generation of feminism, civil rights and other momentous social and political changes.

Freaks, the geek, the androgyne and the hermaphrodite crowd the space of multiple Rocky Horror Shows. Drugs, mysticism, satanism, various brands of insanity are also in the catalogue. Murder and cannibalism, made visible by Romero in *Night of the Living Dead* in the sixties, became eroticized by Greenaway in the eighties and made it into the mainstream by the nineties, with *Silence of the Lambs*. The analysis of the current fascination with the freakish half-human/half-animal or beast-figure alone would fill a volume. We may think, as an example, of comic strips (the Ninja Turtles), TV classic series like *Star Trek*, the covers of records, CDs and LPs, video-games and CD-ROMs, video clips and the computer-generated images of Internet and Virtual Reality, as further evidence of the same trend. They are connected to the drug culture, as much as to its spin-offs in music, video and computer cultures. A great deal of this culture is flirting with sexual indeterminacy, which has been rampant since David Bowie's path-breaking Ziggy Stardust.

Contemporary culture has shifted the issue of genetic mutations from the high-tech laboratories into popular culture. Hence the relevance of the new

the status of a cultural icon. 'Altered states' are trendsetters: video drugs now compete with the pharmaceutical ones. This cyber-teratology also gives a new twist to the centuries-old connection between the feminine and the monstrous. There is indeed a distinct teratological flair in contemporary cyber-culture, with a proliferation of new monsters which often merely transpose into outer space very classical iconographic representations of monstrous others. Whether utopian (*Close Encounters*) or dystopian (*Independence Day*), messianic (*E.T.*) or diabolical (*Alien*), the inter-galactic monstrous other is firmly settled in the imaginary of today's media and of the electronic frontier. Lara Croft of the *Tomb Raiders* series inaugurates the genre of the digital heroine character, post-Barbarella but also post-Ripley (from the *Aliens* series) and thoroughly Gothic.

Quite significant is also the contemporary trend for borderline or liminal figures of sexuality, especially replicants, zombies and vampires, including lesbian vampires and other queer mutants, who seem to enjoy special favour in these post-AIDS days. This is not only the case as far as 'low' popular culture genres are concerned, but it is equally true of relatively 'high' literary genres, as testified by authors like Angela Carter, Kathy Acker, Martin Amis, Bret Easton Ellis and Fay Weldon. The established success of genres such as horror, crime stories, science fiction and cyberpunk also points to a new 'post-human' techno-teratological phenomenon that privileges the deviant or the mutant over the more conventional versions of the human. Becker argues that these forms of neo-Gothic also express some of the liberatory potential of the postmodern condition in that they place back on to the social agenda issues of emotion and of excess. She also argues (Becker 1999: 2) that 'one of the secrets of the Gothic's persistent success is gender-related: it is so powerful because it is so feminine.' Part of this feminine charge consists, according to Becker, as well as to Linda Hutcheon, in excess and boundary-blurring, all of which exceed the boundaries not only of the classical Gothic genre, but also of pulp, porn, parody and other eminent postmodern sub-genres. As such it constitutes a serious gender-laden challenge for cultural criticism.

On this score, feminism is very much part of this culture. Contemporary feminist culture is just as passionately parodically and paradoxically involved with the cyber-monstrous universe as any other social movements or cultural and political practice in late post-industrial societies. Feminism shares fully in and actively contributes to the teratological techno-imaginary of our culture, and with it an emphasis on hybrid and mutant identities and transgender bodies, as I argued in the discussion on alternative patterns of desire in chapters 1 and 2. Cyber-feminists play with body-boundaries and the contours of the corporeal, presenting graphical surfaces where theoretical questions mingle with visual montages that re-assemble familiar images into

location of femininity in postmodernity, which, as Griggers put it, is of the register of the unrepresentable:

> the unspeakable as all that accompanies the breakdown of rational conscious-ness flows constantly around us . . . the breakdown functions as the successful failure of feminine subjectification – the antiproduction of feminine subjectivities. Beyond the unspeakable, only morbid symptoms remain to be located, re-covered, mapped – the bulimic vomiting of the toxic maternal, the anorectic refusal to take in the phallus, the neurasthenic introjection of the social fem-inine as slow suicide, the autistic refusal of the social body as 'real' percept through sensory mutilation – mnemic signs providing both clues and impene-trable screens for affects and events but unrepresentable. (Griggers 1997: 104)

In her inimitable style, Griggers positions the embodied female in the highly turbulent zone that is the dissolution of classical subjectivity. The list of psycho-pathologies she provides functions as the frame for the pathetic/despotic location of (mostly) white femininity in advanced post-industrial cultures. For more on this, return to chapter 2.

Gender trouble, a sort of trans-sexual imaginary, rather than seventies-style lesbianism has entered feminist culture. 'Queer' is no longer the noun that marks an identity they taught us to despise, but it has become a verb that destabilizes any claim to identity, even and especially to a sex-specific identity. The heroine chic of Calvin Klein's advertising campaign and the success of anorexic top models like Kate Moss have fashioned the body in the direction of the abject: hybrid mutant bodies seem to be the trend. The anorexic and amenorrheic body has replaced the hysteric as the *fin-de-siècle* psycho-pathological symptom of femininity and its discontents. The abject drug-addicted bodies of Irving Welsh's *Trainspotting* have met with a huge cultural resonance and unprecedented success. The alliance between queer sexuality, drugs and cyber-technology was announced in the psychedelic, narcotic film *Liquid Sky* (1993), where the lethal alien-body machines spread like a virus through the post-industrial urban landscape. They seduce and induce cosmic orgasms and then they kill the humans at orgasm point, mak-ing them disappear. The aliens feed on the euphoria-producing chemicals secreted during orgasm.

A colder, more ironic sensibility with a flair for sadomasochism is the contemporary version of 'no more nice girls'. Mae West has replaced Rebecca West as feminist mother, as Madonna claims in her *Sex* album (1992). Cyber-feminism in all its multiple rhizomatic variables promotes a mon-strous or hybrid imaginary. Bad girls are in and bad girls carry or are carried by a teratological imaginary. As Warner puts it: 'in rock music, in films, in fiction, even in pornography, women are grasping the she-beast of demonology for themselves. The bad girl is the heroine of our times, and transgression a staple entertainment' (Warner 1994: 11). The iron-pumping

Mary Russo, in her important work on the female grotesque, sees the 1990's fascination with freaks as a reaction against the normalizing and normative elements of mainstream feminist culture, which is also linked to a generational shift. She argues that through the eighties – the period I analysed in chapter 1 in terms of the 'sex wars' – American feminism entered a process of normalization in response to the conservative backlash and the negative portrayal of feminist women in the media. For fear of being marginalized and excluded from the mainstream, feminists adopted reassuring strategies which led them to reject 'the strange, the risky, the minoritarian, the excessive, the outlawed and the alien' (Russo 1994: vii). This is how the freak or the monstrous comes to overlap with the grotesque in the political imaginary of today. The nineties' re-appropriation of these categories is a deconstructivist turn that 'parallels the powerful, historic detours of words like "black" or, more recently "queer", away from their stigmatizing function in the hands of dominant culture, a trajectory that is often described as moving from shame to pride' (Russo 1994: 76). Relying on the theoretical work of Kristeva and Bakhtin, Mary Russo defines the female grotesque as the site of transgression, 'the horror zone par excellence' (1994: 10). It marks the return of the repressed of the political unconscious of late postmodernity through the expression of a carnivalesque culture of the excessive, the risky and the abject. For Russo the freak overlaps with the grotesque as a bodily socio-political category.

The monstrous or teratological imaginary expresses the social, cultural and symbolic mutations that are taking place around the phenomenon of techno-culture (Penley and Ross 1991a). Visual regimes of representation are at the heart of it. From the panoptic eye explored by Foucault in his theory of 'bio-power' to the ubiquitous presence of television, surveillance video and computer screens, it is the visual dimension of contemporary technology that defines its all-pervading power. With the on-going electronic revolution reaching a peak, it is becoming quite clear that this disembodied gaze constitutes a collision of virtual spaces with which we co-exist in increasing degrees of intimacy. In this context, feminist analysis has alerted us to the pleasures but also the dangers of 'visual politics' (Vance 1990), and the politics of visualization, especially in the field of bio-technology (Franklin, Lury and Stacey 1991). Whereas the emphasis on the powers of visualization encourages some of the theoretical masters of nihilistic postmodern aesthetics (Kroker 1987; Baudrillard 1995) to reduce the bodily self to a mere surface of representation and to launch a sort of euphoric celebration of virtual embodiments, the feminist response has been more cautious and ambivalent. It consists in stressing both the liberating and the potentially one-sided application of the new technologies (Haraway 1991; Zoe 1992). They argue for the need to develop figurations of contemporary female subjectivities that would do justice to the complexities and the contradic-

The contemporary science fiction genre

'Science fiction has gone through a whole evolution taking it from animal, vegetable and mineral becomings to becomings of bacteria, viruses, molecules and things imperceptible.'

(Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux*: 248)

One needs to turn to 'minor', not to say marginal and hybrid genres, such as science fiction, science-fiction horror and cyberpunk, to find fitting cultural illustrations of the changes and transformations that are taking place at present. I also think they provide an excellent field in which to test and apply Deleuze's work on culture, embodiment and becoming. Deleuze acknowledges the importance of the science fiction genre himself, when he praises these texts for their nomadic force: science fiction is indeed all about displacements, ruptures and discontinuities. As a 'low culture' genre, moreover, it is also mercifully free of grandiose pretensions – of the aesthetic or cognitive kind – and thus ends up being a more accurate and honest depiction of contemporary culture than other, more self-consciously 'representational' genres (such as the documentary, for instance).

Furthermore, for the purpose of the argument that I am pursuing through this book, namely the quest for positive social and cultural representations of hybrid, monstrous, abject and alien others in such a way as to subvert the construction and consumption of pejorative differences, I think the science-fiction genre offers an ideal breeding ground to explore what Haraway describes affectionately as 'the promises of monsters'. In this section I will argue forcefully for the relevance of Deleuze's theory of becoming to science-fiction texts and films,[1] while also arguing with him on the issue of sexually differentiated nature of these processes. I will also challenge his idea of sexually undifferentiated 'becomings' by pointing to significant evidence of gender-specific patterns.

Even the most conservative commentators (Smith 1982) recognize that science fiction is a literature of ideas, with a serious philosophical content and a distinct tendency to moralizing. The dividing line between conservative and other critics, however, concerns the relation between that fantastic, the magical and the strict genre of science fiction. Thus Smith argues that 'absurdist, existentialist literature, the type in which human beings are inexplicably transformed into cockroaches, does not qualify as science fiction' (Smith 1982: 9). I beg to differ from this reductive approach. This recalls the traditional standards of judgement exemplified by Todorov, namely that even fantastic literature must not seriously threaten the morphological normality and the moral normativity of the humanistic world-view. Meta-morphoses are fine, so long as they are kept clean and in control, that

is, anthropocentric and moralizing. All the rest does not deserve to be taken into serious consideration. I will defend instead the idea that science fiction enacts a displacement of our world-view away from the human epicentre and that it manages to establish a continuum with the animal, mineral, vegetable, extra-terrestrial and technological worlds. It points to post-humanist, bio-centred egalitarianism.

As Laurie Anderson wittily put it, the anti-anthropocentrism of this genre allows it to dispense rapidly with the question of 'human nature' and its psychological repertoire, so as to move on to the exploration of other possible worlds. The emotions commonly associated with humans are not eliminated so much as decentralized and diffused throughout the text. Robert Scholes (1975) has argued that this technique operates a de-familiarization or sense of estrangement that is potentially confusing but often also exhilarating. Thus science fiction has the means of mirroring and even magnifying the crisis of our culture and our times and of highlighting some of its potential dangers. Scholes places high value on the visionary and didactic role played by the imagination in times of crisis. He argues forcefully that science fiction is a genre that takes the risk of looking into the future and drawing cognitively significant and morally relevant conclusions, in keeping with the established tradition of 'fabulations'.

Scholes defines science fiction as a 'structural' fabulation, that is to say a sub-branch of the speculative mode (as opposed to the dogmatic) and close to the didactic romance. It is strongly influenced by science and tinged with clear moral tones, and demands quite a large imaginative effort of its readers. Science fiction is a genre that accepts full responsibility for its attempt to imagine things differently and thus enacts a sort of cognitive responsibility for its own imaginative flights. As such it is beneficial not only to society but also to science which needs to be imaginative and speculative in order to progress.

Teresa de Lauretis defends the positivity of science fiction in terms of very definite textual processes 'that coexist with narrativization and counter its tendency to totalize meaning' (1980: 160). In this respect, de Lauretis, quoting Foucault, suggests that contemporary science fiction has moved beyond the irreconcilable classical conflict between utopia and dystopia, moving instead towards heterotopia, the co-existence of mutually undermining meaning systems which point to the dissolution of the unitary notion of the subject.

Less high-minded but equally convinced of the seriousness of the science-fiction genre, Fredric Jameson values it precisely for the dominant role that the wild imagination is allowed to play in it. This allows science fiction to dramatize both the fears and the aspirations of our culture at the level of the plot itself. Relying on his idea of 'the political unconscious' (Jameson 1981) as a vast network of ideas, narratives, fantasies, memories and

expectations – a web of 'narrative pensée sauvage' – Jameson argues that it has the power to structure the social field as well as its cultural production. Writing specifically about science fiction, Jameson (1982) praises the epistemological priority of imagination and fantasy not only in culture but also in 'high' theory and in science, thus challenging the separation of the two.

What distinguishes contemporary science fiction from the nineteenth-century versions is that, rather than offering utopian scenarios, it reflects back to us our sense of estrangement at the fast rate of changes that are taking place in the present. Science fiction, in other words, is the defamiliarization of the 'here and now', rather than dreams of possible futures. It both reflects and provokes unease. Jameson summarizes this as the 'unthinkability' of the future, or the death of utopia, which is a mark of late postmodernity understood as the cultural logic of advanced capitalism. The contemporary imaginary is impoverished and unable to think about difference outside the frame of deep anxiety. Science fiction therefore becomes a vehicle for the reflection on our own limits, on the cultural, ideological and technical closures of our times. By doing this, science-fiction texts become self-referential in that they reflect upon their own limits and circumstances. They reflect the fundamental sense of disbelief of an entire culture towards itself and thus echo the doubts of well-meaning progressive people confronted with the large-scale social transformations of today.

As an example, Fredric Jameson's influential idea of the political unconscious attempts to hold together a notion of 'cognitive mapping' of the present with a pedagogical political culture in such a way as to create a totalizing effect. The role of psychoanalysis in this is significant: Jameson tries to apply the Freudian methodological scheme and distinguishes between latent and manifests meanings in texts (be it social or literary ones). Thus, the political unconscious indicates the mass of underlying latency, that is to say an infrastructure of yet-untapped material that can and should be made manifest. Jameson then goes on to index these meanings on mechanisms of cultural narrative and the workings of the individual unconscious according to Freud's psychoanalysis. This lends a deep and secret unity to the collection of fragments that is the cumulated texts of a culture and which can be reconstituted in critical analysis. The legacy of Hegel and Marx casts a long shadow over Jameson's work and it tilts his notion of interpretation towards the classical dialectical method of unveiling latent meanings. Jameson's subsequent attempts to draw conceptual analogies between his 'antitranscendent hermeneutic model' (1981: 23) and Deleuze and Guattari's anti-interpretative model is, in my opinion, unconvincing.[2] Jameson is both praising the fragment and constructing it as a phobic object that needs to be recomposed within a more unitary plot and a single theoretical framework

As a result, Jameson's 'political unconscious' becomes yet another master-narrative solidly indexed on the historicist reading of capitalist development. I find his uni-linear mode of thinking especially ill-suited to contemporary complexities. Given in fact that cartographies are politically informed maps of the present, it follows that they are not one-dimensional, but rather give rise to all sorts of contestations and dissonant readings. Major axes of dissonance are sexual difference, gender, ethnicity, age, religious and national identity and social class, as well as access to education. It is this proliferation of dissonant differences that makes the nomadic practice of philosophy into a complex and multi-layered which web of power-relations which breaks up bilateral and usually binary or dualistic modes of interrelation. I think Marxist modes of social analysis do not escape from binarism and in some ways, notably in the opposition between 'ideology' and 'science', re-assert it with distressing conviction.

Thus, Jameson claims to follow Deleuze's lead and yet he remains an unrepentant Marxist in his totalizing vision of the relationship between the fragments and the whole. I think with Deleuze that neither in science fiction nor in any other text is there a master plot to be unveiled or revealed by the simultaneous deployment of world history and individual psychic processes. There are only fragments and sets of hazard-meetings and *ad hoc* intersections of events, Deleuze's points of crossings, rather that Freud's libidinal predestination or Marx's teleological process.

Therefore, however close to Deleuze in terminology, Jameson's project is conceptually and affectively different from the nomadology. Jameson applies a modernist philosophy of time to the analysis of the socio-economic cultural conditions of late postmodernity. He adopts the lexicon of nomadology, not its syntax. Poststructuralism thrives on fragments and discontinuities without falling into the indulgence of relativism, the hysteria of panic or the dubious luxury of melancholia. Poststructuralism is a pragmatic philosophy that rejects the ghosts of metaphysical interiority, the 'hauntology' of missing presence. It specifically rejects the tyranny of a signifier that forever refers to something else, which is never 'there' and never 'that' anyway. What you see is what you get and what you see – as Walter Benjamin put it ever so lucidly before the Nazis pushed him to suicide – is but a heap of debris which they call progress.

The imaginary of disaster

If it is the case, as Noel Carroll (1990) argues, that the genre of science-fiction horror movies is based on the disturbance of cultural norms, it is then ideally placed to represent states of crisis and change and to express the widespread anxiety of our times. As such, this genre is as unstoppable as the

The current manifestations of fascination with the monstrous can be linked with the historical phenomenon of the 'post-nuclear sensibility' (*Diacritics* 1984), often referred to as the 'post-human' predicament. Significant writers like Amis, Acker, Weldon, Russ and Carter, who in my opinion have provided some of the most illuminating accounts of the monstrous imaginary of contemporary culture, link it directly to the post-nuclear predicament. The historical factor that marks this shift is that science and technology – far from being the leading principles in a teleological process aimed at the perfectibility of the human – have 'spilled over', turning into sources of permanent anxiety over our present and future. The 'thinkability' of nuclear disaster makes for an almost trivialized popularity of horror, which is connected to the unthinkability of the future. An imaginary world filled with images of mutation marks much more than the definitive loss of the naturalistic paradigm: it also brings to the fore the previously unspeakable fact that our culture is historically condemned to the contemplation of its extinction. Barbara Johnson argues along similar lines, within a Derridian perspective. In her comments on Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (Johnson 1980), Johnson thinks that the contemplation of the death of the future, the extinction of the last human, is the condition of possibility for contemporary literature. Being able to represent a future in which she or he will most probably not play a role confirms the reader in the enjoyment of the act of reading itself. The text projects us beyond the contemplation of our own death.

This 'apocalyptic imagination' (Ketterer 1976) thus plays with religious and moral themes. In her classical definition of this genre, Susan Sontag associates science fiction with the imagination of disaster and the aesthetics of destruction: 'The peculiar beauties to be found in wrecking havoc, making a mess' (Sontag 1976: 119). The more extensive the scale of the disaster, the better. Hence an in-built sense of cruelty which makes the science-fiction genre overlap with the horror movie. Sontag argues in fact that the spectacle of abject and abnormal bodies, 'the sense of superiority over the freak conjoined in varying proportions with the titillation of fear and aversion make it possible for moral scruples to be lifted, for cruelty to be enjoyed' (Sontag 1976: 122). In other words, science fiction offers the enjoyment of suffering and destruction in a very simplistic and highly moralistic frame. That usually singles out science and technology – especially the nuclear – as the source of anxiety and evil.

Though historically the actual event of a nuclear explosion has materialized only in selected parts of the globe, the build-up of nuclear weapons is a problem in itself. Meanwhile the toxic waste and other polluting side-effects of the nuclear situation have increased genetic defects and other congenital malformations. Teratoxicology (Glamister 1964) is the brand of molecular biology that deals with bio-chemically induced birth defects and mutations

In her in-depth analysis of the political economy of the postnuclear predicament and the thinkability of disaster, Sofia Zoe comments very wittily: 'The unthinkable has never been innocently unthought: the extinction question's conspicuous absence from all but the most recent American political discourse has been maintained by the condensation of extinction anxieties onto ambiguous symbols, and their displacement onto other political and moral issues' (Zoe 1984: 47). Zoe reads science-fiction representations of foetal life alongside the political campaigns of the Pro-Life militants of the American New Right and their idea of foetal personhood. This eye-opening comparative reading shows that one of the aims of cultural practices centred on the foetus is to distract our attention from the practices of extermination currently growing in the world as a result of the military-industrial complex. Sofia Zoe points out the contradictions of contemporary culture, which is so concerned with 'rights to life' in the case of abortion and reproduction issues while it continues to neglect the culture of death in nuclear armament, the pile-up of radioactive waste and other toxic material, and the environmental crisis. It is as if the much-publicized spectacle of the suppression of a few unborn babies were allowed to obscure the far larger and more dramatic possibility of the extinction of life on this planet as a whole. Again, *bios* dominates *zoe* in political discourse to the right of the centre.

Part of the unsettling quality of science fiction – that mixture of familiarity and estrangement which has emerged as one of its main features – is due to the fact that it combines macro-events with micro-instances, in a sort of condensation of space and time which increases proportionally with the levels of anxiety. Stewart argues that spatially science fiction, like the genre of horror, plays on hybridity and liminality. The scenes often take place in dungeons (part basement, part cave); swamps (part earth, part water); woods (part garden, part wilderness) and most significantly, in the suburban household (part home, part hell). Susanne Becker puts it succinctly: 'Gothic horror is domestic horror, family horror, and addresses precisely those obviously "gendered" problems of everyday life' (1999: 4).

Massumi (1992), in his analysis of the political economy of advanced capitalism, situates the management of anxieties and the ubiquity of fear as key-elements. Quoting Deleuze and Antonio Negri, he defines this as the 'accident-form', which is the defining event of the contemporary subject's position in the new world disorder. Massumi sums up the logic of fear and anxiety in the background of the decline of ideologies, which does not mean the defeat of one ideology (capitalism) over another (communism), but rather the defeat of ideology itself. Since the end of the cold war in 1989 especially, a new situation has risen which marks the decline of the binary opposition between freedom and despotism, which Reagan and Bush hailed as the struggle of democracy against the evil empire. The enemy is no longer out-

the home-front: terrorism is the mode of contemporary domination. It works by random violence: the bullet shot that inflicts the fatal blow could literally come from anywhere, at any time and hit anybody. It is the random shot, the accident as catastrophe that defines the political economy of fear, that is to say the threat of imminent disaster striking at any point in space or time: planes crashing because of explosive engines artificially placed upon them, or, as in the case of the Concorde, because of a torn tyre.[3] Safety seems to have left our lives – what will become of our children?

The accident is imminent but, as Massumi astutely puts it, it is also immanent, it is here and now, blended with the most familiar and the most intimate: the macro and the micro coincide in the moment of the catastrophe. A general sense of disaster accompanies the breakdown of established patterns of identity and kinship. There is not one enemy any more, but the infinite possibility of enemies everywhere. In the economy of fear, the enemy has become virtual and as such it awaits actualization. It could be the child, the woman, the neighbour, the AIDS virus, global warming or the next computer crash. It is unspecified because it has become a generic category, a prototype that can fit many bills at once; the accident will happen, it is only a question of time.

> Fear is the translation into 'human' terms and onto the 'human' scale of the double infinity of the figure of the possible. It is the most economical expression of the accident form as subject-form of capital: being as being-virtual, virtuality reduced to the possibility of disaster, disaster commodified, commodification as spectral continuity in the place of threat. (Massumi 1992: 185)

Consumerism, the acquisition of property and purchases are the logic that best expresses the captivity of this kind of market economy. One which predicates forces outside its control as the perpetual threat to its or our survival. Thus elevating consumerism to the function of the orgiastic consummation of fear: in the West we have become our own monsters. The commodity encapsulates the contraction of space and time: each gadget or electronic appliance represents the promise of enjoyment and consequently also its deferral. It is therefore caught in the spectral economy of the ghostly presence–absence of fulfilment; as such it haunts us. The commodity embodies futurity, as time stored (future use) or time saved (a productivity enhancer). Massumi argues that the commodity has become co-extensive with the inner space of subjectivity, as well as the outer space of the market and of social relations. Post-industrial subjectivity is about consumerism, the constant management of 'crisis' and the exploitation of its contradictions. Loyal to the bodily materialism of Deleuze, Massumi points out a qualit-

world-order. Whereas the winners only put their money on the line, the losers risk their bodies. The readers may remember at this point the discussion of chapter 1: that a subject-position like the cyborg simultaneously evokes an abstract image, or spectral commodification (Schwarzenegger) and a very embodied, concrete and actualized one, namely the mostly anonymous, under-paid exploited bodies of labourers – mostly ethnic, natives or immigrant – who fuel the technological revolution. The over-exposed anonymity of the latter makes them coincide with their exploited bodies and ends up making them invisible. The dominant subject-position, however, consists in reaching high definitions of identity, or singularity, that is to say in gaining access to visibility, albeit of the spectral kind. Whiteness, the colour of corpses and of zombies is, according to Dyer, a major factor in regulating access to visibility with high definitions of identity, as opposed to the over-exposed anonymity of the excluded and the losers. Power today is a matter of selection and control, entitlement and access: it is bio-power, centred on the body and on its imagined promises and horrific threats. As Foucault put it, that engenders a system of integrated and all-encompassing surveillance which postulates potential, virtual enemies everywhere, also and especially within its by now exploded boundaries. Politics today is the management of the terror evoked by this imminent and immanent threat. The media both relays and produces this fear and the panic attack with their fixation on live coverage of the next disaster before the next one which, at least cathodically, happens everywhere and at all times.

I think Massumi's superb analysis of the political economy of fear is in tune with the basic concepts of philosophical nomadism. It also helps us understand the mutual dependence of the issue of political theory with cultural, artistic and literary concerns. Philosophy takes place in the world: it is co-extensive with the cartographic practice that consists in taking stock of the social imaginary, the social positions it sustains and the desires it sponsors. On all these scores, therefore, I can only conclude that science fiction is a highly philosophical genre.

Feminist science fiction

As an adventure-minded and action-oriented tale of exploration, war, conquest and destruction, science fiction fits in with relatively traditional gender narratives: it is quite a male-dominated adventure story. As Sarah Lefanu put it, however, science fiction as an experimental genre came of age in the sixties, as a challenge to the stock conventions of both realistic and fantastic literature. Eminently political, in both a dystopian and a utopian sense, it destabilized authority in all its forms and, as such, it exercised a fatal attrac-

and society. The number of female science-fiction writers has consequently grown fast (Lefanu 1988).

Science-fiction writers find their historical roots in the nineteenth-century Gothic tradition which is one of the few genres of the period that allows women to play active roles as travellers, murderesses, thieves, adventuresses of all sorts. That most Gothic heroines are eminently wicked is also a tribute to their intelligence and wit. One of the direct links between the Gothic and science fiction is the idea of travel through space and time: outer space travel allows for fantasies of escape into alternative systems. Nowadays, gender relations, sexuality, child-bearing and alternative ecological and technological systems are all part of the post-nuclear trip. The most direct point of reference, therefore, remains science and technology. Even at its most dystopic, as in M. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), I think that feminist science fiction is structurally technophilic. It takes distance from the feminist tradition of opposition to bio-technology, best exemplified by Gena Corea's notion of 'the mother machine', also known as 'the reproductive brothel' (1985 a and b) where women are totally enslaved to mechanical procreation. Historically, Dorothy Dinnerstein (1977) launched the idea of technology as the subordination of the female humans to the mechanical powers of men. Adapting Mumford's idea of the 'megamachine' to the feminist movement, Dinnerstein denounces the gigantism, the bureaucracy and the general regimentation of society that accompany advanced technology. She opposes to the inorganicism of contemporary culture a more organic, life-giving female world-view.

This position contrasts with another clear strand within non-fictional feminist theory, which relates more positively to the utopian aspects of the culture of science and technology. The most telling case is that of Shulamith Firestone, whose masterpiece *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) was to influence not only the theoretical and political practice of the second feminist wave, but also the fictional works of writers such as Charnas, Piercy, Russ and Gearhart. Firestone represents the 'technophilic' trend in feminism, which was to be a minority position until the late eighties, when more 'cyberminded' feminists emerged. Cybernetic feminism relies on the use of technologies in every aspect of social interaction, including reproduction, in order to relieve women from the drudgery of paid work, the oppression of the patriarchal family and masculine violence. In Firestone's Marxist utopia the ultimate aim of technology is to relieve humanity of its enslavement to an obsolete natural order. The reproductive utopia of techno-babies is part of it, and it is connected to collectivist politics, social utopianism and seventies radical feminism.

Another important insight Lefanu brings to this discussion is that of a structural analogy between woman as the second sex – the 'Other of the

assimilated within the general category of 'difference', understood as a term of pejoration. Lefanu extends this insight to speak of a deep empathy between women and aliens which, in science-fiction literature, favours exchanges and mutual influences. As a matter of fact, in science fiction written by women, women simply love the aliens and feel connected to them by a deep bond of recognition. This bond is played out differently, however, by different authors.

In this respect, the striking feature of feminist science fiction is less the affirmation of the 'feminine' in an essentialist and moralist manner than the questioning and the deconstruction of the gender dichotomy itself. It is a genre that erodes the cultural foundations of notions such as 'woman' and 'man'. In her work on feminist literary postmodernism and in a dialogue with Scholes, Marleen Barr coins the expression 'feminist fabulations' to include works of science fiction, utopia, and fantasy but also the main-stream fiction of Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes and Doris Lessing, which share in restructuring patriarchal narratives, values and myths (Barr 1993). In Barr's assessment, these texts contribute to the postmodern undoing of master narratives and to challenging literary hierarchies.

Science fiction is about sexual metamorphoses and mutations. Angela Carter's 'New Eve' changes from man to woman, much as Woolf's Orlando. Joanna Russ's 'female Man' navigates between sexual polarities, opening up new possibilities; Ursula LeGuin's characters determine their sexual characteristics depending on whom they happen to fall in love with. Most of these mutations are ways of exploring sexuality and desire in situations of extreme duress, just before or after the collapse of civilization and the end of recorded time.

A great deal of these physical and morphological mutations are expressed in the language of monstrosity, abjection and horror; in fact, the whole Gothic repertoire is ransacked and recycled shamelessly in science fiction texts. What horror has to do with is the lifting of categorical boundaries between humans and their others: racialized or ethnic others, animals, insects or inorganic and technological others. The main function of horror, consequently, is to blur fundamental distinctions and to introduce a sense of panic and chaos. The monstrous body fulfils the magical or symptomatic function of indicator of the register of difference, which is why the monster has never been able to avoid a blind date with women. In the post-nuclear cybernetic era, moreover, the encounter between the maternal body and the technological apparatus is so intense that it calls for new frames of analysis. Contemporary 'monstrous others' blur the dividing line between the organic and the inorganic, thus rendering superfluous also the political divide between technophobia and technophilia. The issue becomes one of redefining the techno-body in such a way as to preserve a sense of singularity, without falling into nostalgic reappraisal of an essential self. The issue of the bound-

Extra-uterine births

Several feminist critics (Creed 1990) have argued that the genre of science-fiction horror films is of great relevance to feminism because it is explicitly bent on the exploration of the maternal body and processes of birth. This genre uses the woman's body to explore the possibilities for the future, potentially destructive or positive as they may be.

All fans know that science fiction since *Frankenstein* has to do with fantasies about how science and technology manipulate the body, especially the reproductive body. Science fiction represents alternative systems of procreation and birth, ranging from the rather child-like image of babies born out of trees or of cauliflowers, to monstrous births through unmentionable orifices. Extra-uterine births are central to science fiction texts. Thus, woman as the mother of monsters and the monstrosity of female genitalia are a crucial element in science fiction. The theme of conception and birth is a constant to science fiction as a genre, but interest in it has increased in recent years. Barbara Creed argues that science-fiction horror films, for instance, play with fundamental male anxieties about procreation. They deal with these anxieties by displacing them – usually on the mother's body, which is represented as *the* site of horror: a monstrous vision. There has been a concentration of images connected with the female reproductive cycle: the giant foetuses of *Dune, Inseminoid, The Thing, Alien* and *Aliens*.

These texts externalize and therefore allow us to explore the insides of alien figures who are coded as female in so far as they reproduce, and yet remain threatening. These figures resemble the human but are represented as a source of horror and overpowering awe. A reading inspired by psychoanalysis, especially by Freud's essay on the Medusa-like powers of the female sex, sees these films as displaying a distinct preoccupation with the occult, monstrous powers of the maternal body and the unfathomable depths of female genitalia. The mother as monster becomes a powerful *topos* of this genre and it expresses a deep anxiety about the feminine and gender identity.

A great deal of these horrific effects are achieved through a change in scale which magnifies defects and bodily features. In an illuminating analysis of gigantism, Calame (1985) points out that the gigantic body is a sign of mis-measure, excess and consequently of deviation. It visibly transgresses the delphic principle of the right middle, which has been central to Western aesthetics since Antiquity. Bogdan (1988) emphasizes the importance of the phenomena of aggrandizement and dwarfness in freak shows since the nineteenth century. He points out that tallness is traditionally associated with exotic, orientalist and racist narratives – even the giraffe as an unusually tall animal is no exception. Dwarves, however, tend to fit in with the home-grown

(think of Tom Thumb). The contemporary fascination with insects and other microscopic actors also fits in with this.

Let me try to draw a cartography of the women–monsters nexus, as it is represented in films, depending on their relationship to human reproduction.

Firstly, there are films where science manipulates reproduction, producing machine-made humans. Here the classical example is the series of *Frankenstein* films, where the mad scientist gives in to the impulse to play God and create life in his image, producing only an aberration in the process. In *The Bride of Frankenstein*, the monster is so very ugly that even his fiancée rejects him. Films like these display a rather modernist view of the powers of technology and science, which are seen as a threat to the humanist spirit. This genre culminates in the masterpiece that is *Metropolis*, where the female body doubled up as a robot becomes the symbol of man's ambivalent technological future. In this film technology is embodied in a female robot, a machine-vamp who leads the workers on a rampage and is subsequently burned at the stake (Huyssen 1986). More on this in the next chapter.

A second common topos is the insemination of the female by aliens of all sorts. In *The Fly*, the female body becomes the site of the unknown, that is to say of a hybrid mix of human and non-human. *Inseminoid* shows the woman being impregnated by an alien who will destroy the earth. In Cronenberg's *The Brood* the woman gives birth to monstrous dwarves through a sack attached to the side of her stomach. This theme can be seen as a variation on possession by the devil, of which a major term of reference remains *Rosemary's Baby*. Films like *It's Alive!* are a variation on satanic births. Woman's intercourse with zombies is explored in *Village of the Damned*. A more light-hearted approach can also be found in fifties films such as: *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*.

Thirdly, machine–woman copulation and monstrous high-tech birth: *Xtro*, *Inseminoid*. Robots, born mechanically but 'becoming' human because of affectivity, love and desire: *Daryl, Terminator 2, The Man who Fell to Earth, The Man who Folded Himself*. In *Aliens* human bodies are nests for monstrous embryos that come to birth through the stomach. These films explore the inside of alien female figures who resemble the human and are coded as a source of abject horror and overpowering awe. The *Alien* series is marked by womb-like, wet and sticky interiors, fallopian tube corridors and small closed-in spaces full of unmentionable horrors.

Next, cloning, in movies such as *Clones* and *Seconds*. Some of the more serious films in this tradition show up the political dangers implicit in cloning. Thus *The Boys from Brazil* plays with the temptation to follow the Nazis' experiments with eugenics in the attempt to create a master-race. The all-time classic series in this genre, however, is *The Thing*; both the original and the many remakes illustrate this quite well. 'The thing' is the body of an

one's unsuspecting body, creating havoc. In the original film version, 'the thing' is a vegetable substance with green fluid instead of blood; it reproduces by cloning: he carries spores in his wrists and reproduces from them as flowers do. In the modern remake 'the thing' is an amorphous blob of living death that squats in other people's bodies. 'The thing' which may appear as innocuous as a plant, however, needs animal blood as his basic food; so he kills and then drains the victims of all their bodily fluids. 'The thing' behaves like a vampire, it looks like a non-human and it splatters huge quantities of blood.

A variation on the theme of self-birth is the vegetable-born body-double in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. This is a film from the late fifties, which shows the human race gradually being taken over by identical-looking androids devoid of all feelings and emotions. It is a typical paranoia-McCarthy-era film; the body doubles are born out of plants.[4]

Male births are also noteworthy. Here, the phantasmagoria is quite striking: in *Alien*, man gives birth to a non-human using his stomach as the incubator, in what can only be described as a blatant case of womb-envy, after having been inseminated through the mouth. In *The Thing* and *The Fly* man gives birth to himself transformed into another life form: a murderous monster or a gigantic insect. Actually, Spielberg is the master of male-birth fantasies. The film *Indiana Jones* is the perfect example of this: there is no mother in sight, ever, but God the father is omnipresent. In the series *Back to the Future* which he produced, the teenager boy's fantasy of being at the origin of himself is given full and prolonged exposure, using the device of time-travel to skip generations and even climb down the evolutionary scale. Constance Penley (Penley et al. 1991b) has argued that a film like *Terminator* enacts a primal-scene fantasy in the form of a time loop. One has to return to the past in order to generate an event that has already made an impact on one's identity. According to Freud, being present at the scene of one's conception expresses the fantasy of witnessing parental intercourse. The linearity of time (*chronos*) is split, allowing for the spatialization of time through time-travel. It also allows, however, for the contemplation of the possibility of disaster, namely the end of time and extinction. I will return to this time-loop paradox in technology in the next chapter.

Last but not least, the 'feminization' of man in the sense of a sex-change: the 'feminine' as 'effeminate' in trans-sexual or trans-gender films such as *Psycho* or *Dressed to Kill*.

Sexual anarchy or disorder is built into the monstrous imaginary and thus makes it analogous to the queer or deviant body, as in the trans-sexual imaginary which I analysed in chapter 2. For instance Hurley has noted (1995) that a great deal of the appeal of the *Alien* in the homonymous film-series has to do with its puzzling sexuality. It is both phallic and vaginal; it repro-

births and it treats the human as mere host, in the best parasitic tradition. Human sexuality with its metaphysical dualism of the sexes is a highly inadequate paradigm to explain this 'horrific embodiment' (Hurley 1995: 218). This fantasmagoric of unnatural births and unrepresentable sexualities of the most hybrid kind plays with alternative body-forms, or morphologies. It thus offers a repertoire of virtual re-embodiments in the post-human mode which I explored in my analysis of the becoming animal/insect of chapter 3.

Thus, the alien's bodily morphology is suitably complex and it defies human comparisons: it resembles a spider, a crustacean, a reptile, an insect, a skeleton stripped of its flesh. This flesh, moreover, is made up of materials that may be popular on Mars but are considered inimical to human life on this planet: mostly acids and metal wiring. Hurley concludes that this horrific embodiment constitutes 'a collapsing of multiple and incompatible morphic possibilities into one amorphous embodiment' (1995: 219). This throws a terminal challenge towards a human identity that is commonly predicated on the One. Furthermore, the parasitic relationship the alien establishes with its human host cannot fail to contaminate the human organism, disgregating it from within. This destructive symbiotic relationship between the normal and the pathological, the human and the monstrous, is such as to blur the distinction between the human and other species. Categorical distinctions thus become erased and this marks the demise of the human subject: his body in ruins, his ontological security shattered, his identity in tatters. One could not find a more graphic rendition of the poststructuralist idea of the 'death of man'.

Meanwhile, however, this subject's mother had not fared very well at all: she has been taken over by the bio-technological corporate industrial system. It may be objected that most horror films are made by men and that the only pleasures or terrors on offer are male-defined. The horror film speaks to the contemporary social imaginary, revealing – perhaps more than any other genre – the unconscious fears and desires of both human subjects: male fears of woman's reproductive role and of castration and woman's fears of phallic aggression and violence. No doubt as women make more horror films, the latter area will be explored more fully. As things stand now, however, the science-fiction horror film is male-dominated and it is a privileged site of deployment of male anxieties about reproduction and consequently also about female power.

The material/maternal feminine as monster

Science-fiction horror films play with fundamental male anxieties and displace them by inventing alternative views of reproduction, thereby manipu-

parallel is often drawn between the woman's and alien, animal or insect bodies. The female body emerges from this as a monstrous fetishized other, capable of breeding unmentionable and unpresentable misfits.

Preoccupation with the horror of the maternal feminine expresses a deeply-seated postmodern anxiety about the social and symbolic orders. The monstrosity of the female is a sort of paradox, which on the one hand reinforces the patriarchal assumption that female sexuality is evil and abject, on the other hand, however, it also states the immense powerfulness of the female subject. Creed (1993) is careful to distinguish from these texts the elements of male fear of the female castrator, while she also stresses the elements of affirmation of the feminine. Relying mostly on Kristeva's work, Creed links the ambivalent structure of the maternal feminine to religious taboos on perversions and abominations, which include decay, death, human sacrifice, murder, bodily wastes, incest and the feminine body. Creed breaks down the dominant topos of the monstrous mother into a number of recurrent images: the monstrous womb, the irresistibly repugnant lesbian vampire, the castrating mother. The 'horror' part of these films is due to the play with a displaced and fantasized 'maternal' function, as holding simultaneously the key to the origins of life and to death. Just like the Medusa's head, the horrific female can be conquered by being turned into an emblem, that is to say becoming fetishized.

Thus, it is no coincidence that in *Alien*, a classic of this genre, the master-computer that controls the spaceship is called 'Mother' and she is vicious, especially to the post-feminist heroine (Sigourney Weaver). The maternal function in this film is displaced: the alien reproduces like a monstrous insect by laying eggs inside people's stomachs, through an act of phallic penetration through the mouth. There are also many scenes in the film of ejection of smaller vessels or aircrafts from the mother-dominated, monstrous and hostile spaceship. Mother is an all-powerful generative force, pre-phallic and malignant: she is a non-representable abyss from which all life and death come (Penley 1986).

The other side of the coin of the monstrous maternal/material feminine is however the manifest failure of men to maintain paternal authority. As many science-fiction narratives make evident post-nuclear contexts of urban decay, they also highlight the failure of the father to keep up his political, economic and spiritual privileges. David Cronenberg is, in my opinion, one of the most interesting authors in this respect. Thus, the rage and frustrations of the mother and her rebellion against the patriarchal order are at the heart of the monstrous births of films like *The Brood*. Parthenogenetic births are always a sign of the potentially lethal powers of the undomesticated female. This *topos* resurrects an ancient set of beliefs about the monstrous powers of the female imagination (Braidotti 1996). They simultaneously also express, however, men's sense of impotence and of increasing irrelevance

Modleski has pointed out that in contemporary culture, men are definitely flirting with the idea of having babies for themselves. Some of this is relatively naive, and it takes the form of experimenting with new and definitely helpful social forms of new fatherhood (Modleski 1991). In postmodern times, however, this male anxiety about the missing father must be read alongside the new reproductive technologies. They replace the woman with the technological device – the machine – in a contemporary version of the Pygmalion myth, a sort of high-tech *My Fair Lady*.[5]

Much feminist ink has been spilled in the attempt to analyse the link between the monstrous and the proliferation of discourses about 'the feminine' in late postmodernity. This discursive inflation concerns mostly male philosophers, artists, cultural and media activists. With the investment in this kind of 'feminine' as the site of virile display of a crisis, the topos of the monstrous female has proportionally gained in currency. I think it emerges as the expression of the fantasy of dangers that threaten postmodern, or 'soft', patriarchy. Thinking through this material with Deleuze, I think that the monstrous feminized other of science fiction expresses primarily the fear of the Majority-subject who sees them as a threat to their own patriarchal power. The imaginary in question is that of European men at a historical time of crisis. Lefanu's argument about the bonds of empathy that connects women, ethnic, technological and extra-terrestrial others in science-fiction texts written by women acquires a particular relevance here. It points to the alliance of the 'others' against the empire of the 'One'. Thus, I think that the first and in some ways foremost link between women, racialized, ethnic or technological others and monsters lies in the eyes of the Master colonizer. Only in His gaze are their respective differences flattened out in a generalized category of 'difference' whose pejorative status is structural to the establishment of a norm that is inevitably masculine, white, heterosexist and promoting of naturalistic and essentialistic beliefs. As I argued in chapter 1, both the feminine and the monstrous are signs of an embodied negative difference which makes them ideal targets for the 'metaphysical cannibalism' of a subject which feeds on what it excludes. Pejorative otherness, or 'monstrous others', help illuminate the paradoxical and dissymmetrical power relations within Western theories of subjectivity. The freak, not unlike the feminine and the ethnic 'others', signifies devalued difference. By virtue of its structural interconnection to the dominant subject-position, it also helps define sameness or normalcy among some types.

Noel Carroll (1990) argues that what demarcates the science-fiction genre from others, like the fairy tale or the myth and legend, is precisely the fact that the monstrous other is cast in the mode of a threatening otherness. They embody ontological impropriety. This negative difference causes a disturbance in the status quo and therefore evokes anxiety, the mixture of fascination and loathing in the spectators. We shrink away from them

because their metamorphic powers are immense, as Diana Arbus knew all too well. That this is represented in a monstrous imaginary which is saturated with connotations of abnormality, deviancy, criminality, abjection and ugliness is, in my opinion, a legacy from the nineteenth-century discourse about monstrous races and deviant sexes. In the political economy of post-modernity, such as I outlined in chapter 1 and have been detailing through-out this book, the 'others' are simultaneously commodified into objects of material and discursive consumption. They are also, however, emerging in their own right as alternative, resisting and empowering counter-subjectivities. For the moment, let me concentrate on the former. Popular cultural practices like cinema were extremely quick in registering the return of the pejorative others as objects of consumption: marketable in their abjection. As an indication, let me offer a chronological sequence of film production of difference. It is my own very situated and consequently highly partial genealogy of the axis monster–native–robot–woman.

1920	*Caligari*	psychic possession by mad scientist
1923	*L'Inhumaine*	*femme fatale* merges with robot to produce Orientalist sexual delights and endless perdition
1926	*Metropolis*	virgin–whore split projected on to the fleshy woman–android divide with the aim of rescuing civilization from the abyss
1931	*Svengali*	demon lover cast as Oriental threat, endowed with divine powers as singing voice ruining single white female forever
1932	*White Zombie*	white paranoia in the Southern seas coupled with demonic possession
1932	first *Tarzan* film	
1932	first *Frankenstein* film	
1932	first *Jekyll and Hyde* film	devolutionary tale of genetic undoing by morally and sexually corrupt mad scientist

Einersen and Nixon (1995) single out two major figures of female aberration which express deep male anxieties about women: the 'Virago', masculine female, and the 'Lamia', who is hyper-feminine and even more lethal. As I argued in chapter 3, Fay Weldon's 'She-devil' is a good example of the former, Coleridge's 'Christabel' and her many re-incarnations down to A. S.

'Lamia' are the heroines of the *film noir* genre and other *femmes fatales* in cinema. Gilbert and Gubar have argued (1977) that the figure of the 'Virago' is a particularly strong presence in the eminently misogynist genre of satire, which functions by magnifying the physical and moral imperfections of women. Showalter (1990) points out that the misogynist repertoire is stable throughout history; for instance at the end of the last century female emancipation was blamed for the moral decline of culture and eventually the fall of Western civilization. Disapproval of the 'new woman' was expressed in monstrous images of depravity, mutation, degeneration and perversity.

A more contemporary version of the Virago *topos* is the over-ambitious female of the post-feminist era, usually a multi-talented super-bitch who causes havoc and needs to be put in the right place. Doane and Hodges (1987) provide an excellent analysis of this phenomenon in terms of monstrous amazons. Lefanu also echoes this concern, pointing out that the figure of the monstrous amazon, so popular in science fiction, comes directly from the Gothic tradition. It is a figure of loathing and fear who is generally forced into submission to the male order, although female science-fiction writers are resisting and reversing the trend. Generally, however: 'Amazons must be punished, nominally perhaps for their presumption in assuming "male" characteristics, such as strength, agency, power, but essentially for their declaration of Otherness' (Lefanu 1988: 33). Marina Warner (1994) concurs, and argues that the image of the destructive monstrous female is especially current in the ways in which contemporary culture portrays feminism. The monstrous female has turned into the monstrous feminist, whom conservatives hold responsible for all the evils of today's society. Especially targeted for criticism is the single mother. As Warner rightly points out, this is not only a prominent 'problem' for the enemies of the welfare state, but also a general threat to masculine authority. Reproduction without men triggers a deep malaise in the patriarchal imaginary, resurrecting the centuries-old myth of gynocracy (Warner 1994: 4–5). Women's bodies today are in the same position as monstrous bodies were over a century ago: a testing-ground for various brands of mechanized reproduction. Are Corea's nightmare world of 'gender-cide' (1985 a and b) or Atwood's dystopia of the techno-brothel (1985) likely scenarios?

To sum up: in the contemporary imaginary, the monstrous refers to the play of representation and discourses that surround the bodies of late postmodernity. It is the expression of a deep anxiety about the bodily roots of subjectivity which foregrounds the material/maternal feminine as the site of monstrosity. I view this as the counterpart and the counterpoint to the emphasis that dominant post-industrial culture has placed on the construction of clean, healthy, fit, white, decent, law-abiding, heterosexual and for-

correcting the traces of mortality of the corporeal self – plastic surgery, dieting, the fitness craze and other techniques for disciplining the body – also simultaneously help it supersede its 'natural' state. What we witness in popular culture is almost a Bakhtinian ritual of transgression. The fascination for the monstrous, the freaky body-double, is directly proportional to the suppression of images of both ugliness and disease in contemporary post-industrial culture. It is as if what we are chasing out the front door – the spectacle of the poor, fat, homeless, homosexual, black, dying, ageing, decaying, leaky body – were actually creeping in through the back window. The monstrous marks the 'return of the repressed' of techno-culture and as such it is intrinsic to it.

As I mentioned earlier on, however, these monstrous representations do not express only the negative or reactive anxieties of the majority. They also, often simultaneously, express the emerging subjectivities of the former minorities, thus tracing possible patterns of becoming.

Thus while the monstrous feminist haunts the imagination of the operators of the backlash, a less destructive reappraisal of the monstrous other has been undertaken by feminists needing to redefine difference positively. Multiculturalism and the critique of Orientalism and racism have also contributed to a rethinking of the cultural and scientific practices around monstrous bodies. The need has emerged for a new epistemology to deal with difference in non-pejorative terms. In this case, the freak/monstrous other becomes emblematic of the vast political and theoretical efforts aimed at redefining human subjectivity away from the persistently logocentric and racist ways of thinking that used to characterize it in Western culture.

Confronted with such a discursive inflation of monstrous images, I refute the nostalgic position that reads them as signs of the cultural decadence of our times, also known as the decline of 'master narratives', or the loss of the great canon of 'high culture'. I am equally opposed to the paranoid and misogynist interpretations of the new monsters. The proliferation of a monstrous social imaginary calls instead for adequate forms of analysis. More particularly it calls for a form of philosophical teratology which Deleuze is in a unique position to provide. I argue that a culture, both mainstream and feminist, where the imaginary is so monstrous and deviant, especially in its cybernetic variants, can profit greatly from philosophical nomadology. The project of reconfiguring the positivity of difference, the philosophy of becoming and the emphasis on thinking about changes and the speed of transformation are a very illuminating way to approach the complexities of our age.

From a cultural angle, a nomadic approach to contemporary creativity, be it conceptual, scientific or artistic, casts a most significant light on some of the most unprecedented aspects of advanced post-industrial cultures.

and values, the ubiquitous presence of narcotic practices and of cultural artifacts derived from the drug culture, the all-pervasive political violence and the intermingling of the enfleshed and the technological. These features, which are often referred to as the 'post-human' universe can be read in an altogether more positive light if they are approached from the angle of philosophies of radical immanence. Multiple patterns of becoming over-throw humanistic parameters of representation, while avoiding relativism by grounding practice in a tight spatio-temporal framework.

Beyond metaphors: philosophical teratology

I have argued that the reason why the monstrous is a dominant part of the social imaginary is that it offers privileged mirror-images. We identify with monsters, out of fear or of fascination. This may also help to explain the peculiarly reassuring function that the representation of freaky bodies fulfils in the anxiety-ridden contemporary imagination. As Diana Arbus suggests, freaks have already been through it and have come out at the other end. If not quite survivors, they are at least resilient in their capacity to metamor-phose and thus survive and cope. Many late twentieth-century humans may instead have serious doubts about their capacity to cope, let alone survive. In the case of monsters, the accident or catastrophic event, to paraphrase Massumi, has already taken place. This can afford us a welcome relief and a break from the generalized political economy of fear, precisely by incarnat-ing fully its destructive potential. They exemplify the virtual catastrophy by embodying it. The effect is cathartic, erotic and deeply emotional: with a sigh of relief the would-be suburban monsters rush to embrace their poten-tial other self. Contemporary horror and science-fiction literature and films show an exacerbated version of anxiety in the form of the 'otherness within': the monster dwells in your embodied self and it may burst out any minute into unexpected and definitely unwanted mutations. The monster is in your embodied self, ready to unfold. The monstrous growths spreading within one's organism, as Jackie Stacey (1997) reminds us, in the form of cancer or other post-nuclear diseases, are also variations on the theme of the 'enemy within'.

Monsters are 'metamorphic' creatures who fulfil a kaleidoscopic mirror-function and make us aware of the mutation that we are living through in these post-nuclear, post-industrial, post-modern, post-human days. For instance Sontag (1976) has argued that Diana Arbus's photos of human oddities are troubling not so much for their subject-matter, as for the strong sense of the photographer's own consciousness and involvement with them. The fact of Arbus's own suicide adds a tone of tragic authenticity to the images and it testifies to the metamorphic power of the freaks, that is to say

her. Arbus's representation of freaks embodies the paradox of the contemporary teratological imaginary: on the one hand they familiarize us with human oddities and thus lower our threshold of tolerance of the horrible. On the other hand they keep a cold and unsentimental distance from them, displaying them as unself-conscious and quite autonomous. In fact, these pictures of freaks have the utter lack of irony and the stiff respectability of Victorian portraits, so that they paradoxically end up reinforcing our sense of alienation from them. These pictures become neutrally self-referential and thus defeat any possible moral message.

The metamorphic power of monstrous others serves the function of illuminating the thresholds of 'otherness' while displacing their boundaries. As I argued earlier in this chapter, this process mobilizes issues of embodiment, morphology and sexuality, scrambling the code of phallogocentric, anthropocentric representation in which they are traditionally cast. For instance, Fiedler's analysis of the typology of contemporary monsters classifies them in terms of lack, of excess and of displacement of organs. Noel Carroll (1990) also points to hybridity and categorical incompleteness as defining features of monsters. This means that they superimpose features from different species, displaying alternatively effects of excess or staggering omissions. The detachability of bodily organs is crucial to this effect, and Carroll analyses it in terms of either complete lack of shape – as in the gelatinous blob-like entities – which effaces all meaningful morphological points of reference, or else by fusion and fission of body parts. The fusion blurs significant distinctions, such as living–dead, male–female, human–animal, insect–machine, inside–outside. Fission, on the other hand, displaces the attributes of these categories over other entities, creating body-doubles, alter-egos and other forms of displacement of familiar traits. A variation on this is the evocation of abject monstrosity by metonymy: vermin, skeleton, decaying body parts as ways of representing the monstrous entity without actually showing it.

This facilitates the analogy with the feminine. As psychoanalytic feminism has successfully argued (Wright 1992), the feminine also bears a privileged relation to lack, excess and displacement. By being posited as eccentric vis-à-vis the dominant mode, or as constantly off-centre, the feminine marks the threshold between the human and its 'outside'. This outside is a multi-layered framework that both distinguishes the human from and also connects it to the animal, the vegetable, the mineral and also the divine. As a link between the sacred and the abject, the feminine is paradoxical in its monstrosity. In other words, it functions by displacement and its ubiquity as a social or philosophical 'problem' is equal to the awe and the horror it inspires. Metamorphic creatures are uncomfortable 'body-doubles' or simulacra that simultaneously attract and repel, comfort and unsettle: they are objects of adoration and aberration. As I mentioned earlier, in science-fiction

texts written by women, a sort of deep complicity runs between the other of the male of the species and the other of the species as a whole.

The other historically continuous analogy between women and monstrous beings has to do with the malignant powers of women's imagination. Ever since Antiquity the active, desiring woman's imaginative powers have been represented as potentially lethal, especially if pregnant. On the destructive powers of the pregnant woman's imagination the literature is vast.[6] Huet (1983) uses a psychoanalytic framework to read the fear of the maternal imagination as a variation of the male anxiety over castration. The pregnant woman literally has the capacity to undo the father's signature and uncreate life. Doane (1987) and Williams (1989) find the same mechanism at work in classical Hollywood cinema where, 'when the woman looks' with desire, trouble is never too far off. These feminist critics have argued that the lethal gaze of the desiring female expresses a general fear and mistrust of female desire and subjectivity in phallocentric culture.

Psychoanalytic feminist theory has also cast an interesting light on this aspect of the monstrous imaginary: women who are caught in the phallogocentric gaze tend to have a negative self-image and to dread what they see when they look in the mirror. One is reminded of Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath who saw monsters emerging from the depth of their inner mirrors. Difference is often experienced as negative by women and represented in their cultural production in terms of aberration or monstrosity. The Gothic genre can be read as female projection of an inner sense of inadequacy. In this perspective, the monster fulfils primarily a specular function, thereby playing a major role in the definition of female self-identity. *Frankenstein* – the product of the daughter of a historic feminist – is also the portrait of a deep lack of self-confidence and even deeper sense of displacement. Not only does Mary Shelley side with the monstrous creature, accusing its creator of avoiding his responsibilities, but she also presents Frankenstein as her abject body-double, which allows her to express self-loathing with staggering lucidity.

Gilbert and Gubar (1979) have argued that in English literature women have often depicted themselves as vile and degraded. Thus, they read Frankenstein as Mary Shelley's anti-Prometheus response to Milton and also as a tale of self-hatred. I think the latter is especially true of creative women, whom Virginia Woolf urged to 'kill the angel in the house' and confront the inner demons so as to stretch their resources to the limit. I read Mary Shelley's character of Frankenstein as mirroring the process of literary creation: he is isomorphic with the structure of Shelley's book – which is also rather badly structured and shapeless. Thereby it confronts the readers with the auto-referentiality that is the key to this genre's power to make us experience our limits. I find it a text that is affected by deep *malaise* which takes the form of an uneasy epistolary format with many flash-backs and

detours. The effect is one of unrest and torment also for the readers. More-over, Mary Shelley on several occasions deliberately compares the text to Frankenstein's monstrous body; a horrible, unfinished product, it portrays the activity of writing as doomed to failure and basically unfulfilling. Frankenstein is the becoming-writer of Shelley and he is a most imperfect writing machine. His difficulties with comprehension and communication reflect the circular logic of the process of writing, which delivers itself to the pursuit of its own clarity. Graphic onanism, games of seduction and repetition, writing is eroticized in the same way as the agony of longing, but it offers little relief and even fewer rewards. The constant confrontation that Shelley sets up between healthy normal human heterosexuality and the sterile pleasures of the anthropomorphic monster stresses this point: that creative writing does not pursue the sublime, but it rather courts disaster and crime.

Thus, Mary Shelley criticizes primarily the hubris of the scientists who play God by creating artificial life: crazy little men locked up in their dun-geons and masturbatory chambers, prey to matrix-envy and trying to turn shit into gold or petrified matter into new life, swapping anatomy against a new destiny. The ontological jealousy of the fallen angels working maniacally so as to capitalize on time and space and achieve self-reproduction haunts the writers also. A comparable folly inhabits also the creative spirit who endlessly spills his or her fluids on the whiteness of the page in an endless process of self-birth from which there is no escape. The circularity of the writing process expresses a delirium of self-legitimation. All writing is simul-taneously predatory, vampiristic and self-serving and no significant distance separates the gloved hands of the creator from the hideous claws of the monster. Through *Frankenstein,* Mary Shelley becomes herself such a writing device, a depersonalized entity, a 'bachelor machine'. Baldick has argued that Mary Shelley's masterpiece achieves a double sort of self-referentiality: 'both in its composition and in its subsequent cultural status miming the central moments of its own story' (1987: 30). In a remarkable case of 'bib-liogenesis' the process of artistic creation, the status of motherhood and the birthing process all mirror each other and overlap constantly. Remembering that Mary Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft died as a result of giving birth to her, the text, the body and the mother become one ungovernable heap of excessive meanings, which explode *Frankenstein* outwards, into a mythic dimension.

The metamorphic dimension fulfills another function. I argued earlier that the monstrous as a borderline figure blurs the boundaries between hierarchically established distinctions (between human and non-human, Western and non-Western, etc.) and also between horizontal or adjacent differences. In other words, the monstrous triggers the recognition of a sense of multiplicity contained within the same entity, as Jane Gallop has

put it (1989). It is an entity whose multiple parts are neither totally merged with nor totally separate from the human observer. Thus, by blurring the boundaries of differentiation, the monstrous signifies the difficulty of keeping manageable margins of differentiation of the boundaries between self and other.

This problem with boundaries and differentiation is at the core of the mother–daughter question, following the analyses of Irigaray, Hirsch and Chodorow. Any daughter, that is, any woman, has a self that is not completely individuated but rather is constitutively connected to another woman – her mother. The term mother is already quite tangled and complex, being the site of a symbiotic mix-up, which – according to Lacan – requires the ordering power of the Law of the Father in order to restore the boundaries. This is also the line pursued by Barbara Johnson in 'My monster/My self' (an allusion to Nancy Friday's popular *My Mother/My Self*). Who is the monster? The mother or the self? Or does the monstrosity lie in the undecidability of what goes on in between? The inability to answer that question has to do with the difficulty of negotiating stable and positive boundaries with one's mother. The monstrous feminine is precisely the signpost of that structural and highly significant difficulty.

It is worth noting that in the eighties, feminist theory celebrated both the ambiguities and the intensity of the mother–daughter bond in positive terms – 'écriture féminine' and Irigaray's paradigm of 'the politics of sexual difference' being the epitome of this trend. As I argued in chapter 1, by the late nineties the maternalist/feminine paradigm was well under attack, if not discarded. This shift away from gynocentric psychoanalytic feminism towards a definitely bad attitude to the mother coincides, as often is the case in feminism, with a generation gap. Kolbowski argues (1995) that Melanie Klein's 'bad' mother has replaced the Lacanian-inspired 'vanilla sex' representation of the M/other as object of desire. Accordingly, parodic politics has replaced strategic essentialism and other forms of affirmative mimesis in feminist theories of difference. Nixon reads the anti-Lacanian climate of the nineties, best illustrated by the revival of interest in Melanie Klein's theory of the aggressive drives, 'in part as a critique of psychoanalytic feminist work of the 70's and 80's, privileging pleasure and desire over hatred and aggression' (Nixon 1995: 72).

I would like to situate the new alliance that is currently being negotiated between feminists and Deleuze in this context of historical decline of Lacan's theory of desire as lack and the revival of Klein's theory of the drives. Although a colder and more aggressive political sensibility is dominant in the nineties, I do not share in either the rejection of the mother, or in the denigration of the material/maternal feminine, which it entails. This does not mean that I am thrown back into the murky depths of uterine essentialism. My rejection of a position allegedly beyond gender, or of sexual

indifferentiation, is rather framed by philosophical nomadism. That means that I value the processes of change and transformation as ways of actualizing a virtual feminine in a network of interconnections with other forces, entities and actors. Like Massumi, I do not take Deleuze as an incitement to drop politics, even basic emancipatory politics, but as a way of complexifying it by introducing movement, dynamism, nomadism into it. In chapters 2 and 3 I also called this open-ended, multi-layered virtual feminine met(r)amorphosis. The matrix is neither flesh nor metal, neither destiny nor teleology: it is motion, in spatial as well as temporal terms.

Hal Foster argues that in the late postmodernism of the 1990s advanced technological cultures have moved beyond the notion of the death of the subject, into a kind of 'traumatic realism' (Foster 1996: 131). There is a return of the 'real' subject, in opposition to the excessive emphasis placed in the 1980s on the textual models of culture or conventional notions of realism. A growing disillusionment with the psychoanalytic celebrations of desire as experimentation and mobility is also palpable, in reaction to the AIDS crisis and the general decline of the welfare state at the end of the millennium. What is significant, argues Foster, is that this cultural dissatisfaction is expressed as a return to the shocked subjectivity of a traumatized subject. Given that, as Arbus noted, freaks are born with their traumas written all over them and that they embody the actualized catastrophe, they emerge as a revived cultural paradigm. Cindy Sherman's artistic trajectory is telling in this regard: from the early romances through the history portraits to the abject disaster-pictures of today, she signifies the shift from a fascination with signs and the effects of representation on reality to the realization that the whole body is being cannibalized by a gaze that is disengaged from any signifying system.

Hence the return of horror, in Kristeva's sense of the blurring of boundaries, that is to say a cultural fascination with the amorphous, the shapeless, the obscene. This takes the negative form of the cult of wounded, diseased, traumatized bodies. Foster describes it as a contemporary form of advanced melancholia which expresses a real fatigue with the politics of difference and an equal attraction for indistinction and death. Aesthetically, it produces both the ecstatic fascination for a body that is invaded by the technological gaze and the horror of this invasion which leads to real despair and to a sense of loss.

In other words, in this historical context of late postmodernity, difference returns not merely in the classical postmodern format of the counter-subjectivities of women, blacks, on technological others. It now returns as the abject body and, ultimately, as the last frontier for traumatized subjects, namely as the corpse. This is a forensic twist to the crisis of the humanist subject: it provides experiential grounding and hence authority to the subject as scarred and scared witness, heroic and damaged survivor, that is to

say something that cannot be contested. 'For one cannot challenge the trauma of another; one can only believe it, even identify with it, or not. In trauma discourse, then, the subject is evacuated and elevated at once' (Foster 1996: 168). The accident has happened and there is no going back: the scar is its signature. It is neither negative, nor positive: it simply points to our historicity. This paradox reconciles the conflicting movements of the crisis of the Majority and the reconstitution of emergent counter-identities by the minorities. For me, the critical question remains whether this aesthetic of trauma is the epitome of the cultural impoverishment of today, or an alternative formulation of possible forms of resistance.

I want to argue that, given the importance of both the social imaginary and the role of technology in coding it, we need to develop both forms of representation and of resistance that are adequate. Conceptual creativity is called for, and new figurations are needed, to help us think through the maze of techno-teratological culture.

What has also emerged from a closer analysis of the cyber-teratological imaginary of advanced cultures is the crucial and highly strategic role played by the maternal feminine within it. There is especially one aspect of the quasi-isomorphic relationship between the technological tool and the maternal body that I find quite significant. This has less to do with the classical technophobic objection that the machines are 'taking over' the uterus (Corea 1985a), than with a shift in the position of female reproductive powers. In a context of disruption of the time–space continuum of humanism and of generalized post-nuclear anxiety, what is being highlighted in popular culture is the threat of collapse of paternal authority under the impact of the excessive growth of female power. This singles out the suburban nuclear family as the privileged stage of the horror show (Greenberg 1991). This has been the case in popular culture ever since *The Exorcist*, and it is explicit already in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, not to speak of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and *Alien*, of course. Monstrous gestations are a way of upsetting the monotonous normativity of the suburban family.

Where does this leave the woman, however? She is not only reduced to maternal power, but that power is also displaced on to technology-based, corporate-owned reproductive production systems. In some ways, the cor- porations are the real moral monsters in all the popular science fiction and cyberpunk films: they corrupt, corrode, exploit and destroy ruthlessly. The global incubators in the cyber-nightmare of *The Matrix* speak for themselves.

In other words 'Mother' has become assimilated into the techno-industrial system; reproduction, especially the reproduction of white, male babies, is a primary asset in the post-capitalist cash-nexus, which also bred its own young- sters. The maternal body therefore is at the heart of the political economy of fear in late postmodernity. She simultaneously reproduces the possibility of the future and must be made to inscribe this futurity within the regime of

high-tech commodification which is today's market economy. To hold the maternal/material feminine in this double bind creates an area of great turbulence. This costs empirical females, as Griggers pointed out, in a high degree of discontent, pathology and disease, which I analysed in chapter 1.

The immediate effect of this *topos* is to disengage the child, the foetus, the embryo and even the ova from the woman's body. Much has been written about these 'foetal attractions' (Petchesky 1987; Franklin 1997) and the appearance of the foetus as an independent item in popular imagery. These images are also instrumental to the anti-abortion campaigns of intimidation and terrorism, as the propaganda film *The Silent Scream* demonstrates. Sofia Zoe (1984) has analysed the embryological images attentively, and recommends that they be kept in the context of nuclear technology and the threat of extermination. According to Zoe, the extra-terrestrial embryological imagery which abounds in science-fiction films expresses the intense uterus-envy that is built into technological culture.

In *2001*, for instance, the spaceship's main computer is coated in maternal imagery including the umbilical cord that links the astronaut to the ship. Zoe defends the hypothesis that there is a clear displacement from female uterus to paternal brain via the male belly. This produces a modern-day version of the myth of the birth of Athena in classical Greek mythology: fully armed, from the father's head, bearing on her breastplate the image of the Medusa's head, forever frozen in her horrific gaze. Zoe also notes the recurrence of the father–daughter dyad in science fiction, from Rotwang and Maria in *Metropolis* to Dr Morbius's girl, Alta, in *Forbidden Planet*, to Rachael, the brainchild of the corporation in *Blade Runner*. There is a real trend for Athena-like figures of young warriors at the service of the system on whom the father or scientist or corporation projects the animated remains of what used to be the female mother–nature, by now cannibalized into the company-owned techno-matrix. The brain-womb of the corporation produces the 'star child' in a crystalline Cartesian geometrical space: high-tech super-mums integrated in advanced computer circuits. There is no sticky or messy 'wetware' here. The pure light of reason fortunately also produces its nightmares, the slimy bad alien creatures that the shiny warriors fight to the bitter end, like Ripley in *Alien*.

Confronted with such maternal-corporate-hightech powers, and with such ominous examples of women's free will, men are represented as the heroic resistance fighters. In *Terminator 1* the male prophet descends to earth in order to pave the way for the saviour and to ensure that the elected female does reproduce the future Messiah, thus saving the humans. A deeply-seated anxiety about re-establishing the paternal line of filiation translates into a new masculine determination to make women do the right thing. Spielberg and Lucas are the main authors in this fundamentally conservative approach

safely tucked away in a maternal role. Fortunately, there are exceptions. Cronenberg is the author who highlights the vulnerability of the male body – more on him in chapter 5.

Conclusion

The contemporary social imaginary, in a twist that strikes me as rather misogynist, places squarely on women the blame for the crisis of identity in postmodernity. In one of those double binds that occur so often in the representation of those who are marked off as different, women are simultaneously portrayed as the unruly element that needs to be straightened-out, cyber-amazons in need of some governance, and also, however, as already complicitous with and integrated into the industrial reproductive complex. 'Mother the bitch' is also 'serial mum', using and abusing her powers over life. Sofia Zoe puts it admirably: 'Superman has incorporated and taken over female functions to become a high-tech Supermom, who feeds and fertilizes us with junk food, spermatic images and silicon chips, and who tempts us with terminal apples' (Zoe 1984: 51).

Translated into the Deleuzian language of the becoming-woman, the maternal/material feminine is simultaneously the despotic face of the Majority and the pathetic face of its minorities. On her increasingly contaminated body, post-industrial culture fights the battle of its own renewal. To survive, advanced capitalism must incorporate the mother, the better to metabolize her offspring. This is also known as the 'feminization' of advanced cultures, in the sense of what I would call the becoming-woman of men.

Tania Modleski (1991) notes this tendency in contemporary post-feminist American culture as a whole. For instance women are identified with the most popular, i.e. low-brow, cultural consumeristic habits (talk-shows, soap-operas, etc.) thus leading to a 'feminization of culture' as a synonym for lack of high culture. Men however continue to be represented as the creative and autonomous spirits. In some ways, this continues a glorious nineteenth-century tradition of structural ambivalence towards women. Huyssen analyses it lucidly in the paradox of the masculine identification with women at the turn of the last century. Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi' goes hand-in-hand with the effective exclusion of real-life women from the literary enterprise. It also takes the form, in Flaubert then as in soap-operas today, of representing women as avid consumers of pulp – symbolizing the vulgarity of mass culture – while creative high culture and tradition remain firmly the prerogative of men.

The *Alien* film series operates a welcome feminist intervention in this area. It turns the 'new female monsters' engineered by late post-industrial techno-

its techno-activated annihilation: the feminist as the last of the humans. J. H. Kavanagh (1990) argues that *Alien* in fact celebrates the rebirth of humanism in the shape of progressive feminism. The struggle is internal to the feminine and it takes place between an archaic monstrous feminine represented by the alien and the postfeminist emancipated woman represented by Ripley/Sigourney Weaver. The alien is a *phallus dentatus* born from a man's stomach, grotesquely erect most of the time and prone to attempt oral rapes with its phallic tail. Ripley emerges by contrast as the life-giving post-feminist principle. A warrior with a heart of gold, rescuing pets and little girls as well as life in the galaxy as a whole, she is the new humanist hero: woman as the saviour of mankind.

I think it would be far too predictable an ending, however, were an intergalactic Joan of Arc bearing Sigourney Weaver's ghostly white face[7] to represent all feminism can do for a species in advanced state of crisis. Not that saving humanity be an unworthy cause, but it is a role that historically women have often been called upon to play – especially in times of war, invasion, liberation struggles or other forms of daily resistance. They have, however, seldom drawn any real benefits for their status in society from these episodes of heroism. By the dawn of the third millennium, women's participation in ensuring the future of humanity needs consequently to be negotiated and not taken for granted. As Barbara Krueger put it: 'we don't need another hero'.

Moreover, in the frame of the feminism of difference that I have defended throughout this book, it would be a defeat to have the dialectics of the sexes merely reversed to the benefit of women – mostly white, highly-educated women – while leaving the power structures practically unchanged. I think it would be more beneficial to all concerned if the tensions that are built into the end-of-century crisis of values were allowed to explode also within feminism, bringing its paradoxes to the fore. Because I think that feminism is definitely not about a quest for final authenticity, for the golden fleece of truth, I believe that at the dawn of the new millennium we need to acquire a flair for complicating the issues, so as to live up to the complexities of our age. I would like feminists to avoid repetitions without difference and the flat-out recomposition of genderized and racialized power differences on the one hand, or on the other the equally unsatisfactory assumption of a morally superior triumphant feminine showing the one-way road to the future.

There is another consideration which can also help us understand the relevance of a feminist nomadic approach. In late postmodernity, various brands of nihilism are circulating. A whole philosophical style based on 'catastrophe' is popular among several prophets of doom, who contemplate the implosion of humanism with tragic joy.[8] Nothing could be further removed from the ethics of affirmation, and the political sensibility of nomadic subjects, than the 'altered states' proposed by those who celebrate

the implosion of sense, meaning and values for their own sake. They end up producing histrionic renditions of that delirious megalomania against which I propose firmly and rigorously a sustainable definition of the self. It seems clear to me that a culture that is in the grip of a techno-teratological imaginary at a time of deep social and historical change is a culture that badly needs *less* abstraction and less hype. This has also to do with the economy of the spectral, that is to say the forever living dead of the media representation system: images live on forever, specially in the age of their digital manipulation. They circulate in a continuous present in a ghastly/ ghostly economy of vampiric consumption. This postmodern Gothic element is consequently overwhelming in today's highly mediamatic societies. The revenant icons of the stars live on, Marylin and Diana always already young and dead and returning endlessly to our attention.

I believe that, in such a context, a concretely embodied and embedded reading of the subject as a material, vitalistic, anti-essentialist but sustainable entity can be a profoundly sane reminder of the positive virtualities that lie in store in the crisis and transformation we are currently going through. This is a question of style, in the sense of a political and aesthetic sensibility. It is crucial to nurture a culture of affirmation and joy, if we are to pull out of the end-of-millennium stagnation. Cultivating the art of complexity – and the specific aesthetic and political sensibilities that sustain it – I plead for working with an idea of the subject as the plane of composition for multiple becomings. It is against the contemporary forms of nihilism that a critical philosophy of immanence needs to disintoxicate us and to re-set the agenda in the direction of affirmation and sustainable subjectivity. In this project, the metamorphic company of monsters – those existential aristocrats who have already undergone the mutation – can provide not only a solace, but also an ethical model.

Chapter 4   Cyber-teratologies

1   See also on this point White (1995).
2   On this point I disagree strongly with Ian Buchanan's hazardous attempts to graft Jameson on to the Deleuzian abstract machines, or diagrams.
3   For a very pictorial ilustration of this, see the film directed by Johan Grimonprez: 'Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.' (1998), with musical score by David Shea.

4   It would be interesting to analyse this in the light of La Mettrie's philosophical masterpiece, *L'Homme machine*, and I regret I cannot pursue this here.

5   This is the case of the film *Weird Science*, where three teenage boys design their favourite woman on the computer, discussing at length the size of her breasts.

6   For a more detailed exposition see: R. Braidotti (1994a) 'Mothers, monsters and machines', in *Nomadic Subjects* and (1996) 'Signs of wonder and traces of doubt', in Lykke and Braidotti (eds.) *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs*, London: Zed Books.

7   Anneke Smelik has commented on the analogy between Ripley and Joan of Arc, especially in *Alien III* (1996).

8   See for instance Kroker, A. and M. L. (1987).

notes:

ily cere- cahiers is a collection of texts(fragments). it is a branch of the collective *it is part of an ensemble*. these texts function as starting points for dialogues within our practice. we also love to share them with guests and visitors of our projects.

the first copy of *ily cere- cahier 25* was printed in november 2024