Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature

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Chapter Three

The Embarrassed "etc." at the End of the List

Identifications of Subjectivity and the Social

Building on feminist reconstructions of the hysteric and the archaic mother discussed in previous chapters, I set out to examine the conceptual knots that confuse and hold together historical and contemporary identifications of subjectivity with the social meaning of the symbolic. The constitutive and primary importance of "sexual difference" (Irigaray) within the symbolic function and its negative entanglement in the loss of the primary object of desire (Kristeva's "maternal") call for a renewed perspective from which to approach feminine subjectivity. I propose to look at feminist philosophical intersections of femininity and transgressive spaces of race/ethnicity and the social. The transgression, in its ethical conjecture, appears supremely incompatible with the hegemonic order of cultural belonging and, by its very reality, makes the limits of that order apparent: transgression as heresy, monstrosity, deviance, in other words, as representable difference of any "constructed subjectivity" that continues to be inscribed with a negative signification (Balibar 190). This notion of "transgression" as negativity goes to the beginnings of European philosophical thought and of Western history in general, culminating in poststructuralist attempts to reframe this model but abstracting from what current transfeminist theory needs to focus on: the social practice and social context of feminist communication (see Fraser). In particular, the post/Lacanian encoding of cultural authority as masculine continues to inscribe "woman" with a disadvantaged place in the symbolic, or otherwise in the putative impossibility of a semiotic sexuality. What remains, at the structure of the social, is a normative symbolic order, with its production of monolithic subjectivities, supporting various channels of nostalgic reassertions of culturally dominant or "pure" identities, racism, and national phobias (see Griffin and Braidotti). In this context, both advanced capitalism and its post/communist locations as new cartographies of power persistently invest exclusionary and phallocentric tactics in areas of sociopolitical significance.

Trans-, either as transition, transformation, or transgression of such historically contingent trappings of dominance (as language, accent, ethnicity, or sexual-
ity), continues as illicit, illegal, or incompatible. Through polymorphic precarious locations that by necessity need to remain peripheral, transgression undermines the conservative preservation and continuous reproduction of boundaries that hold proper bodies and expel pollution and danger. My central concern is to emphasize the renewed necessity to look at transgression across the heterogeneity of Western cultures as a concept denoting not only incompatibility with the "proper" order of belonging and identity, but also turning difference into the positive, empowering affirmation of alternative subject positions. Transgression that makes the limits of the proper order apparent in a difference that is long representable and that reflects the current dissemination of cultures in which identities are useful as strategic identifications: either institutionary or with other subjects by the intermediary of an institution. What is changing today, to follow Braidotti, is not merely the terminology or metaphorical representation of the subjects, but the very structure of subjectivity, social relations, and the social imaginary. Braidotti's question—how can we free difference from its negative charge in the social function—is more relevant than ever, but first what do we want to free from what? In elaborating this question, I begin with the Kristeva (Hegelian and, indeed, Lacanian) position on what she names the imaginary "loving third," "the key stone for the capacity to sublimation" and the collateral for the ability to idealize (Black Sun 121-22). This third party, according to Kristeva, intervenes between the maternal territory and the child, that is, its subjectivity in process, and emerges in her discussion as a counterbalance to the punishing function of the superego; as a flip side of the Law that recognizes the necessity of negotiating the unbridgeable and is therefore essential to the formation of the subject. What remains if this counterbalance is lacking could be called a masochistic or paranoid construction of subjectivity that believes it deserves punishment due to its instability, and constantly puts itself under the surveillance of the Law. We are returning to the poststructural position of feminine subjectivity that for centuries continued to develop without the imaginary support of the social function. If this subjectivity is to be freed from its negative or ambiguous foundation, it needs to be freed from its entrapment in the abstract position of the "floating signifier": from a "senseless flow that produces its own significance," "impersonal, in short, speaking (in) the name of no one" (Desire 190). I continue with Kristeva's terminology on purpose, not only to show how contradictory and antithetical her poststructural theory sometimes appears, but also how difficult it is to posit transgressive practice once and for all. Kristeva's transgressions (the abject, the semiotic) certainly give rise to discursive innovations that could subsequently be normalized in the form of modified signifying practices, but the absence of a credible constructive alternative to the symbolic order is part of her theory (see Fraser and Bartky).

Butler's intervention on power discourse is relevant, as power (in Foucault's sense) is precisely what makes the subject possible, "the condition of its possibility and its formative occasion," and "what is taken up and reiterated in the subject's 'own' acting." The subject is formed as "a subject of power (where 'of' connotes both 'belonging to' and 'wielding')" and it "eclipses the conditions of its own emergence;
it eclipses power with power" (*Psychic Life* 14). As a conduit, or negotiation, between semiotic drives/affects and words/symbols, "the subject of power," in Butler's analysis, is crucial for one's sense of belonging to the symbolic dimension. Denial and loss of the negotiation works precisely against it—if semiotic traces are denied, the subject becomes a prisoner of the "primary loss." The particularities of melancholy, hysteria, depression, or suicidal tendency, returning to Kristeva logic, draw on the denial and consequently on the absence of signifiers of the semiotic loss. The poverty of linguistic activity that marks depression and melancholia—gaps, silences, and the inability to complete verbal sequences—points to the domination of semiotic traces that remain illegible, unrepresentable. In Kristeva's belief, the absence of the interaction between the marginalized subject and culture is followed by the collapse of the psychic space (*New Maladies* 29) that is conceived in a speech act. Reading through this absence, Braidotti might be too quick in rejecting Kristeva's "panic exercises, whether it is in her analysis of horror and monstrous others, of ethnic diversity, and inevitably, of loss and melancholia" (*Metamorphoses* 41). Melancholic returns to the "loving party," crucial to Kristeva's original loss and Butler's notion of desire, derive precisely from the unrealized potential for verbal expression (marginalized identities, sexual, cultural, or social citizenships disenfranchised within the dominant system, are particularly prone to melancholia that work in tandem with processes of social regulation). To read with Butler, in the absence of public recognition or discourse through which a loss "might be named and mourned," melancholia "takes on cultural dimensions of contemporary consequence" (*Psychic Life* 139). Butler's question of "drag identity" interconnects here psychoanalysis with gender performativity and performativity with the subject of melancholic mourning. What might, however, enable the constitution of subjectivity, and the narcissistic structure that supports formation of the subject, is a metaphorical transgression from the place of nonarticulation to the place of social support for the cultural meaning, that is the psychic space of power. In discussing this transgression ("transfer"), I propose to disconnect, theoretically, feminine subjectivity from repression, negative ambiguity, and ultimately depression as the only alternatives to sublimation. Butler, like Kristeva's appraisal of "transgression," seems to valorize change abstractly (change for its own sake) and thereby, similarly, to diminish feminist capacity for progressive sociopolitical action: "Butler's ontology of the subject has some significant conceptual limitations. It does not theorize the relation of embodied individuals, with their relatively enduring dispositions (habitus), to the dispersed subject positions they successfully occupy. Nor does it theorize intersubjectivity, the relations to one another of such individuals" (Fraser 215). Butler and Kristeva rely "on the ontogenetic subject formation by means of abjection," and like Foucault, insist that subjects are constituted primarily through exclusion and elimination. But is it really the case, to ask with Fraser, "that no one can become the subject of speech without others being silenced?" (216). Without "loving" support (recognition) from the Social, the subject is homeless and incompatible with the proper order of belonging, but, on Braidotti's note, this subject is far from being immobilized. There is an immense potential in
homelessness and transgression, suggesting ways in which stigmas and recognition are perennially translated one into the other (Balibar 190), in which social order produces modes of reflectivity as it simultaneously limits forms of sociality. Positioning nostalgic gesture as "not merely politically conservative," but also "deterrent to serious analysis of contemporary culture" (*Metamorphoses* 41), Braidotti intervenes thus with a discourse of pleasure. Irigaray's "sensible transcendental" is the key to this "feminine" reconfiguration, allowing for new theoretical space between the primary loss and subsequent repression of the maternal body. Braidotti asks: "What if the 'fixer' of the psychic landscape were the over-flowing plentitude of pleasure, rather than the melancholy discourse of debt and loss" (*Metamorphoses* 53)? I return to this question in my readings of the narratives, attempting to disconnect feminine subjectivity from repression and to cut the linearity of the "umbilical cord" once and for all. Not that the cord suggests filth and danger, but that, in its inevitably melancholic posture of mourning over the loss, it demobilizes permutable, plural, and otherwise mobile positions. After all, the cord is not a straight line connecting A and B, but a spiraling, entangling device that connects as much as it flows, persists, and transmutes.

Once cut, the cord does not disappear, but continues to represent desire, which can now unfold in many alternative and unpredictable subject positions. Consequently, the witch employed in the narratives discussed here mobilizes hybridity through her un/belonging. Un/belonging, a term designating both physical location (belonging) and sociopolitical relation with agency (unbelonging), conveys a decentralized but not disempowering cultural topography. As a fugitive from melancholic positions of absence and exclusion, s/he draws on her confinement to the "far away land" of collective myths and superstitions, to her expulsion from the "here and now," and simultaneously her ubiquitous physical presence, her hidden closeness as a neighboring woman, mother, or daughter. But her nonconforming physical appearance is ambiguous, because as a phallocentric projection of the feminine it should be familiar (motherly), but it is not. In fact, as argued in the previous chapter, the diasporic image of the witch's body is marked by the stigma of the monstrous feminine, the castrating vagina, and the witch as a grotesque "unfeminine" figure. Her enforced exile or voluntary flight is from this initially marked gender, as she is caught between, rather than supported by, the various laws and languages of the Father. But eventually the exile inscribes her also with "agency." As Butler writes, "The question of locating 'agency' is usually associated with the viability of the 'subject,' where the 'subject' is understood to have some stable existence prior to the cultural field that it negotiates. Or, if the subject is culturally constructed, it is nevertheless vested with an agency, usually figured as the capacity for reflexive meditation, that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness" (*Gender Trouble* 142-43). Embracing agency involves therefore a discussion of cultural but also social construction. Since today, in a new millennium, Western feminism has accepted that gender in as much as any other bodily identification has become too polyvalent as a concept to be universally accommodating, what remains is to discuss the feasibility of socio-
cultural "embeddedness." The narratives chosen for this chapter help to illuminate the affirmative rewriting of difference, as outlined by Irigaray and Braidotti, and in particular the shift of the political debate from the issues of difference between cultures and ideologies towards differences within the very same structure of cultural identifications (Metamorphoses 14). These new complexities, indeed paradoxes, of difference within the Western condition account for the shifts in theoretical thinking about agency transgression: shifts that defy dualistic, oppositional, and melancholic reasoning. Following Braidotti, what remains if the postures of diaspora and negativity are abandoned is a type of nomadic, multiple existence. Its shifting foundations delineate a very tangible sociotheoretical gap between identity (self-sameness) and difference, a borderline position of philosophical suspension in un/belonging. This formulation of un/belonging converges with a number of theoretical concepts, such as resistance, parody, or subversion, and finally, the emergence of a subculture as a political form of expression. As an experience of self-affirmation that first appears at odds with the social, un/belonging (or nomadism, to use Braidotti’s term) permutes and transforms the social structure. It is in this interplay of border positions that resistance, mimesis, and parody take place. I use un/belonging as a key metaphor for a cultural interconnectedness, a common thread in the variety of stories, which are all related, differently, to a clear move away from the psychoanalytic idea of the body. This body, no longer exclusively a map of semiotic inscriptions (Kristeva) or culturally enforced codifications (Butler), is a surface for a nomadic fantasy of gender: of body (and, by necessity, of "embeddedness") as a "bundle of contradictions" in the process of cultural mediation, of becoming-subject (Metamorphoses 21). For Deleuze and Guattari, the becoming-woman, embodied in the image of "the little girl," represents the process of becoming-subject, for both, or otherwise, for many different sexes. For Deleuze and Guattari, read in particular with Braidotti, it is the paradox of bodily instability that moves us beyond fixed gender identities and beyond the oppositional arrangement of subject and object. The feminine adolescent is a nomadic subject in a continual process of "becoming," but her becoming-woman is most certainly not the growing of the girl into a woman, but precisely a deterritorialization of this apprehension. The girl, in Deleuzean-Guattarian understanding, and in a flip-side relation to the post/Lacanian "Woman," is an "abstract line," a "becoming" "that remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult. It is not the girl who becomes woman; it is becoming-woman that produces the universal girl" (Deleuze and Guattari 276-77). Narrativity of this theoretical mediation, which I trace in the texts selected for this chapter, is of crucial binding force in this correlation: "a collective, politically-invested process of sharing in and contributing to the making of myths, operational fictions, significant figurations of the kind of subjects we are in process of becoming" (Metamorphoses 22).

Various figures associated with, rather than constituting, the witch in the following analyses take a theoretical borderline position between melancholia and pleasure. In this borderline position, particularly relevant as a location that escapes precise definition and needs to be traced under various names and structures, the
witch becomes a her(m)etic figure (hermetic and heretical), no longer to be thought of in terms of categories, but in terms of an experience of dissociation, of slipping across borders, of nomadism. The temporal paradox of this figure is such that it necessarily follows Kristeva's, Butler's, and Braidotti's implications of a subject already formed in order to account for its own incompleteness, its becoming: "That 'becoming' is no simple or continuous affair, but an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of social being" (Butler, *Psychic Life* 30). Crucial to this process of becoming are issues of other differences, notably religion, nationality, language, and ethnicity, a complex web of identifications arguably constitutive of subjectivities. But to encompass a situated (gendered in as much as political or social) morphology of a subject is indeed an impossible enterprise, invariably failing to be inclusive, exposing the fallacy of "political correctness." Writing of gender and sexual difference, respectively, Butler and Braidotti have addressed this impossibility. For Butler, "the theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness" are consistently closing "with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list" (*Gender Trouble* 143). This phenomenon is of course instructive: "what political impetus is to be derived from the exasperated 'etc.' that so often occurs at the end of such lines? This is a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself" (143). Thus, to insist on belonging and self-recognition is precisely to ensure and to intensify a continuing confusion of and about the predicates in question. To follow Gibson, there is an ethical (Levinasian) space in this theoretical narrative of gender and of sexual difference. Butler's "illimitable et cetera" and Braidotti's "embodied becoming" must be understood as a spontaneous and immediate desire to escape the limits of identity, a desire generated as those limits are experienced and practiced in their narrowness, even their absurdity: "It is thus a principle of unease within and inseparable from the self that is of a different order to being and more profound than it. Evasion is the ethical impulse towards or openness to the other that effects a release from the confines of the self" (Gibson 37). In this sense, it is impossible to determine our class, gender, or ethnicity once and for all, however much they are assumed, and it is with this recognition that the feminist ethics of un/belonging may begin.

The witch as a boundless fantasy of gender is thus a fantasy of un/belonging opening ways out of limiting significations. Although cross-gender, cross-cultural, and cross-body identifications make subjects politically vulnerable, they allow simultaneously for re-zoning the tabooed borders of stigmatized conditions. As proposed by Braidotti, in particular in her discussion of Deleuzian relevance to feminism, "the challenge that the monstrous throws in our direction is a disassociation of the sensibility we have inherited from the previous end of the century" (*Metamorphoses* 2). Precisely in the face of growing xenophobia, there is a necessity "to think of the anomalous, the monstrously different not as a sign of pejoration but as the unfolding of a virtual possibilities that point to positive alternatives for us all" (2). Thinking through such creative operations, I argue consequently that the witch as a metaphor for cultural pejoration involved in the narratives to follow does
not need to invite identification with a lost (semiotic) experience. The language of boundaries that (post/Lacanian) psychoanalysis has involved in elaborating notions of identification and mourning promotes a specific set of assumptions about what subjectivity is about, cutting it, in fact, from the plentitude of the subject (Irigaray), "sapping it away into a series of delusional and compensatory manifestations of self" (*Metamorphoses* 54). Instead, Irigaray's position of the *plenum* takes its hold by a proliferation of subjectivities and subsequently permits Braidotti's departure on the status of identity-in-process (in becoming) that derives from multiplicity. This "account of nomadic subjectivity as ethically accountable and politically empowering" (*Metamorphoses* 2) interrupts the problematic discourse of authenticity (and therapy as a result of its loss) at work in narratives as discussed in previous chapters. Gender, for Butler and Braidotti, (and despite their different positions) is always already at an intersection with power (*Metamorphoses* 17) and therefore of a "transgressive" complexity. Equally for both, categories are "open coalitions," alternately affirmed and relinquished according to the purposes at hand (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 16). In this open and hence transitive sense, "power not only acts on a subject" but "enacts the subject into being" (Butler, *Psychic Life* 13). Emphasizing both normativity and the limitations of the category of "woman" (which fails to be exhaustive), Braidotti takes Butler's strategy of performative transgression further and employs it as a nomadic interpellation. Indeed, Althusserian interpellation as a process constituting ideological subjectivity is delayed and expanded in Braidotti's proposal of nomadism in which voluntary acknowledgement of the dominant ideology does not inevitably enmesh subjects in numerous discursive and social subordinations, but first destabilizes this ideology by transgressive enactments of subordination (Butler's position) and then intervenes with the positive difference of subversive spaces: "It would be indeed naive to believe that the mere rejection or destabilization of gender dualism is exclusively or necessarily a subversive position" (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 37). The incessant philosophical inscriptions of "difference" with negativity continue to support exclusions and disqualifications of transgressive subjects and their representability within the social. They also unnecessarily imply that the understanding of "sexual difference," as emerging from Anglo-American sociological and anthropological sex/gender relations (e.g., Butler; Scott), is polemically at odds or even conceptually different from the Continental European tradition: "This constitutive ambivalence makes for an interesting case of a location that appears as Eurocentric in the USA and as highly Americanized in Europe," but accounts in fact for two sides of the same coin: a constitution of resistance to the cultural foundations of the patriarchal order (*Metamorphoses* 32).

In a reflection on the phenomena of migration (traveling) and the dissemination of traditions, I take Etienne Balibar's position on identity as an accumulation of stigmas, hyphenated names, and identifications (187). If one of the privileged names of tradition (understood in relation to its conservativism, locality, and institutionalization) is precisely "culture," there remains little sense contained in something as broad as the concept of "identity." For Balibar, there are "only identifications: either
with the institution itself, or with other subjects by the intermediary of the institution" (187). Similarly, identity emerges as "a collection of traits, of objective structures (as such spontaneously thought of in the dimension of the collective, the social, and the historical)." As such, identity pertains to the formation of subjectivity "in the dimension of 'lived experience,' of 'conscious' or 'unconscious' individuality" (174). Drawing on these formulations of identity, my analysis focuses on the allegedly free-floating and/or bisexual identities that escape the limits of cultural boundaries, the bonds/bounds preserved by traditional household structures and national frontiers. Precisely because of its subversive potential, the edge (or the margin, taking into account the wide range of geographical/spatial and linguistic images employed in this selection) transforms the nostalgic (reassuring) concepts of "home," "nationality," and "gender" into the blurred areas of cultural un/belonging. As I suggest, following Butler, there is no formula that can predict when or how the historical or traditional identity of the unencumbered woman can be released from its derogatory origins, or can avoid the abjection that persistently echoes in the insulting and proliferating names given to her (witch, hag, slut, bitch, whore). The witch, in particular, as a supposedly imaginary feminine transgressor, seems to be suspended between a traditional cultural structure that she has already been made to abandon, and another, unknown, culturally unrestricted structure that she is about to enter. Transported, she "executes her transit imaginarily, perched on the black goat that carries her off, impaled by the broom that flies her away; she goes in the direction of animality, plants, the inhuman" (Cixous and Clément 8). In crossing the borderline between human and nonhuman, she "endures" in culture as the monstrous feminine (Creed 1993). For Braidotti, it is her association with "the in-between, the mixed, the ambivalent as implied in the ancient Greek root of the word monsters, teras, which means both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration" (Nomadic Subjects 77). Whether in a narrative spectacle (Cixous) or a narrative ritual (Kristeva, Creed), "the demarcation lines between the human and non-human have been drawn up anew" (Creed 8), or abandoned for politically more empowering spaces in which the becoming transformative subject nevertheless retains her humanity (Braidotti). In negotiating distances, she effectively negotiates with the symbolic by tying a conceptual knot herself rather than remaining entangled in one made to entrap her. And it is the will (and capacity) to negotiate that implies what the process of becoming-subject is about. The critical task for the transformative subject, to follow Butler's formulation, is "to locate strategies of subversive repetition" that are made possible by the narrative constructions of a sexually boundless, or un-bound woman, Irigaray's "volume without contours." Serving as the locus of subversion, this boundlessness is as a construction not beyond culture, "but a concrete cultural possibility" that in the capitalist and neo/capitalist economy of deficit and lack "is refused and redescribed as impossible" (Butler, Gender Trouble 77). What remains "unthinkable" and impossible within the terms of this economy "is not necessarily what is excluded from the matrix of intelligibility within that form; on the contrary, it is the marginalized, not the excluded, the cultural possibility that calls for dread or, minimally, the loss of
sanctions....The 'unthinkable' is thus fully within culture" but fully excluded from its dominant representation (77).

Indeed, in mainstream Western history and religion, witches have been perceived, (re)presented, and depicted consistently as the "unthinkable," peculiar outcasts on the margins of culture (on this, see Sanders). In the absence of any mediation between their peculiarity and the universal norm of a subject, witches have been construed as dangerously polluting the universal "norm." Projected as homeless, they both expose and are exposed to inappropriate and noncanonical bodily forms, through which they mediate their cultural vulnerability. Although specific appearances and connotations of the witch-woman vary from culture to culture, the (projected) peculiarity of her cultural body is common to all the contexts concerned here. Defined as an awareness or consciousness of un/belonging that manifests itself as an openness (vulnerability) to heresy and deviation, the witch comes to represent not what is contained and sustained by traditional identity but rather what is transgressed and therefore eliminated, restricted, or (r)ejected to confined spaces, such as asylums or prisons. In this cultural restriction, then, the witch as a border-crosser and boundary marker opens a new "system of classification" in which, paradoxically, "the negative and borderline values of contaminating objects are reversible, and reverse themselves into omnipotent and positive values" (Clément and Kristeva 92). In Clément and Kristeva's understanding, these formulations of transgression are also effective as a form of sacred disorder: "The sacred shatters the order and introduces a new one...the mystic order, the trance, the transcendence" (113). In this sense, the transgressive potential of the fantasy of gender meets indeed at the crossroads with sexual sameness. Sameness, like difference, is a fantasy, easily disrupted by the politics of location (on this, see Kaplan and Grewal), and in particular its "embodied accounts" (see Griffin and Braidotti). Theoretical positions employed in my study (i.e., Clément and Kristeva, Braidotti, Butler, Irigaray, Kristeva) are interactive in this sense, involving processes of thinking that bring different figurations into light, calling into play precisely a sense of different feminist locations and alternative subjectivities in relation to un/belonging. In the narratives at hand, there is both a tension and a dialogue between the particular/peculiar and the normalized, a dialectic reflecting what Homi Bhabha divided into "culture as the noun for naming the social imaginary, and culture as the act for grafting the voices of the indentured, the displaced, the nameless, onto an agency of utterance" ("Freedom's Basis" 52). In view of the paradox or "illusion of a true body beyond the law" (Butler, Gender Trouble 93), the illusion that they often enact, the identities of the "witch" in these narratives evoke certain types of cultural transgression that insert (or smuggle) a nomadic articulation into the collective symbolic discourse. The "beyond" is neither a new (semiotic) horizon on the outside of culture nor a leaving behind of the past, but "there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an explanatory, restless movement" (Bhabha, Location 1).

Finally, contextualizing the social, there is no going back to the old equality/difference debate in the sense of an exclusive focus on any single axis of difference.
The shift from "gender difference" to "differences among women" and then towards "multiple intersecting differences" remains an unsurpassable gain, although it does not imply necessarily that we should forget the old debate. Rather, what seems to be at stake today is the need for connections between the problematic of cultural difference and the problematic of social equality (Fraser, *Justice Interruptus* 187). Nothing in principle precludes that the subject is both culturally constructed and capable of distance from its own "constructedness," although the subject is itself the product of prior signifying processes, capable of resignification (Butler) and critique (Fraser). I thus propose to view the witch in this chapter as transgressing her "fixed" (stigmatized) identity to produce a range of hybrid and plural literary representations. The notions of hybridity and un/belonging are particularly relevant in the narratives here, in which the distinction between good and evil, that is, what has been culturally sanctioned and embedded as one or the other, is prone to disappear altogether. This textual plurality, however, should not be seen as a universal nihilism acknowledged by Lyotard as "postmodern condition," but rather as a transfeminist acceptance of "difference" that has to be negotiated rather than fought over. Although belonging to different national/cultural traditions, the narrative figures occupy a dialectical position between their cultural abjection and their "porous" bodies, signifying both cultural transgression and gender ambiguity. This dialectical position allows us to see Irigaray's "disruptive excess," Butler's suspension of the category "gender," Kristeva's concept of "porousness," and Braidotti's embodied subject of "becoming" as converging in a common intention to elaborate a theory of a different cultural legality—none of them guaranteeing sexual/cultural subversion per se, but "emphasizing the complex, interactive and power-driven web of relations around the sexuality/sex nucleus" (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 33). This multiple system, or legality, does not refer to "woman" as a/the subject or the object of discussion, but "of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal" (Irigaray, "Power" 126); it therefore must be seen as a theory of cultural negotiation.

The Sacred May not be the Same as the Religious

Building on the theories discussed, I now explore the transgressive spaces of religion, faith, and sacredness, focusing on Angela Carter's literary constructions of two culturally nonconforming women, Mary Magdalene in "Impressions: The Wrightsman Magdalene" (1996) and Jeanne in "Black Venus" (1985). Carter, a dedicated atheist, deals explicitly with religiously sanctioned values or dogmas, which makes her figures interesting in the context of the feminism-informed subversive potential of the feminine. I begin with the question arising at the intersection of the feminine and the sacred as explored by Clément and Kristeva. What is experienced as "sacred" or as "trance," in Clément's and Kristeva's perception, is "a translation of eroticism into more noble terms" (23). In their post/Lacanian understanding of the subject, "a woman—with or without the trance—is the daily demonstration of ...[a] catastrophic or delicious distillation of flesh within the mind"; she is a subject "capa-
ble of giving life," but "a subject whose repression remains very problematic. Rather, she is subject to generalized vapors" (16). As evoked repeatedly in the dialogue between Clément and Kristeva, it is the very intersection, the coming together of the sacred and the feminine, that creates chains of associations between the feminine body, faith, sexuality, and the senses. As I suggest in the following analysis, Carter's figures represent such an intersection; but one that exceeds its post/structuralist premise of repression towards positive reframing of "difference." The figures appear as paradoxical creatures that escape from the limits of cultural boundaries, from the bonds/bounds maintained by traditional structures and religious, national, or gender boundaries. Carter supplies no formula that can predict when or how her figures' traditional identity can be released from their derogatory origins. She seems to be much more interested in delineating what all these evocative categories have in common: the intersection, the borderline, the cleavage. Within these permeable categories Carter locates strategies of subversive recurrence made possible by her narrative constructions of a boundless "woman." In this sense, Carter follows Butler's notion of an original or primary gender identity (of a "woman"). This "feminine" identity has been parodied within the subcultural practices of cross-dressing and the sexual stylization of identities in general. And although in hardcore feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood as degrading or uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping (see, e.g., *Gender Trouble* 137), the parodic identities are, by necessity, more complex. The relation between "gender imitation" and the "original" (*Gender Trouble* 137) is of interest for Carter, as in her narrative framework gender refers specifically to the hetoresexist matrix of power as constituting oppressive social and symbolic representations. As Butler would argue, normative sexuality fortifies normative gender, and hence the politically minded question of how gender hierarchy relates to all kinds of other variables. The point is that Carter's narrative drag is not subversive of gender norms, but that the (gendered) subject lives "with received notions of reality which determine what kinds of bodies and sexualities will be considered real and true, and which kind will not" (*Undoing Gender* 214).

Subcultural parodies are already suggested by Kristeva in her formulation of identity transgressions as part of a "carnivalesque cosmogony" that ignores "substance, causality or identity outside its link to the whole" (*Desire* 78): "This carnivalesque cosmogony has persisted in the form of an antitheological (but not antimystical) and deeply popular movement. It remains present as an often misunderstood and persecuted substratum of official Western culture throughout its entire history... Within the carnival, the subject is reduced to nothingness, while the structure of the author emerges as anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self and other, as [wo]man and mask" (78). However, an inevitable return to culture, its order and sanctions, suggests that these transgressions have an anxiogenic character. Butler, in particular, referring to Kristeva's position, denounces this type of subversion (disruption of cultural form) as "a futile gesture, entertained only in a derealized aesthetic mode which can never be translated into other cultural practices" (*Gender Trouble* 78). We revert to "a primal cartography of the body," representing what Kristeva
calls the *semiotic* precondition, "even though it depends on language," which "suffers and takes pleasures in an other logic, complementary to the logic of linguistic signs imposed and consolidated by paternal laws" (Clément and Kristeva 95). In discussing Carter's narratives, Kristeva's concepts of subversion and border transgression, differing from Butler's, might nevertheless appear effective as both unsettled and unsettling, exposing the limits of Lacan's efforts to universalize the paternal law within the symbolic. The semiotic, relating in many respects to Kristevan "abjection," which disrespects positions and rules (*Powers* 4), disturbs the singularity of the identity system. Carter illustrates these types of abjection or transgression as deliberately straddling borders and in a way proposes what Kristeva's, Butler's, and Braidotti's theories might have in common: the transgressions as indicators of cultural negotiating, pointing to a knowledge of when to abandon one particular position for another, "knowing when to let it go, living its contingency, and subjecting it to a political challenge" (Butler, "Discussion" 131). As Braidotti reminds us, the challenge to women's representation today lies in thinking about interconnecting processes rather than singular concepts (2002).Positing both narrative (aesthetic) and political modes as rooted in the social structure, Carter certainly takes on this challenge: Her narrative figures are effective not as temporary escape routes to the outside of culture but concrete (collectively imagined) representations of "women" as ongoing, subversively repetitive alternatives to the dominant order.

Depicted in liturgy, literature, and art as a penitent sinner, Mary Magdalene emerges as more physically "real," more bodily focused than the equally powerful but alone-of-all-her-sex Virgin. Because of the presence of her erotic but penitent body, she answers both to the *phallic* (symbolic, paternal) gaze that accepts her penitence, and to the *omphalic* (maternal) one that identifies with Magdalene's fate and alludes to the presence of the scar, of the navel as a place of disconnection from the semiotic pleasures. According to Warner, Magdalene "was created from unrelated stories in the image of an earlier mould, itself cast in a Judaic tradition" (232). This creation follows the harlot theme similarly to Gomer, the faithless wife of Hosea, who prefigured Israel's stormy union with Yahweh (Hosea 1:2-3), to Jezebel, whose body was torn to pieces and eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9:30-37), and to Rahab, who appears in Matthew's genealogy as an ancestress of Christ (Matthew 1:5). Following Warner, devotion to the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene venerates two Western ideals of the feminine—the "consecrated chastity in the Virgin Mary and regenerate sexuality in the Magdalene" (235). In its condensation of physical beauty with temptation and subsequent practice of bodily mortification, Magdalene's prototype mirrors the Christian fear of and the desire to re-form women (232): "The witness of the risen Christ, who, veiled and carrying her jar of ointment, walks up silently to the empty sepulchre in so many early Christian representations of the Resurrection, was transformed in the Middle Ages into a hermitess, the perfect embodiment of Christian repentance. As such, Magdalene was considered a powerful and beneficent witch, a great and beloved saint" (Warner 229). But Mary Magdalene can also be linked with the image of a heretic, anti-religious ("unreformed") woman, incarnat-
ing "the equation between feminine beauty, sexuality and sin" (Haskins 3). Precisely because of her feminine but antimaternal potential, the cultural "frontiers" transform the reassuring concepts of "repentance," "faith," and "resurrection" into the blurred space of un/belonging. This space provides, in Carter's story, an intricate passage (a type of umbilical cord) from passion to sanctification, from the symbolically inarticulate and prohibited semiotic jouissance to a desire/pleasure, or what remains of it within the symbolic: "Virgin Mary wears blue. Her preference has sanctified the colour. We think of a 'heavenly' blue. But Mary Magdalene wears red, the colour of passion. The two women are twin paradoxes. One is not what the other is. One is a virgin and a mother; the other is a non-virgin, and childless. Note how the English language doesn't contain a specific word to describe a woman who is grown-up, sexually mature and not a mother, unless such a woman is using her sexuality as her profession" (Carter, "Impressions" 410).

As I suggest, it is precisely this linguistic gap, the cleavage, that becomes the focus of Carter's exploration. Her story, "Impressions: The Wrightsman Magdalene," which gives a commentary on a painting by Georges de La Tour, draws on images of the feminine body as a dividing line, representing both the separation and the tie between symbolic language and semiotic ecstasy or jouissance. Like Clément and Kristeva, Carter pursues a distinction "between belief and religion, on the one hand, and the sacred, on the other" (Clément and Kristeva 27). In agreement also with Braidotti's thought, Carter's account of transgression becomes a form of sacred disordering and "an account of subjectivity," an "ethically accountable and politically empowering" (Braidotti, Metamorphoses 2) process of feminist thinking. Portraying "the fallen woman who through Jesus was able to rise again" (de Boer 8), Carter's narrative extends the image of Magdalene as "the repentant harlot" (Carter, "Impressions" 409) towards the remnants of her voluptuous, "happy non-virgin" existence at the crossroads of sacredness and sacrilege. Carter's understanding of Magdalene's sacredness recalls Clément's perception of the sacred that "shatters the order and introduces a new one...the mystic order, the trance, the transcendence" (Clément and Kristeva 113). The sacred alludes not only to specifically "feminine" traces of (unspoken) jouissance, but also to a politically informed figuration of the subject as a dynamic and shifting entity (Braidotti, Metamorphoses 2). If she had been an apostle, Magdalene would have had much to tell, since she "had followed Jesus from the beginning," was "present at the crucifixion and the burial," and was "first to proclaim the resurrection" (de Boer 2). As a "fallen" woman, however, she does not speak but meditates through her feminine body. The fallen and the feminine meet together in her repentant posture: "Mary Magdalene meditates upon the candle flame. She enters the blue core, the blue absence. She becomes something other than herself....She can't speak, won't speak. In the desert, she will grunt...she will put speech aside...after she has meditated upon the candle flame and the mirror … But something has already been born out of this intercourse...See. She carries it already. She carries it where, as if she were a Virgin mother and not a sacred whore, she would rest her baby, not a living child but a memento mori, a skull" (Carter, "Impressions" 413).
The silent archetype of Magdalene, "brought into existence by the powerful undertow of misogyny" (Warner 225), provokes Carter to speak against the association of Magdalene with an antimaternal degradation of the flesh. On Warner's analysis, the Virgin Mary is the only Christian woman conceptualized both as a holy virgin and a holy mother. The concept of a parthenogenetic virgin birth releases the Madonna from hysterical experiences; the Roman Catholic Madonna does not menstruate (is she not fertile?), her physiological integrity in pregnancy and post partum is astonishing, her birth pains are never mentioned, and her virginity is never violated. There is no split in her body between the virgin and the mother. Echoing Warner's argument, Carter opens her narrative with an image of Magdalene in a scene that emphasizes her separation from other pious women: "to be a virgin and a mother, you need a miracle; when a woman is not a virgin, nor a mother...nobody talks about miracles. Mary, the mother of Jesus, together with the other Mary, the mother of St John, and the Mary Magdalene, the repentant harlot, went down to the seashore; a woman named Fatima, a servant, went with them. They stepped into a boat, they threw away the rudder, they permitted the sea to take them where it wanted. It beached them near Marseilles...But the other Mary, the Magdalene, the not-mother, could not stop. Impelled by the demon of loneliness, she went off on her own...she crossed limestone hill after limestone hill. Flints cut her feet, sun burned her skin. She ate fruit that had fallen from the tree of its own accord, like a perfect Manichean. She ate dropped berries. The black-browed Palestinian woman walked in silence, gaunt as famine, hairy as a dog" ("Impressions" 409).

There is something about "the other" Mary, in Carter's text, that connects with processes of transition and hybridization, taking place in between nature/biology and social order, in the spaces that flow and connect in-between. Her jouissance contradicts the religion she follows and diverges from Christian communion with other believers towards hermetic loneliness, self-denial, and mortification, as she separates herself from the "first" Mary. It is in this separation that Kristeva's suggestion of "the sacred that might not be the same as the religious" meets with Braidotti's "transformative account of the self" (Metamorphoses 3). While interpreting La Tour's Magdalene, Carter's narrator experiences a sensation similar to what Clément refers to as a "bizarre feeling" in front of a sacred work. She experiences "the sensation that someone wants to impose a vision" on her (Clément and Kristeva 120): that the religious doctrine leaves no choice of perception, and that precisely this lack of choice provokes antagonism, and a desire for "other" insights: "Mary Magdalene, the Venus in sackcloth. George de La Tour's picture does not show a woman in sackcloth, but her chemise is coarse and simple enough to be a penitential garment...the kind of garment that shows you were not thinking of personal adornment when you put it on. Even though the chemise is deeply open on the bosom, it does not seem to disclose flesh as such, but a flesh that is more akin to the wax of the burning candle, to the way the wax candle is irradiated by its own flame, and glows...you could say that, from the waist up, this Mary Magdalene is on the high road to penitence, but, from the waist down, which is always the more problematic part, there is the question of her
long, red skirt" (Carter, "Impressions" 409-10). Although merely suggested, Magdalene's "road to penitence" represents a her(m)etic crossing of the forbidden border towards the knowledge of unexplored eroticism, sensuality, and the body. Whereas Clément argues that the sacred is sexual "because it authorizes the brutal insurrection of the forbidden humors during ceremonies" (Clément and Kristeva 20). Carter explains that "because Mary Magdalene is a woman and childless she goes out into the wilderness. The others, the mothers, stay and make a church, where people come" ("Impressions" 410). The sacred associated with Magdalene's unbound and hybrid sexuality is impossible within the domesticated space of the religious; however, as Carter seems to imply, it is not (culturally) impossible altogether. Braidotti's position on the becoming-subject helps to explore this implication further. In a joint project with Irigaray, Braidotti posits the feminist subject as no longer that of a Woman as the specular other of man but rather a complex, multifaceted "embodied subject" that has distanced itself from the institution of "femininity." This "embodied subject" coincides with positions assumed by the dominant subject, and does so in ways that may no longer be of a particular gender, but of "the subject of quite another story: a subject-in-process, a mutant, the other of the Other, a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis" (Metamorphoses 12).

The ecstasy Magdalene experiences in mortifying her body (either feminine or unfeminine, or inseparably both) suggests that it is precisely the intersection of genders that is at work in Carter's story: a merging of oppositions into sensuality that transforms gendered experience into "the sacred." The sacred, in its turn, "authorizes the lapse, the disappearance of the Subject, the syncope, vertigo, the trance, ecstasy" (Clément and Kristeva 30). But Magdalene's earthly ecstatic sins also clearly retain gendered character, or more precisely, Irigaray's "sexual difference" that cuts much deeper to suggest the possibility of a social/cultural etiology. Embodied by the ancient fertility virgin, erased by Christian orthodoxy, Carter's Magdalene suggests constitution and representability of "sexual difference." Until her repentance, she is the trace of an unencumbered woman, the extravagant combination of a harlot and a virgin that to some extent "absorbed the role of the classical goddesses of love" (Warner 235). While the "unspotted goodness" of the Virgin Mary "keeps her in the position of the Platonic ideal" and "prevents the sinner from identifying with her," it is Mary Magdalene who "holds up a comforting mirror to those who sin again and again, and promises joy to human frailty" (235). Is then her scarlet frock, as Carter suggests, only a piece of "left-over finery" ("Impressions" 410)? "Was it the only frock she had, the frock she went whoring in, then repented in, then set sail in? Did she walk all the way to the Sainte-Baume in this red skirt? It doesn't look travel-stained or worn or torn. It is a luxurious, even scandalous skirt. A scarlet dress for a scarlet woman" (410). This passage suggests that Magdalene could also be a hybridized Lilith. Indeed, if the Virgin, the mother-of-god, and Magdalene, the lover-of-god, "together form a diptych of the Christian woman" (Warner 235), the picture remains two-dimensional, incomplete. Magdalene, and this facet of her char-
acter is traced by Carter, eventually transcends her feminine promiscuity, turning "into something wild and strange, into a female version of John the Baptist, a hairy hermit, as good as naked, transcending gender, sex obliterated, nakedness irrelevant" ("Impressions" 411): "Sometimes she wears only her hair; it never saw a comb, long, matted, unkempt, hanging down to her knees. She belts her own hair round her waist with the rope with which, each night, she lashes herself, making a rough tunic of it. On these occasions, the transformation from the young lovely, voluptuous Mary Magdalene, the happy non-virgin, the party girl, the woman taken in adultery—on these occasions, the transformation is complete" (410).

In her long-lasting retreat as a hermit, her famished body develops into that of an old hag, and fulfills the third role of the pagan goddess that is lacking in the eternally young Virgin Mary. Thus, Carter's Magdalene reproduces the archaic goddess (in her aspects of the lover and the crone), and she does it in a mould of the monstrous Lilith practically silenced by Roman Catholic mythology. Conversely, has she any choice of "where she wants to be" (as a crone or a lover), or is she "beyond choice," beyond antagonisms, without any other "option but virtue" ("Impressions" 411)? As Carter suggests, there are other traces virtually erased from the popular myths of Mary Magdalene. Donatello's sculpture, also mentioned by Carter, represents Magdalene's repentance and, and as she argues, it borders on masochism, an internalised desire for self-destruction, a nullification of the flesh that, in a way, is a type of choice: "dried up by the suns of the wilderness, battered by wind and rain, anorexic, toothless, a body entirely annihilated by the soul. You can almost smell the odour of the kind of sanctity that reeks from her—it's rank, it's raw, it's horrible. By the ardour with which she hated her early life of so-called 'pleasure.' The mortification of the flesh comes naturally to her....Penitence becomes sado-masochism. Self-punishment is its own reward" ("Impressions" 411). This "odour of sanctity," also discussed by Clément and Kristeva, marks the intersection of the feminine and the sacred with violence and the uneasiness of bodily vapors. In abolishing the physical distance between herself and Jesus, a distance between "the sinful woman and God" constructed by the postmedieval Church (de Boer 71), Carter's Magdalene comes within reach of jouissance and returns the divine kiss. To follow Haskins, according to the Apocryphal Gospel of Philip, Magdalene was the companion of Jesus, who "loved [her] more than all the disciples, and kissed on her mouth often" (63.34-35; 3). Similarly, Warner observes that the suggestion of love unfolding between Jesus and Mary Magdalene had been celebrated by the Gnostics in the second century. And this trace of carnal love between the saint and the sinner has been obliterated from the myths of Magdalene. However, an indication that she might have been a visionary entrusted (by the kiss) with divine wisdom is present in the story of Mary from Magdala. As Haskins relates, Mary from Magdala is mentioned among the women who followed Jesus and who "had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities." In Luke, Jesus exorcised seven devils out of Magdalene (8:2). These "seven devils were a focus for speculation amongst early Christian commentators; the link with the 'evil spirits and infirmities' ascribed to some of the women may well have led
to their identification with the seven deadly sins" (14). To follow other suggestions, Mary Magdalene "was the best known of the women because her 'healing was the most dramatic,' as the seven demons may have indicated a 'possession of extraordinary malignity.' However, nowhere in the New Testament is demoniacal possession regarded as synonymous with sin. That Mary [Magdalene]'s condition might have been psychological, that is, seen as madness, rather than moral or sexual, seems never to have entered into the considerations of the early biblical commentators" (14). Since Jesus's kisses can be seen as a divine penetration of the female mouth, the Magdalene-harlot receives a sacred gift from her master that purifies her body of the "seven devils." But why then, returning to Carter's story, "has she taken her pearl necklace with her," to the cave, the site of her mortification? "Look at it, lying in front of the mirror. And her long hair has been most beautifully brushed. Is she, yet, fully repentant" ("Impressions" 410)? Here again sacredness, as an odour from her mortified flesh, meshes with her erotic desires; her body in the mirror is not yet fully lost. Secluded in a cave, with long hair covering her nakedness, Carter's Magdalene represents the mutant, the subject-in-process who has undergone an essential metamorphosis (Braidotti): her body is neglected, wrecked, but not abandoned, and claiming in fact a valid position in relation to the sanctioned culture.

Carter had examined a similarly neglected non-mother's body in an earlier story: "Black Venus." Alluding to Greco-Roman pre-Christian religious prototypes of the sacred feminine, Carter's Venus appears as a half-prostitute, half-sacred site of métissage. Drawing on the ambiguous figure of Jeanne Duval, one of Baudelaire's lovers, Carter pursues the subject of female identification with strangeness, victimization, and cultural incompatibility, "as if the fatal drama of the primal fruit-theft must recur again and again, with cyclic regularity" ("Black Venus" 231). As a racialized subject, a "woman who makes free use of her attractiveness—adventuress, vamp, femme fatale," Jeanne evokes de Beauvoir's "disquieting type" of woman, who keeps "an ancient fear...alive" (201). Jeanne's fate ironically draws on biblical traces of Eve, who preferred knowledge to virtue ("Black Venus" 231), and of Jezebel, a foreign prostitute. But she also goes beyond these traces, and creates her own paradigm of cultural un/belonging. She reminds us of Wittig's vision of Eve (Les Guérillères 1985), who appears as a naked woman walking among the fruit trees in an orchard. Her beautiful body is black and shining, while her hair consists of thin moving snakes that produce music at each of her movements. Also, Cixous's Medusa, a figure ridiculing Freud's idea of female castration, comes into play here: Carter's Venus is, however, enslaved: "This dance, which he wanted her to perform so much and had especially devised for her, consisted of a series of voluptuous poses one following another; private-room-in-a-bordello stuff but tasteful....He liked her to put on all her bangles and beads when she did her dance, she dressed up in a set of clanking jewellery he'd given her, paste, nothing she could sell or she'd have sold it" ("Black Venus" 233). Jeanne resurfaces in the story as "the pure child of the colony. The colony—white, imperious—had fathered her" (238). She knows nothing but the omnipresent Law of the Father; her "mother went off with the sailors" (238). Upon
her arrival in Paris, she continues her colonized life as a foreign muse at the service of the poet. Her body dances in the silence of "a kept woman" (241), chained to her "Daddy's" fancies. "Meanwhile, she hummed a Creole melody, she liked the ones with ribald words about what the shoemaker's wife did at Mardi Gras...but Daddy paid no attention to what song his siren sang, he fixed his quick, bright, dark eyes upon her decorated skin as if, sucker, authentically entranced" (233). Following de Beauvoir's concept of the seductive Sphinx deeply anchored in the poet's fantasies, Carter portrays her as a racialized object of phallocentric desire, a witch to be tamed, "deprived of history" (238) and cultural belonging: "Nobody seems to know in what year Jeanne Duval was born, although the year in which she met Charles Baudelaire (1842) is precisely logged and biographies of his other mistresses...are well documented. Besides Duval, she also used the names Prosper and Lemer, as if her name was of no consequence. Where she came from is a problem; books suggest Mauritius, in the Indian ocean, or Santo Domingo, in the Caribbean, take your pick of two different sides of the world. (Her pays d'origine of less importance than it would have been had she been a wine)" ("Black Venus" 237).

The "essence" of foreign womanhood, as incarnated in the figure of "Black Venus," encodes the "second sex" with the colonial experience, in which the subject acts as an object charged with foreign, savage fluids. Thus the fluids in Carter's text attain a doubly transcendental signification: Jeanne's body as an object of desire has something permeable, "porous" about itself; it evokes the vulnerability of the colonized body and a subversive power of rage. Carter refers here to the "the atrocious mixture of corruption and innocence" (235) that transmits its eroticism as an experience of the sacred degradation as if "porous" repentance: "After she's got a drink or two inside her, however, she stops coughing, grown a bit more friendly, will consent to unpin her hair and let him play with it, the way he likes to. And if her native indolence does not prove too much for her—she is capable of sprawling, as in a vegetable trance, for hours, for days, in the dim room by the smoky fire...and dance for Daddy who, she will grudgingly admit when pressed, is a good Daddy, buys her pretties, allocates her the occasional lump of hashish, keeps her off the streets" (233). In both collapsing and reinforcing the boundaries between master and slave, Carter's text moves beyond Jeanne's objectification. The relationship between the poet enchanted by Jeanne's controversial (simultaneously prostituted and unattainable) exoticism and the slave's desire to insult the Law are clearly at play, but also far from resolved. In maintaining this suspension, the narrative collapses the position of object/fetish and its colonized debased nature. Instead, by evoking transitory, in-between conditions, the narrative enjoins the slave and the master in the task to outwit the Law, suggesting a route beyond the poverty of the social imaginary that operates in mental habits of dichotomies. The intersections of the poet's fascination and Jeanne's narcissism designates an always suspended understanding of shifting positions, a continuous deferral of security that is at play in transitory thinking. "Venus lies on the bed, waiting for a wind to rise: the sooty albatross hankers for the storm. Whirlwind!" (239). And this suspended security connects with the Judeo-Christian
imagery of sexuality as contained by the Strange Woman. Claudia Camp discusses the relationship between her "strangeness," exogamy, and foreign cults (317) by linking the Strange Woman with "the wife of another," with an adulteress, and, in a broader sense, a "deviation, faithlessness, and the unknown" (311). Accentuating the connection between Jeanne's strangeness and (the flowers of) evil as a specific reinforcement of her foreign status, Carter's text suggests that Jeanne is indeed, as Kristeva has put it, "a stranger to the sacrifice." The odour (scent, perfume) emanating from her body fuses horror and desire into a fluctuating fantasy of pleasures and dangers that need each other as a supplement, as a necessary foil. Jeanne is a foreign fantasy of Eve, even though she is void of Eve's knowledge since, as Carter assures us, "she never bothered to bite any apple at all. She wouldn't have known what knowledge was for, would she? She was in neither a state of innocence nor a state of grace" ("Black Venus" 231). Jeanne certainly does not initiate this projection of herself as Eve-before-the-Fall (it is the poet who does so), but she has learned to sell it, to utilize the fantasy, so that the poet "thinks she is a vase of darkness; if he tips her up, black light will spill out. She is not Eve but, herself, the forbidden fruit, and he has eaten her!" (237). In a permanent cultural suspension, Jeanne incarnates evil, "although she wishes to do no such thing" (237).

Pippin's interpretation of the Biblical Jezebel as a punishable object of desire can be used as another parallel to Jeanne. As an extension of the phallocentric fascination with fear, her "evilness" feeds on the metaphysics of deficiency and the supposed uncleanness of her foreign body. Jezebel, as Pippin suggests, is constructed as a guilty body, the "dying other," an exotic and dangerous femme fatale (186). Jezebel's foreign status might be culturally acceptable, but her "uncontrolled" rebellious womanhood is not. In her accomplishments as an acting woman, Jeanne-as-Jezebel incorporates the Strange Woman, "institutionally legitimated as the other woman," and "portrayed as an active creator of her own alien status" (Camp 322). Alluding to the culturally sanctioned "impurity," Pippin's analysis concentrates on Jezebel's dying body, calling it "dung," "the ultimate impurity," Jezebel and her religion are "to be excreted" (38). In a similar environment of carnal pollution, Carter constructs her Venus as a future hag/witch, destined for the unavoidable fate of a polluting and polluted body to be punished, and "rot": "When she was on her own, having a few drinks in front of the fire, thinking about it, it made her break out in horrible hag's laughter, as if she were already the hag she would become enjoying a grim joke at the expense of the pretty, secretly festering thing she still was. At Walpurgisnacht, the young witch boasted to the old witch: 'Naked on a goat, I display my fine young body. How the old witch laughed! 'You'll rot! 'I'll rot, thought Jeanne, and laughed" ("Black Venus" 235). Her body, infected and punished with syphilis (in Carter's version to be seen as Baudelaire's gift to his "fleur du mal"), makes her conscious of physical borders, those inside and outside of her porous body: "she would have liked a bath...was a little worried about a persistent vaginal discharge that smelled of mice...something ominous...horrid" (236). Her bodily impurities are further linked with the "polluted" language of her granny, who spoke "Creole, pa-
tois, [she] knew no other language...knew it badly," and "taught it badly" to Jeanne. In turn, Jeanne "did her best to convert it into good French and started mixing with swells but...her heart wasn't in it.... It was as though her tongue had been cut out and another one sewn in that did not fit well" (239). Creole, projected as an unclean, bastard language of "mixed" race, is Jeanne's mother tongue. Its structure/mixture cannot be "corrected," and will refuse to belong. Her two (female) mouths are mixed too, interconnected in their inadequacy, alienation, and estrangement bound to the stigma of Jezebel. Because of her métisse status, Jeanne becomes a double target. First, she is condemned as an adventuress who breaks social boundaries and disrupts the stability of the traditional household, then as "a foreign national, who introduces the dangers of foreign worship" into the community (Camp 312). Carter speculates: "Maybe he found her crying because the kids in the street were chucking stones at her, calling her a 'black bitch' or worse and spattering the beautiful white flounces of her crinoline with handfuls of tossed mud they scooped from the gutters where they thought she belonged because she was a whore who had the nerve to sashay to the corner shop for cheroots or ordinaire or rum with her nose stuck up in the air as if she were the Empress of all the Africas" ("Black Venus" 238). In this role of a double stranger, she blurs/exceeds her status of a prostitute: "Had she been a prostitute, the sage's depiction of utter evil would have been undercut, for the professional prostitute does have a place in a patriarchal world" (Camp 322). She, however, is positioned in an unrecognizable cultural structure, a stigmatized vacuum of foreignness encaptured in terms of both race/ethnicity (as black) and of gender (as Venus). Thus to exist in the patriarchal structure, as Carter argues (echoing both Kristeva's and Butler's positions), Jeanne is "in drag," that is "in a duplicitous state of affectation" (Webb 211). To be Jeanne Duval, a strange, weird fantasy of a woman, is to expose this invisible, perfectly reenacted deception in a visibly disturbing un/belonging. It is to be "like a piano in a country where everybody has had their hands cut off" ("Black Venus" 231).

Returning to Pippin's analysis of Jezebel as "a fantasy space" of a foreign culture and religion, Jezebel does not die, she "is the vamp/ire that cannot be killed, who roams through other texts and times and women. She has a future in a different form; she is constantly re-formed in the image of male desire and fear" (Pippin 39). In this sense of continuous "becoming," Carter shows Jeanne as a survivor, an ugly hag, "deaf, dumb and paralyzed" ("Black Venus" 242), while it is Baudelaire who dies in Carter's text: "He told his mother to make sure that Jeanne was looked after but his mother didn't give her anything. Nadar says he saw Jeanne hobbling on crutches along the pavement to the dram-shop; her teeth were gone, she had a mammy-rag tied around her head but you could still see that her wonderful hair had fallen out. Her face would terrify the little children" (242). Carter's narrative does not stop at this bodily collapse. In a metamorphic spirit, it goes on to outwit Jezebel's curse (syphilis), turning its monolithic character into an alternative subject position. With a little extra help, Jeanne-Jezebel will not rot forever, but, indeed, activate her potential in a metamorphosed artificially enhanced body of a crone. Skipping the mother-
stage, she moves strategically to le Guin's stage of lost fertility (3). Following le Guin's "barren childhood" as the first "waiting room" to "fruitful maturity," Carter questions fruitfulness/fertility as "the only meaningful condition for a woman" (le Guin 5). This "loss" attains a positive quality, as the "loss of fertility does not mean loss of desire and fulfillment....The woman who is willing to make that change must become pregnant with herself, at last" (le Guin 5). Jeanne is willing, and starts to cooperate. A man "who called himself her brother" ("might have been Mephistopheles, for all she cared") supplies her with artificial teeth; the best wig comes "from the shorn locks of novices in convents." Jeanne is surprised "how much she was worth" ("Black Venus" 243): "Fifty francs for Jeanne, here, thirty francs for Jeanne, there. It all added up....Add to this the sale of a manuscript or two, the ones she hadn't used to light her cheroots with. Some books, especially the ones with the flowery dedications....Later, any memorabilia of the poet, even his clumsy drawings, would fetch a surprising sum" (243). In this profit-making endeavor, Jeanne can afford her metamorphosis and emerges as the triumphant crone who returns to her mother country and her mother tongue. She does it finally to celebrate her cultural un/belonging, her existence as *la mestiza* who learned how to cope with contradictions. Conscious of crossing borders, Jeanne embodies "representable difference," both the heretic (poison) and the sacred (remedy), whose cultural vulnerability begins with gender (trouble), with the "porousness" of her body, and its *disruptive excess* of a foreign race: "In a new dress of black tussore, her somewhat ravaged but carefully repaired face partially concealed by a flattering veil, she chugged away from Europe on a steamer bound for the Caribbean like a respectable widow and she was not yet fifty....She might have been a Creole wife of a minor civil servant setting off home after his death. Her brother went first, to look out for the property they were going to buy" ("Black Venus" 243). In examining the phallogocentric structures of institutionalized religion, imperialism, and colonization as modes of specifically feminine alienation and debasement, Carter's implications exceed Clément's and Kristeva's concept of the borderline between "the animalistic and the verbal." Precisely as a feminine type of sacredness, Carter's borderline in itself represents a process: the becoming of a pagan, illicit *jouissance* in the physiological and cultural *cleavage*. Strategically suspended between the deferred poles of authority, both Mary Magdalene and the Black Venus slip across borders and form their own sub-cultural paradigm of "cultural possibility" (*Gender Trouble* 77). Although excluded from the dominant culture, they provide a valid response to their "fixed" stigmatized identity, at once refused by and initiated within the "indifference" coded as phallic potency and strength. In undoing the conceptual knots bequeathed by laws and prohibitions, they transcend the dominant power-relations, suggesting ways in which stigmas and recognition can be translated one into the other. In evoking the divine (sacred) journeys to the limits, they evoke alternative subjectivities, where the human "becomes" an "em bodied subject," where animality, like monstrosity, is an indispensable experience in the process of becoming. It is where metamorphoses as cultural transgressions take place on the threshold of self-annihilation, of consciousness that retains a Kristeva
element of "different legality": the presence of the physiological body hinting at the sacred that, in fact, is not the same as the religious. This "legality" is upheld "by a divided subject," a pluralized subject that occupies permutable and mobile places; thus, bringing together in a heteronymous space "the naming of phenomena (their entry into symbolic law)" (Kristeva, *Desire* 111).

The shifting landscape of poststructural submission and melancholy is equally central to the analysis of the next two narratives, emerging as a "different legality," a locus of the transgression and political power of the "maternal." This "legality," pursued by Toni Morrison in her narrative of the subversive household (home of drifters and cultural transgressors), is explored as a sub/cultural resistance to the traditional exclusion of women/mothers from the sociopolitical structures of power. Out of this resistance, the newly established authority of the household negotiates between the sacred and the heretic spaces of culture, shifting the notion of mother fantasy away from the signature of "lack" towards multiplicity and "porocity," the fantasy feeding upon the plentitude of the subject (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 54). I now address the political effectiveness of this negotiation in Morrison's proposal of the maternal sacredness that succeeds in reinvesting displaced women with spiritual integrity but in the end takes refuge in the transcendental. "To impose the new order," Clément believes, "one must permit a fierce resistance, an extreme anger, a revolt of pride, to come into oneself" (Clément and Kristeva 29). Both narratives introduce women who demonstrate such types of resistance, pride, and anger, but they also reveal, in Braidotti's sense, their troubling cultural porousness and their alternative imaginary.

**Locating Heretic Conditions**

In her article "On the Politics of Domesticity," Nancy Armstrong suggests that political power is closely associated with the modern household, rather than with the clinic believed by Foucault to provide "the proto-institutional setting" (918). Home, overseen by a woman, actually precedes the formation of other social institutions, and as a locus of feminine authority and creativity it challenges the phallogocentric sphere of the public. As argued earlier by Douglas and de Beauvoir, a housewife is a transformer of natural products into culture. Responsible for preserving the boundaries between natural and cultural life, she shifts matter out of place into matter in place (Douglas 40): "With her fire going, woman becomes sorceress; by a simple movement, as in beating eggs, or through the magic of fire, she effects the transmutation of substances: matter becomes food. There is enchantment in these alchemies, there is poetry in making preserves; the housewife has caught duration in the snare of sugar, she has enclosed life in jars" (de Beauvoir 476). However, when this process is disrupted by some illegal, culturally abject activity such as witchcraft, "the authority and identity of the housewife are put in question; she can no longer predict or control the processes of transformation required" (Purkiss 97). She becomes a witch, the symbolic antihousewife figure, responsible for disorder, hysteria, and other processes of contamination. Simultaneously, she reveals that the home boundaries were
always crossed, while "the notion of the house as a closed container" is at odds with the housewife identity as a member of the community (98). Following Armstrong, once the household "changes into an impenetrable place of magic forces, escaping control of the authorities, every attempt will be made to destroy it" (918). Similarly, Purkiss writes that nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century moralist literature of domestic conduct chains the "virtuous" wife to "house" where she guards "its resources from overflowing or escaping into the general economy....The physical boundaries of property" are thus "identified with the social boundaries of propriety" (98). In order to preserve its access and relation to power and knowledge, the dominant cultural discourse (community, clique) will persecute everything that disturbs and shifts the boundaries of that relation.

This is precisely the case in Morrison's *Paradise* (1998), in which the conservative African American community cannot tolerate "newcomers" who inhabit an abandoned convent at the edge of their settlement: "If they stayed to themselves, that'd be something. But they don't. They meddle. Drawing folks out there like flies to shit and everybody who goes near them is maimed somehow and the mess is seeping back into *our* homes, *our* families" (Morrison 276). For Morrison, the concept of a subversive household counters the traditional exclusion of women from the sociopolitical structures of power. This power, understood as an institutionalized multiplicity of male-dominated discourses, is undercut by Morrison with a narrative of depression, hysteria, and distress. These initially melancholic spaces, which I trace following Kristeva and Butler, eventually unfold as sub-cultural expressions of race and gender. The surfacing of the witch figure as a container for these expressions is at once empowering and incompatible with the dominant discourse: "Something's going on out there...No men. Kissing on themselves. Babies hid away. Jesus! No telling what else...I hear they drink like fish too...Bitches. More like witches...Before those heifers came to town this was a peaceable kingdom. The others before them at least had some religion. These here are sluts out there...never step foot in church and...they ain't thinking about one either" (Morrison 276). The suspicious and transmuting convent "in some desolate part of the American West" (224) was already "entitled to special treatment" (233), since it was previously inhabited by "Catholic women with no male mission to control them." Those who have come now to inhabit the abandoned mission are "obviously not nuns, real or even pretend, but members, it was thought, of some other cult" (11). In fact, the newly arrived women are homeless, exploited, and hysterical daughters, or mothers (to be). In finding temporary lodgings in the "recovery" convent, they cross a borderline between the oppressive paternal structures ("what is out there where they come from") and what is "inside" the convent. The unknown inside of the convent reverses the norm by expelling it to the "outside," excluding it from its center. The "inside" promises shelter and rest; it speaks a different language, neither inviting nor rejecting but strategically ignoring and thereby coping with the "outside": "Over the past eight years they had come. The first one, Mavis, during Mother's long illness; the second right after she died. Then two more. Each one asking permission to linger a few days but never actually
leaving. Now and then one or another packed a scruffy little bag, said goodbye and seemed to disappear for a while—but only for a while. They always came back to stay on, living like mice in a house no one, not even the tax collector, wanted, with a woman in love with cemetery. Consolata looked at them through her bronze or gray or blue of her various sunglasses and saw broken girls, frightened girls, weak and lying" (Morrison 222).

Consolata, the last "legitimate" convent resident, is introduced by Morrison as a "confused" woman, oblivious to the outside world, suffering from depression and extensive consumption of alcohol. As a nine-year-old, no longer a virgin, she was "rescued" by the Mother, an ambitious missionary, from the severe conditions in Mexico. In the convent's environment of another phallocentric structure, she has been taught to reject the ordinary "feminine condition" as impure. On Kristeva's note, Consolata's inability to express the primal loss (that in Morrison appears as the loss of the maternal culture) has its accompanying affect of a substitution (through the "loving third" of the convent). This substitution, resulting in a suppression of older memories, makes the depressed constantly aware of an "abstracted" loss, all the while unable to name the source of her suppression. The actual loss is not translated into language but is often betrayed by a permeating tone of anguish and sadness. The emphasis is on the evasion—the necessity of resisting the cultural and sociosymbolic processes through which subjectivity articulates itself—rather than on imaginative empowerment. For thirty years "she offered her body and her soul to God's Son and His Mother as completely as if she had taken the veil herself" (Morrison 225). As a "typical Christian conundrum, oppressive and liberating at once" (Warner 77), the convent becomes her home, her element, and a structure that she is not to abandon but eventually, in Braidotti's sense, to transform. Defined by a cultural transgression quite incompatible with the paternal religion, Consolata represents an intermediary figure, exhibiting her strangeness, her irony, and her latent atheism of a foreign national and a passionate lover. Always at odds with the notion of a housewife who maintains the boundaries of home, she opens up her household to the chaotic and disorganized "outside": the lesbian, the bad mother, the hysteric, all types of women "out of control." Suspending the sublime model of the virginal life, Consolata "runs" the convent in a permanent erasure of the nun in herself, in a disabling state of being non-mother, no-body. If she seems depressed, it is because of her alienation, her acknowledgment of the unbridgeable gap between self and the other, self and the "outside." Here, in agreement with Butler, it is not enough to render this "erasure" performative, even if "pleasure" constitutes significant moments of Consolata's subversion. Above all, Consolata continues to live "in a world in which one can risk serious disenfranchisement and physical violence for the pleasure one seeks, the fantasy one embodies, the gender one performs" (Undoing Gender 214). Separated from the two people she loved, first from her lover and then from the Mother, Consolata gradually succumbs to melancholy and drinking: "Melancholy is both the refusal of grief and the incorporation of loss, a miming of the death it cannot mourn" (Butler, Psychic Life 142). Repelled by her own "sluglike existence," she
seems to tolerate the other women's "resignation, self-pity, mute rage, disgust and shame" (Morrison 250). Their experiences connect them, and, in blurring the borders, tell a common story of drift, deception, and cultural displacement. As drifters, Morrison's characters "oscillate" in an oppressive atmosphere between normality and the asylum. Silently breaking the rules and silently being condemned, they end up like heretics "in confinement," in isolation, and eventually "in death" (Clément and Cixous 8). The longer the women dwell among themselves, the more intense and the less coordinated their physical behavior. They are anxious, disillusioned, and obviously uninterested in "proper" housekeeping.

The women's "dwelling" and their bisexuality expand thus into an unbalanced, hysterical condition, which increasingly threatens to break out beyond control; the women are the "go-go girls: pink shorts, skimpy tops, see-through skirts; painted eyes, no lipstick; obviously no underwear, no stockings" (Morrison 156). Connecting hysteria and melancholy, the gradually collapsing convent offers a temporary substitute for security, identity, and representation. Simultaneously, for the town nearby, a Black settlement representing an oppressively ordered and conservative territory, the combination is unbearable: the convent horrifies as it contains secrets in disruptive excess. The convent's "kitchen is bigger than the house in which either man [from the town] was born" (5). In the cell-rooms there is no "proper" furniture, hammocks replace beds, and "strange things [are] nailed or taped to the walls or propped in a corner": "A 1968 calendar...a letter written in blood so smeary its satanic message cannot be deciphered; an astrology chart; a fedora tilted on the plastic neck of a female torso...the series of infant booties and shoes ribboned to a cord hanging from a crib in the last bedroom they enter. A teething ring, cracked and stiff, dangles among the tiny shoes" (Morrison 7). From the settlement's perspective, the convent goes astray, transgresses and transforms into a coven, a den of nonstructure, and "a carefully planned disguise for what [is] really going on" (11). It is a place at the edge of culture, a locus of subversive intention, with no "cross of Jesus," no men, no language (7). Both the co(n)ven(t) and its inhabitants are culturally formless, symbolically embracing the boundless body of the witch, her ability to transform into other bodies, or to change shape and disappear. It frightens by invoking uncertainty about the witch's identity, her intention and her course of action: "Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside" (39). As a metaphor for unspoken feminine jouissance, the convent's "inside" epitomizes an impenetrable maternal womb. The sphere is ambiguously transmutable, and seductive, suspending "the notion of the house as a closed container" (Purkiss 98). Its self-contained, maternal character echoes the earlier days of the convent, when self-sufficient nuns made sauces and jellies and European bread. The luring, transformative capacity of the convent increases after the collapse of the missionaries, and in offering shelter to the exploited it threatens to seduce the patriarchal daughters away from their traditional gender roles in which women's "identity rested on the men they married" (Morrison 187). And it is above all the independent status of the convent that endangers the carefully re- enacted hierarchy of the conservative African American community. The
road connecting the town with the convent represents an umbilical cord connecting the phallic children with the maternal space of filth; it has an explicitly feminine character since "it was women who walked this road...[b]ack and forth, back and forth; crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost...out here where the wind handles you like a man, women dragged their sorrow up and down the road between Ruby and the Convent. They were the only pedestrians" (270). Moreover, the unpredictable inside of the convent connects all the culturally suspicious activities: the stillborn babies, abortions, alcohol, wickedness, and filthy music: "And in the Convent were those women" (11). Morrison goes on to narrate the story of their extermination, the cut of the umbilical cord resulting from the community's fear of losing its masterfully attained racial/cultural identity. Perhaps, "somewhere else they could have been accepted...[b]ut not here. Not in Ruby" (157), where nine "handsome, utterly black men murdered five harmless women (a) because the women were impure (not 8-rock [pure black race]); (b) because the women were unholy (fornicators at least, abortionists at most); and (c) because they could—which was what being an 8-rock meant to them and was also what the 'deal' required" (297).

Morrison clearly deconstructs the traditional concept of household as a stable phallocentric structure that would continue as a result of the cut. In morphing the mother from various dislocated elements, transitory states and marginalized positions, her narrative re-enacts a political act of cultural un/belonging, whereby Consolata, unaware of the 8-rock conspiracy, undergoes a metamorphosis, a type of spiritual and bodily awakening. Encouraged by the "practicing" woman from Ruby, Consolata, a gifted healer, begins the practice of "stepping into" people's souls. While transgressing and transforming the paternal cult, she thus succeeds in finding "another sacred space" (Clément and Kristeva 64), another cultural, or rather subcultural, possibility within the paternal. Nostalgia and depression, as Kristeva believes, are indispensable in this process, since it is "only in mourning the old seductions and beliefs of our ancestors, in exhausting their artificial spark in the accounting of a sober meditation that we can move in the direction of new truths" (Clément and Kristeva 142). Consolata's extensive mourning in the cellar indeed leads her out of depression and into the "discovery" of a state that has a specifically transgressive character. It rests on the meditative interconnectedness of all cohabitants of the household and requires therefore a substantial change in their behavior, allowing for the imaginative empowerment that would take over grief and mourning: "I call myself Consolata Sosa. If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for" (Morrison 262). What Consolata manages through this summoning is the completion of two parallel tasks: that of a mother (a household figure) who introduces order into the scattered home structure and that of a healer who provides that structure with a social support. There is a feminist political passion involved in both, following Irigaray's project of the alternative female genealogy, and there is no sentimentality involved in this reappraisal of the maternal/material feminine. Maternity, positioned as a "resource"
rather than a biological indisposition or necessity, transforms into a capacity "to explore carnal modes and perception," a resource of empathy and interconnectedness that surpasses the phallogocentric economy (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 23). This "maternal/material feminine" is clearly "linked to the political project of providing symbolic representation for the female feminist subject" (23), and, in Morrison's work, becomes the very reason for the convent's success and its subsequent drama.

Although scared by the unexpected transformation of the woman they learned to ignore, none of the inhabitants leaves the convent. Their quest seems to be ending at its collapsing doors, while the convent itself, with its persistently reoccurring maternal quality, becomes a metaphor for the ophalos: the navel as the scar of dependence on the mother. Favoring the ophalic as a source of effective subversion, Morrison's "mother" (Consolata) negotiates as such between the phallic and the (om-phalic) spaces of religion. The latter, composed of cultural splits/fissures, remains unarticulated in the paternal cult. Consolata is thus rendered a spiritual negotiator, mediating between the "symbolic castration" that denies her the right to speak the symbolic and the "real incision" that draws/lures her back to unspoken semiotic pleasures. Therein, confined to her household, Consolata transforms the place from within, and these (magic) transformations connect her with one of the most interesting aspects of the historical witch, the healer figure who "belongs to the private sphere, from which the rite stems, even if it is collective. Initiation, ritual, healing, love itself have to do with individuals" (Clément and Kristeva 176). In a "mixed" language difficult to follow, a meditative trance rather than an organized grammar, she manages to formulate her spiritual message to the half-frightened, half-amused listeners: "Hear me, listen. Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve" (263). In consolidating all the "abominable" conditions of a neglected, dark, and moist household, the cellar becomes the central place of their meetings. It evokes the remoteness of the womb, as a windowless room, a closed container, and a sealed, her(m)etic space. A locus of Consolata's erotic desires from the past, it is a secret crossroads, a place of coming together of the broken, depressive, hysterical and the inarticulate, semiotic: "First they had to scrub the cellar floor until its stones were as clean as rocks on a shore. Then they ringed the place with candles. Consolata told each to undress and lie down. In flattering light under Consolata's soft vision they did as they were told. How should we lie? However you feel....When each found a position she could tolerate on the cold, uncompromising floor, Consolata walked around her and painted the body's silhouette. Once the outlines were complete, each was instructed to remain there. Unspeaking. Naked in candlelight" (263). The "predisposition for the sacred," as referred to by Clément and Kristeva, "better accommodates itself to naked rebellion, insurrectional heroism, the enthusiasm of the moment, in short, to the gaps in social time" (55). These gaps or fissures tie in with the transgressive structure as the cultural practice of suspending the order. This suspension, associated with momentary "gaps in social time," has a different resonance in Morrison's text, since it refuses to be momentary, casual, or orgasmic, and functions as a newly established order
for the secret/sacred practices in the cellar. It also challenges the overexcited body of a hysteric, since the sacred experience comes as a result of the cure (treatment) of pathological symptoms. The women's desires, pains, and sorrows intermingle with their newly established spiritual household, and the reversed "system of classification" (Clément and Kristeva 92) in which all are taken care of. "In loud dreaming, monologue is no different from a shriek; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love. So, exhausted and enraged, they rise and go to their beds vowing never to submit to that again but knowing full well they will. And they do" (Morrison 264). The carnivalesque carelessness of their "freedom" is gone, but rather than returning to the phallocentric order, the household prevails as a strategically independent structure.

As initiated by Consolata, household tasks and specifically maternal/material desire (incorporation) intermingle, connect and disconnect, becoming a spiritual practice of renewal, a subculture within the symbolic system of restrictions. Feminine desire, intensified by spiritual and bodily transformation, transcends the stereotypes of race, but not "sexual difference." As in Morrison's earlier work, the reader is never given any final opportunity to distinguish the women's skin color: the racial identifications are ambiguous, exchangeable, releasing the operations of race in the feminine from obligatory references to skin color and its subsequent cultural connotations (Abel, Christian, Moglen 102). By replacing the conventional signifiers of (racial) difference and by substituting for the racialized body a series of disaggregated cultural parts, Morrison exposes the unarticulated (racial) codes that operate at the boundaries of consciousness: "They shoot white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out there. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time and the day has just begun" (3). Apart from Consolata's stated Indian origin, the racial indications are few and confusing, almost absent. Their absence directly challenges the Black community's obsession with racial purity that is no longer "the sign...they had taken for granted" but "a stain" (194), a historical repetition but in reverse, as a vengeance. The convent's impurity is projected both as feminine and as not (entirely) black; it reopens and pollutes their grandfathers' wounds. As in Creed's analysis of the horror setup, "the house that offered a solace ultimately becomes a trap, the place where the monster is destroyed and/or the victim murdered" (56). For the nine men on the mission, the place constitutes the ultimate danger of annihilation, of being engulfed by the witch's monstrous and invulnerable womb. Its invulnerability "works to license violence against her, violence tinged with the terror of the maternal. Her hard body is a pretext for violence against her invasive magical power, itself an extension of her body" (Purkiss 127). Inevitably, the subversive power of the convent has to be challenged by the centralized phallic power, believed to be wrong in order to be destroyed. "I know they got powers. Question is whose power is stronger....They don't need men and they don't need God. Can't say they haven't been warned" (Morrison 276). The impenetrable inside threatens life, and is therefore "radically excluded" (Kristeva, Powers 2). The subversive household, a condition that gradually supplements the
absence of the phallocentric discourse, has the transitory, metamorphic character of
a trance that is healing/becoming, and it is this process of growth, restored to its sym-
boic and economic functioning, that is abruptly ended by the phallic interference.
In the brutal murder performed on the women, the men expel their anxieties to the
margin of the community, and project a deeply familiar contradiction to everything
they believe they stand for. The convent in the end becomes for them a place of
disconnection, of separation from anxiety, impenetrability, and vulnerability—from
everything that the "unknown" (mother) comes as a reminder of.

The ambiguous maternal pleasures, opening for the women as they transcend
life, emerge from the fertile, reproductive spaces of the convent's garden. This gar-
den/paradise offers another transgression of symbolic restrictions as the differently
cultured realm of unspeaking Piedade, a transgression that converges with the "sa-
cred body of a woman...at the crossroads of love" (Clément and Kristeva 105). The
garden serves as a locus of the specifically feminine trance (order) that contrasts di-
rectly with the (disordered) brutality of the men who leave the mission unconvinc-
of the results they have accomplished. As Morrison suggests, it is the spiritual path
of the restorative maternal powers, rather than institutionally sanctioned religious
structure, that serves as a strategy for women to cope with the phallogocentric cul-
ture. However, as a space of "eternal refuge," Morrison's posthumous paradise fails
to protect women within culture. In transgressing into semiotic pleasures beyond
culture (beyond body), the paradise simply offers a return to the protective womb.
As such it runs the risk of appearing as "a futile gesture" (Butler, Gender Trouble
78-80), unable to solve the problem within the social structure, its laws and prohi-
bitions. The political power of the cellar/womb is left unarticulated, enclosed with
other secrets behind the convent's walls, and sealed with a scar/meaning that cannot
be deciphered. It is in this sense, perhaps, that Morrison's sacred space (as a
source of subversion) becomes politically problematic, since it is not "maintained
within the terms of culture" (80). Simultaneously, the after-life paradise originates
from and maintains its firm connection with/in the convent, where the women, just
before being shot, were in the process of "becoming," undergoing metamorphosis.
This connection, misunderstood or never taken into account by the self-victimized
oppressors from Ruby, is posited by Morrison as an attempt to formulate the space
of libidinal character within culture. This attempt converges in fact with Irigaray's
project of the "sensible transcendental": the space of unspoken cultural territories
that have not been acknowledged as negotiable, and therefore neither strategic nor
political. Although a great deal of the political project of "different legality" aims at
postulating a sociocultural contract by and for marginalized women (boundary fig-
ures, cross-borders, and drifters), it also contains the powerful transcendental value
of refusal to be constricted/restricted or categorized, once and for all.

Metamorphoses and New Orders of Significations

Published in 1998, the same year as Morrison's Paradise, both Dom dzienny, dom
nocny (The Day House, the Night House) by Tokarczuk and Złodziejka pamięci
(Thief of Memories) by Krystyna Kofta expand the concept of a subversive house-
hold into a transnational dis/order that abolishes borders between domestic (na-
tional) and foreign structures. The notion of foreignness, evoked in these texts as a
contingency of disorder and confusion, implies the need for a new classification, in
fact, a new order of signification that permeates the structures of the national home.
Negotiating race, gender, nationality, and religion, these narratives, and Tokarczuk's
in particular, demonstrate the formations of the new positive subject that Braidotti
has strived to mark with recognition: the subject of becoming. In Szczuka's account,
and in those of other poststructural feminist critics in Poland, Tokarczuk represents
"the most important contemporary myth-writer, searching for literary images of re-
ligious, unconscious and archetypal structures in spaces of 'minor' and borderline
plots" (Szczuka, Cinderella 20). In analyzing various poststructural feminist de-
velopments, Szczuka places Tokarczuk among authors exploring transgression and
the metamorphic potential of the feminine subject, such as Emma Tennant, Jeanette
Winterson, and Angela Carter.

Marta, Tokarczuk's figure of the crone blurs a boundary line between the usual
and the unusual, or feasible and unfeasible, forms of behavior ascribed to an el-
derly woman living in a cottage by herself. According to the narrator, Marta's nearest
neighbour, she has "nothing to say about herself," and acts "strangely," unpredictably,
out of context: "As if she had no history. She only liked to talk about other people...
also about those who probably did not exist at all—later I found some proofs that
Marta liked to make things up," fabricate places in which she puts people, like plants
(Dom dzien ny 10; unless indicated otherwise, translations from Polish are mine).
In winter, Marta's cottage is dark, moist, and cold, while its mysteriously "fragile"
inhabitant (her hair is "all silver," her skin is "dry and wrinkled," she is missing some
teeth) simply disappears "like everything else here...Out of the window...I can see
Marta's house. For three years now I have been wondering who Marta was...always
saying different things about herself. Every time we spoke she mentioned a different
year of birth" (9). In summertime Marta visits the narrator frequently, but seems to
be distant, neither listening nor worrying about the consequences of her own talking.
She is indifferent, even somehow cruel, for instance when she feeds her cocks, and
then kills and devours them all over two autumn days (12). In her extravagant habits,
Marta confuses the binaries of day and night, warmth and coldness, life and death. In
integrating polarities, she undermines the structure of traditional concepts of linear
time, amount, or degree that are "proper" and "well balanced" (day is for work, night
is for rest, hens are kept for eggs, etc.) and develops her own sovereign morphology
within this traditional structure. In a metaphorical extension of night into winter,
Marta "sleeps" through winter, and like everything else about her, Marta's hiberna-
tion is extreme, deathlike, crossing the border into the "forbidden" and unthinkable.
Her resting body lies in the dark cellar, carefully stored in the midst of apples and po-
tatoes, suspended in time and language. Half animal, half human, Marta "wakes up
around March" and gradually returns from her womblike winter retreat to her "day
house" routines. Again, the passage along the umbilical cord seems to be reversible,
reiterated, carrying the freshness of the original experience back through the layers
of obscurity, repression, and habit. It connects and redefines the ambiguous semiotic spaces within the cultural (or at least, culturally recognizable) structure: "First she sensed the cellar—its moist and safe scent, the scent of mushrooms and moist hay. This was the reminiscence of summer. Her body was awakening from a long dream, until she found out that her eyes were open....And so on, piece after piece, she called into life her entire body" (12). By advocating this bodily transcendence, Tokarczuk's narrative ineluctably moves towards Irigaray's insistence to disengage the feminine, in particular the maternal, from the one-dimensional picture of phallogocentric objectification. Marta, in a link to Braidotti's postulate of "incorporeal materiality" that defines the body "not only as material, but also as a threshold to a generalized notion of female being, a new feminist humanity" (*Metamorphoses* 58), is explicitly rendered transcendental. To put it differently, Marta implies rethinking of space, time, nature, materiality, symbiosis, and mucosity. The circulating, flowing, and transgressive nature of eroticism that codes Braidotti's incorporeality as feminine meets in Marta's particular morphology of desire with Kristeva's "feminine sacred" and Irigaray's "feminine divine." Marta's peculiar way of coping with the seasons undermines the stability of her household as well as her (human) body, which would normally need to be taken care of, whatever the season. On the contrary, dismantling the permanence and continuity of a "kept" household, Marta reveals some metamorphic and incomprehensible capacities of adjustment to the conditions and manifestations of sociocultural causalities: "I didn't understand Marta and I still don't when I think about her. But do I need to understand Marta? What would I gain from the discovery of her manners, or the sources of her stories? Why would I need her autobiography, if she had one at all? Perhaps there are people without biographies, without a future or past, who appear to others in a sort of permanent present?" (*Dom dzienny* 12).

With all the physical transmutability of her body, her origin and substance, we can trace Marta back to the "ghost" of the pre-Oedipal mother, a phantom of the "speaking subject" as emerging from culturally forbidden spaces. I return to Sprengnether's pre-Oedipal mother and her "effect of the spectral" (5) in order to elucidate Marta's articulation of her cultural validity as related both to a "speculation" ("spectacle," "suspicion") and "appearance" in the face of the semiotic that does not speak or read the symbolic. In a way, Marta's language as well as her circular biography can be associated with a "feminine plotting," defined by Szczuka in the Polish cultural context as the "weaving, intriguing, or gossiping" of an uneducated, "simple" woman, very often a housewife ("Spinners" 69-70). In spreading gossip about other people, Marta is spreading silence about herself. "After all, to plait, or to weave," in Szczuka's association with feminine modes of speech, "indicate time spent in an uncreative manner," time that elapses unproductively. This type of plotting is often linked with incomprehensible or incomplete utterances, such as babbling, jabbering, or talking nonsense, characteristic of marginalized but culturally present linguistic spaces: baby talk or language appropriate to a mentally disordered, delirious, or sclerotic person (Szczuka 70). Echoing Felman's and Irigaray's deconstructions of the feminine manifestation of symbolic language, Szczuka refers specifically to apho-
risms and generally adopted axioms in the Polish language, such as women's ability to "grind" or to "mince" with their enormous tongues, or to "wag" their tongues and gossip. With Marta, however, these feminine manifestations are reversed or suspended. Instead of plotting, Marta is unplotting her story. Thus, rather than negating herself as the subject, as Szczuka has envisioned the gossiping woman, I see Marta as continuously "becoming": manifesting her presence against time as a category of passing and creating new orders of signification. In Tokarczuk's text, the "feminine plotting" is moreover linked with women's hair, since Marta, earlier a wig-maker, continues to preserve some of her tresses and occasionally wears them when she visits the narrator: "Whenever I asked her to tell me something about herself...she changed the subject, turned her head towards the window, or simply continued to cut the cabbage or plait her own or not-her-own hair" (10).

In occupying this multiple subjectivity, Marta, the incongruent and un/plotting "subject," evokes the borderlands as interlaced with dialogical sites of language: where "subjects are constituted in language, but...language is also the site of their destabilization" (Butler, "Discussion" 135). Marta's (and the narrator's) village represents a crossroads inscribed into constant transformations of culture, and therefore, a destabilization of time. The settlement is placed in-between geographically "authentic" and imaginary spaces: in the vicinity of Wambierzowice and Nowa Ruda, a nationally ambivalent territory (Polish in its current status), adjacent to the German and Czech borders, and fusing culturally different historical traces. This trans/national dynamic of location reconstitutes tradition as a fluid continuous concept-process, projecting the village as a space of Marta's etiology and reinforcing the narrator's addiction to the archaic mother. Collecting the different stories of people inhabiting this equivocal territory, the narrator is a "dispersed" figure, a cultural negotiator maintaining her integrity by developing a metamorphic tolerance for contradictions. In fantasizing about Marta, the narrator evokes the " porousness" of her own homeland and attempts to keep up with its configurations and changes that are simultaneously acknowledged and symptomatic of memory loss. In suggesting different types of Marta's death (128), and subsequently, of her various resurrections, the narrator repeatedly evokes the reversibility of the journey along the umbilical cord. Marta, in fact, can be seen as a negotiator between the phallic and the omphalic, mediating (or "denaveling," to use Bronfen's term) between the "symbolic castration" that denies her the ability or right to speak the symbolic language and the "real incision" that draws/lures her back to semiotic pleasures. In depicting Marta's negotiation "with her entire past and present" (10), Tokarczuk herself becomes a gossip-writer, closely resembling an inventive but ambiguous fortune-teller whose predictions develop into the intrinsic model of her narrative, a metaphoric picture of her own methodology. Configuring thus marginal, apparently trivial and inconsequential fables and legends, the narrator manages in the end to threaten the dominant cultural discourse by imposing a new one. Marta's fabrications (wig- and myth-making) connect both with the transcultural stories told by Lissie in Alice Walker's narrative and le Guin's concept of the menopausal crone who becomes "pregnant with herself" (le Guin 5).
As a multiple speaking (becoming) subject, Marta represents a crossroads of identifications that, according to Butler, are carried precisely and inevitably by language ("Discussion" 135): "I should have known where Marta came from. Why she wasn't there for us in winter, why she appeared again in spring time" (Dom dzienny 26). Hinting at unspoken territories, Marta is a "ghostly apparition," a site of recurring subversion that introduces a new plot (both as an intrigue/subversion and as a subsequent development of the story) and disrupts the traditional order (by killing all cocks at once).

Most significantly for my further reading, it is Marta who draws the narrator's attention to a peculiar statuette in a wayside shrine and who comes up with the story of the medieval, sacred/heretic, and transcultural figure of St. Vigilance. A popular saint venerated by people on both sides of the Polish-German border, St. Vigilance is also known as Wilgefortis[Wilga], Święta Troska, or Kummernis von Schonau. As a fictitious narrative figure, Wilga represents a peculiar fantasy of gender, blurring all culturally sanctioned boundaries at once: nation, religion, body, and the illimitable process of signification itself. What operates at the level of this illimitable fantasy refuses to dissociate from the ways in which material and metamorphic processes of life intermingle: "On the cross was a woman, a girl, in such a tight dress that her breasts under the paint cover appeared naked....There was a small shoe sticking out under the dress; the other foot was bare, and this is when I realized that a similar statuette was in the wayside shrine on the road that led to Agnieszka. That one had a beard though, that's why I always thought that it was Christ in an exceptionally long robe. The inscription underneath read: "Sanc. Wilgefortis. Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat," and Marta said that it was St. Vigilance (Dom dzienny 53). Her life story unfolds in Marta's un/plotting via yet another account: written by Paschalis, a gender-confused monk of German origin, "under the patronage of the Holy Ghost and the superior of the Benedictine Cloister" (54). The legend can be read both as a manifestation of a "sacred transvestism" (Clément and Kristeva 31) and of the bodily heresy that abandons gender for an experience of the sacred outside of religious structure. As a site of cultural transgression, Wilga-Kummernis-St.Vigilance performs at once a gender spectacle and a transmutation of significance, deviating from singular patterns of control and order. Born a daughter, Wilga was already "born somehow imperfect" in the eyes of her father, a knight and a devoted warrior (Dom dzienny 54). Her feminine body, as if trying to compensate for this inaccuracy, develops, under the care of Wilga's beloved stepmother, into a medieval ideal of femininity: "Those who saw her admired the miracle of creation in silence" (55). The continuous absence of her father, (frequently participating in the crusades) and the unexpected loss of her stepmother (dying of a hemorrhage) contribute to the gradual decline of Wilga's home in Schonau. Shortly after his second wife's death, the father gives all his other daughters away in marriage, but Wilga, the youngest, is temporarily sent to a Convent (56). The nuns, in Paschalis's account, "accepted the girl with joy, and it soon became apparent that her physical beauty equaled her spiritual beauty, and was even surpassed by it...and even a dark chamber appeared full of light, and her
speech was exceptionally wise for her age, and her judging was mature. Her slim body discharged a balsamic scent, and roses were found in her bed, although it was winter. Once placed in front of a mirror, a face image of the Son of God appeared on its surface and remained there until the next day" (57). Wilga enjoys her life in the Convent genuinely, a refuge eradicating her unwanted sex.

The Judeo-Christian concepts of the virgin and the mother are installed in the narrative as suspended between the virginal body and its self-destruction (transformation) in pregnancy. Legalized sets of rules govern this historical feminine body: if a virgin, a woman must remain so until she marries; otherwise, she is a harlot. If a wife-mother, she must obey her husband and remain faithful; otherwise, she commits adultery, often penalized by death. If she chooses to retain her virginity, her only refuge is in nunhood, and she must experience the vocation as becoming the bride/servant of the great Father. Either way, she remains imprisoned in the polluted body of Eve. Subconsciously identifying with a creature "beyond sex," Wilga attempts to resolve the dilemma of a Christian woman caught in the dichotomy of Eve-versus-Mary. This dichotomy is particularly strongly projected in the Polish tradition of feminine patriotism, which draws on the model of Maryja (Mary), whose miracles save fortresses and convents surrounded by enemies, such as the Convent of Częstochowa under the patronage of the Black Madonna. Wilga identifies with the Virgin, "who triumphs where the first Eve failed, who refuses where the first Eve was tempted" (Warner 245). While participating in her "novitiate," a "preparation time for giving oneself to the Master" (Dom dzienny 57), she imagines herself the bride of the divine Son, "void of" her physical body, and joined with him in "the moment of ecstatic union" (Warner 129): "But the father was relentless and did not want to hear about giving his daughter away to the nuns for good. There, he believed, she would have become something separate, un-utilized, as if fallow. In giving her away in marriage to Wolfram von Pannewicz, he would almost give her to himself, in other words, to the male kind that he represented through God, so as to rule and watch over the creatures of God" (Dom dzienny 58).

Wilga's persistent refusal to leave the convent transforms her virginity into a rebellion that nullifies the Law of the Father, as well as (his) God, as "an effective instrument of feminine subjection" (Warner 49). In attempting to resolve her particular entrapment, Wilga successfully demonstrates that what is at stake is her relationship to the law. Like Cixous's model of Eve, Wilga "is not afraid of the inside, neither her own, nor that of the other" (Cixous, "Extreme Fidelity" 134). Her relationship to the law mirrors in fact "her relationship to the inside, to penetration, to touching the inside" (Dom dzienny 115). Wilga's pregnant "inside" is linked to her feminine body imprisoned within the parthenos, a Christian shield against physiological and psychological contamination that now turns into a weapon against the Father's will. Virginity, thus "one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilizations" (Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 163), becomes a cynical armor protecting her autonomy, her right to choose between the two sanctified modes of marriage: "So the father told her: 'With your body you belong to the earth, and
there is no other master than me.’ To that his daughter replied: ‘I have a different Father in heaven and He is preparing a different bridegroom for me.’ These words made the baron angry and he said: ‘I am the master of your life, He is the Master of your death’ (Dom dzienny 58). Given no choice, Wilga escapes to the woods, and abandoning both the secular and the religious order, lives in a cave as a hermit, a version of Mary Magdalene, the embodiment of Christian repentance. There she spends her days in meditation and fasting. Like Carter's Magdalene and St. Catherine in Kristeva's commentary, Wilga "undoubtedly draws great satisfaction from that mind game, by mortifying herself. But the same game builds up her moral being...and her capacity to overcome every privation, every ordeal, beginning with disgust—the oral ordeal. Catherine refuses to get married, devotes herself to Jesus, and stops eating. The fast begins at age sixteen—she allows herself only bread, raw vegetables, and water" (Clément and Kristeva 118). As villagers discover Wilga's ability to "work miracles" (59), she becomes popular as a powerful and beneficent ascetic. With the name Kummernis (the German word Kummer means grief, sorrow, and mourning), she "heals the maladies of the soul and sufferings coming from the emptiness of the heart" (60), and is frequently called "to those who were dying to guide their souls through the labyrinths of death" (61). The word of her fame spreads and, as Paschalis's account continues, Kummernis is eventually kidnapped by her father and imprisoned (63). Forced to marry Wolfram, she seeks refuge in meditation, concentrating on the figure of Christ, the redeemer. Paschalis's story reaches its climax when Wilga's father opens the door of her cell to finally make his daughter fulfil her earthy duties: "Kummernis stood in a windowless chamber, but it was not the woman whom everybody knew. Her face was covered with a silky beard; her loose hair was falling down her arms. Two naked girlish breasts stuck out of her torn low-necked dress. Her dark but soft eyes followed the inquisitive faces and stopped at the baron. The maidens began to make the sign of the cross and knelt down one after the other. Kummernis, or whoever it was, raised her hands, as if she wanted to clasp all of them to her breast. She said quietly: My Master saved me from myself and bestowed his beard upon me. The same evening the baron ordered the chamber to be walled up with the monster in it. Wolfram mounted a horse and left without a word" (65). Following this passage, Tokarczuk makes us believe that to achieve her goal, Wilga has to outwit the Law of the Father; to sacrifice her feminine body, mark it with some negation of the sanctified feminine, and commit a cultural slip towards sacrilege, heterodoxy, and deviation. Her metamorphosis into a hybrid figure, a gender-crooser, connects her with the mystic tradition of "moving from one sex to the other" mentioned by Clément as "common currency in the history of mysticism" (Clément and Kristeva 31). The oddness of Wilga's experience lies, however, in the fact that "the mystic does not stop at that difference: he passes beyond....And, although one has the right to scream, to stammer, or to sing, it is forbidden to articulate. To fix the sacred outside the instant is sacrilege" (Clément and Kristeva 31). In fixing the sacred outside the instant, Kummernis, like Consolata in Morrison's story, commits a heresy, and reaches the limits of logic that connects the saint with the
heretic, the Virgin with the witch. In imposing a new order, she passes to the logic of another comprehension: that the subject is indeed becoming, remaining forever imperfect, and conferring flexibility and energy to communicate the limits.

Wilga also incorporates Kristeva's sacredness as bound to sacrifice: "to succumb to duty, to immolate oneself for a tyrannical ideal, with all the jouissances that mortification procures, but all the uneasiness as well, even unto death" (Clément and Kristeva 120). Moreover, in her commentary on Saint Teresa of Avila, Kristeva refers to the sacred as involving "a suggestion of disbelief" (37) as well as a familiarity with "the 'other' logic." Like Teresa's, Kummernis's "intense and evasive body" (above all, her face covered with the miraculous beard that continues to grow) turns her "religious experience" into "a confrontation with abjection" (37). Her experience with "the sacred" is different from paternal religion, since it takes place in a dimension that eclipses linear modes of spacing. The sacred "passes in a boundlessness without rule or reservation, which is the trait of the divine, while the religious installs a marked access road, with meditations provided for the difficult cases." The sacred "erupts in its time, or rather in its instant, since its nature is to turn the order upside down" (30). Although sentenced to death, Kummernis continues to "rewrite" the female model of Eve by her distorted ("upside down") femininity. Shortly before her execution, Kummernis, as a fantasy of gender (a creature that is part Jesus, part Eve, and part Mary) re-enacts simultaneously two scenes of temptation, those of Eve in Eden and Jesus in the desert. In resisting the seductive promises of the devil, who appears in her cell, she resists the paternal speech in the Name of her/the Father: "'You could have loved and been loved,' [the devil] said. 'I know,' she replied. 'You could have carried a child in your womb, you could have heard it from within, and then you could have given it to the world,' he said. 'Betrayed it to the world,' she said. 'You could have bathed, fed and caressed it. You could have watched it grow; its soul and body becoming so much like yours. You could have given it to your God'" (Dom dzienny 66). Her dialogue with the devil permits a heretic resistance, and allows Kummernis to continue becoming; to "resist," as Clément believes, "would be the word befitting the sacred" (53). As an extension of the father, the devil represents the symbolic order of the "community" that, like the Cloister, is a site of support and oppression. The devil explains: "Your stubbornness here, in solitude, with a face of a stranger instead of your beautiful appearance, makes no sense. You are not Him. He poked fun at you and now he does not care. He forgot about you, went to create worlds...left you to face the stupid folk who want you to be sanctified or burnt at the stake just the same" (66). Kummernis's resistance against this community is a revolt that blurs the demands of secular and religious institutions of the social order. Her gender crossing, in this religious context, suggests more than the suspension of her sex: in involving the figure of Christ as actively participating in Kummernis's transition, and therefore sabotaging the patriarchal order, Tokarczuk destabilizes the religious system of signification as a constant and monologic structure. As a border-crosser, Kummernis devalues the symmetricity of signification, fluctuating and altogether weakened by the charisma of her virginal/maternal body. The archaic
authority of the "mother," several times signaled by the presence of Kummernis's open breasts, is ultimate in the scene with the devil: "'Look at me,' said the devil. She clasped him harder to her breast...caressed gently his smooth skin. Then, she took out her breast and positioned the devil to suck it. The devil struggled out of her embrace and disappeared immediately" (66).

In this role of the nursing Madonna, Kummernis/Jesus brings into play the "one natural biological function...permitted the Virgin in Christian cult—suckling" (192). In her attempt to nurse the devil, Kummernis transfers Madonna's milk into a fluid charged with semiotic power, neither directed against nor supporting the Father, but an all-encompassing power of life. This particular fluid conceptually resembles Irigaray's fluid "which is not a solid ground/earth or mirror for the subject" but "is mobile," arousing phallocentric fear (Whitford 28). Like Kristeva's Virgin in "Stabat Mother," Kummernis "obstructs the desire for murder or devotion by means of a strong oral cathexis (the breast), valorization of pain (the sob) and incitement to replace the sexed body with the ear of understanding" (Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 181). Designating maternal power as "the spasm at the slipping away of eroticism" translated into tears, Kristeva suggests that we "should not conceal what milk and tears have in common: they are the metaphors of non-speech" (174). The breast has indeed the final word in Kummernis's conversation with the devil, who takes flight from it as if from holy water. It returns and consolidates the powers of the material subject of becoming, its undeniable corporeality that communicates "sexual difference." In the process of subject formation, Kummernis dis/connects with various figures, with death and life, with the demonic sexual rites of witches, and with the excessive spiritualization of her body. Which one perseveres is to be verified by her father, who carries out her crucifixion: "If God is in you, you should die like God" (Dom dzienny 68). Kummernis's violent death resembles again the death of Jesus and makes her a beloved local saint. The eccentricity of the female martyr, deriving from "sexual difference," speaks, however, against her official sanctification. In turn, Paschalis, who devoted years to composing Kummernis's biography, is also an interesting figure of in-between gender. With a beautiful face of a girl, "he was born [like Wilga] somehow imperfect, because as long as he remembered, he did not feel well within himself, as if he made a mistake at birth and picked out the wrong body, the wrong place and time" (Dom dzienny 74). Paschalis's dilemma is his gender perplexity, which he attempts to resolve by inhabiting the "pleasant spaces" of the same female Convent in which Wilga once lived. The biography, at first his only pretext to stay among women (who make him feel like one), gradually becomes the object of his intense although "vague" desires. Kummernis herself, although long dead and physically distant, becomes his messenger of an unexplored eroticism, a new order of signification. Later, on his journey to plead for Kummernis's sanctity, he meets a woman prostitute who puts a dress on him. The process of new subject-formation requires thus a preemption of his sexuality, a prohibition of cross-dressing that eroticizes the law (Butler, "Subjection" 245). In linking the prohibited desire to the law, Paschalis follows Kummernis: as gender-crossers, both have realized that the act
of crossing "works through compelling eroticization" and through "making the law and its prohibitions into the final object of desire" (245). Kummernis, with her bare breasts and beard, and Paschalis, in a dress and stockings borrowed from a prostitute, are "compellingly eroticised," but therefore also alienated and rejected. Paschalis is eventually told by the bishop that his account "is not finished"; like his sexuality, it is unclear, heretical: "It is not finished, son...or this': 'No matter what I do—it is love for you, and loving you, I have to love myself, because what is alive in me, what loves—is you.' 'This sounds really heretical'...Paschalis understood that everything was lost and took the last argument out of his pocket—a wooden cross with a half-naked body of a woman with the face of Christ. 'You can buy it everywhere,' he said. 'Believers go on pilgrimages to Elmendorf to receive her blessing.' What a tasteless oddity, the monk made a wry face" (Dom dzienny 161).

Paschalis's identity as "being in drag" is distinguished thus by a movement towards the other (the "tasteless oddity"), a practice of reversal in which identity and its supposed unity is precisely evaded and abandoned. Drag is the fantasy in which gender is doubled up and exaggerated, in which identity is fissured. By that token, drag is also an ethical representation of gender as a fantasy. Paschalis not only fails to persuade the bishop in Glitz (not to mention the Pope, whom he never encounters) that the thoughts and conduct of Kummernis were in conformity with Catholic doctrine, but, apparently, he allows himself to be subjugated by a heretic woman. This woman, in the multicultural context of Marta's story, resembles Gloria Anzaldúa's figure of la mestiza, who continually walks out of one culture (gender, nationality) into another, because, paradoxically, she is "in all cultures at the same time" (Anzaldúa 77). As a type of mestiza, conscious of crossing borders, Kummernis represents an un/belonging woman, both the heretic and the sacred, whose cultural vulnerability begins with gender (trouble), with the "porousness" of her body and its disruptive excess of femininity. Like Carter's Mary Magdalene and Morrison's Consolata, Tokarczuk's Kummernis translates the abject into a sacred disorder that shatters the dominant culture through transgression. In exposing the artificiality of fixed identity, she negotiates the stigma of "feminine imperfection" that is no longer an essence "lying unchanged outside history and culture" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 213). In this cultural negotiation, the artificially projected linearity of the umbilical cord has been effectively diffused, and, as demonstrated in Kofta's Złodziejka pamięci (Thief of Memories), its diffusion unfixes the origin to which no absolute, final, or nostalgic returns are possible.

The Stigma and the Paradox of the Navel

In Kofta's novel, the traditional concepts of home and community are suspended in persistent returns to a floating, continually rotating past which needs to be "retold, rediscovered, reinvented" (Hall, "Old and New" 58). What structures this relation is the fantasy of un/belonging, coming into play in the stylization of the embodied subjects. Bodies in Kofta's narrative are not inhabited as fixed molar entities. On the contrary, they are "aging, altering shape, altering signification—depending on their
interaction—and the web of visual, discursive, and tactile relations that become part of their historicity, their constitutive past, present, and future" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 217). Braidotti's and Butler's transfigurations of subjectivity are captured in this narrative as a momentum of their theoretical convergence: as a type of subject reconstruction through memory, fantasy, narrative, and through all these processes, as a "becoming" subjectivity that continuously points towards new horizons, and when it is embodied, it accommodates the new. My discussion of this reconstruction centers on the figure of a grandmother, Sabina, whose existence, similarly to Marta's in Tokarczuk's novel, offers a refreshing way of reading the stigma, the mark of negativity engraved on the subject. One of the central narrative figures, Sabina strategically ventures into the cultural margin, from where she is consistently supplying her granddaughter Bogna (Kofta's narrator) with paradoxical identifications, inconsistencies, and difference.

Bogna, a writer attempting to reconstruct the ambiguous past of her family, lives in Warsaw with her husband (temporarily away), her son, and her lover. In fact, she represents a typical female protagonist in contemporary Polish women's writing. Following Kraskowska, the most important element of postcommunist women's writing is that the protagonist constitutes the opposite of the stereotypical literary heroine. In fact, with all her everyday dilemmas as well as her "biological" fate, which mirror many other biographies of women, apparently there is little substance in her life for a novel. The typical protagonist is in her forties; her age connects with the specificities of a "female process of identification" and the crises involved in this process (207). Precisely the case in Kofta's narrative, which recounts the processes of Bogna's "becoming" (her various identifications), the crisis of the subject intermingles with that of the cultural structure, weak and hybrid in itself, primarily represented by Bogna's politically suspended and altogether suspect father, and her grandmother, Sabina Schönmyth, the alienated, marginalized woman labeled as a witch. Bogna's initial discovery, that both her parents' and her grandmother's homeland (as a source and grounding for the subject) is irretrievably past, makes her dwell in continual confusion of her already unstable, provisional identity: "Grandmother Sabina...minor witches could have been trained by her; I remembered what my father said. When I first saw this fragile woman proudly standing in her black dress down to her ankles, my mother had to repeat: say hello, this is grandmother Sabina, come on, Bogienka, what's wrong?" (*Złodziejka* 150). In imposing an imaginary coherence on her experience of disintegration, Bogna imagines herself collecting and storing various fragments of past conversations: moments that, as her mother assures her, she cannot possibly remember. In particular, attempting to disrupt the silence surrounding her origin, Bogna returns to the earliest moments in her life through the prism of postmemory, the memory stored and passed on by her mother. In trying to fix and identify with a culturally incoherent construct, she begins to understand, however, that her morphology is contaminated by an explicitly foreign, incompatible idiom: "It is a beautiful September day....A woman is pushing a stroller in a street. German soldiers look at her. The thoughts and..."
in a question of when the war will end. A small girl in a round hat is sitting in the stroller talking all the time. She comments on everything she sees. A German soldier asks the woman about the child's age. She will be one in December, the mother answers in fluent German. The soldier shakes his head in disbelief. The girl doesn't stop talking, asking and answering to herself. People turn their heads and laugh, as if there was no war" (Złodziejka 50). In this deconstructive and reconstructive re-mem-bering, the pressures of cultural obligations are suspended in fluctuating geographies of German and Polish nations. Contradictory traces (German soldiers, mother's fluent German, little girl's speaking Polish) reorganize and reshape each other mutually, displacing the center/periphery within the other and within oneself. Homeland, in fact, appears in vague references to "patriotism," which stops at Bogna's denial of German identity, and obliges her to reread the binaries as forms of cultural translation, "destined to trouble the here/there cultural binaries for ever" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 247). Bogna's grandparents and parents were German citizens of Polish descent, who, like many other Polish families, returned to an independent Poland around 1920. Their diasporic consciousness, silenced during the communist period, lives, to quote James Clifford, as "loss and hope as a defining tension" (257). In postwar Poland, Bogna's father is not only still German but also a remnant of the dispossessed capitalist class. Bogna recalls her father saying, "patriotism is when you come back to the worst place" (Złodziejka 114), but she never understood his claims to Polishness, since for him "it was no return, [he] was born in Berlin" (116). The mutually permeating positions of two antagonistic cultures, traditions, and languages haunt her memory, rendering reminiscence into a site of continuous becom-ing, and voiding it in fact of melancholic mourning. The post/memory she has been continuously "stealing" from her parents allows her in the end to break through the cultural invisibility of her past.

In the continuous process of cultural translation, claiming the memory of all those who have passed away, a middle-aged Bogna in her forties invites them back to life as ghosts, apparitions, reminders of the past, inevitable loneliness that "consists of what she desires and what she simultaneously rejects" (36): "My desire is constantly aroused, it lures, tempts, promises fulfilment. It reappears in strange mo-ments...suddenly, it is a coffin, coal black with little golden twigs. I feel pain. My left hand is stiff with pain. The shooting pain behind my sternum intensifies" (292). In this psycho-symptomatic disclosure, Bogna conveys the metamorphic character of her regression that does not end in the melancholic stupor that afflicts her, but moves on into creating new orders of signification in remembering, reinventing, and "be-coming memory." It is above all her mother's ghost that pays her regular visits, usually accompanied by her grandmother, Sabina. Her father appears separately, but "it is difficult to figure out what is happening there" (199). In taking on the multiplicity of the past but recurring subjects, Bogna lets them "drag behind [her] everywhere," a simple task since "she inherited this precarious pleasure of contacting ghosts from her grandmother" (17). Lying in bed with her much younger lover, Bogna sees her grandmother's ghost passing above their naked bodies. An image of the other bed,
that of the dying grandmother, "intermingles with the lovers' mattress" (16). This "precarious pleasure" links with Bogna's earlier fascination with incomprehensible German words; both relate to her persistence in diagnosing her identity as a narcissistic wound that refuses to heal except in connecting with other members of her family, her private mafia, as she believes: "My father's name was Wegner, but just like grandfather Franciszek, he considered himself the truest, the most Polish of all Poles, although he went to schools in Berlin. To German schools, you must admit, Bernard, my mother used to respond, when he reproached her for the church Sunday school. He explained over and over again that the Wegners lived in Berlin, because there was no Poland. But as soon as the country became independent, grandfather Franciszek immediately began to wind up his sewing business and moved his company Wegner & Sohn to Poland. He packed up...sold the factory buildings, except for the Singers which he took along as they were the best. He also took two German seamstresses for the beginning, so that they could teach Polish dressmakers how to sew properly" (161). This memory, in particular, constitutes a confusing interference with the increasingly phallocentric and persistently German structure of Bogna's universe. The constant return of paradoxes (Braidotti's internal idiosyncrasies) instill the insecurity of a child that meticulously reconstructs her primal instability. On her sixth birthday, when she receives *The Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, Bogna collapses upon detecting somewhat smaller letters under the big imprint of the Polish title: "translated from the German": "It seemed as if we were all German. Not only the wolf was German, but also grandmother, perhaps like Sabina Schönmyth. Red Riding Hood and Cinderella were also two small German girls. The stepmother and her daughters were German all right, because they had awful characters, like the German witch who locked Jack and Jill in a gas chamber. All are German. The Wegners, the Schönmyths, the father, the mother, and myself, we're all German. I was in despair, I solemnly...promised myself that I would never learn German" (162).

During the early stage of her linguistic discoveries there is no language to face up to her father's strong, although not always rational, talk. In particular, the father's hatred of Sabina Schönmyth, Aniela's mother, is rendered emotional, underscored by class and gender prejudice, and perpetuating in the end his own fear of cultural unbelonging. His hatred suggests a loss that cannot be recuperated, and that leaves an enigmatic trace of stigma on his subjectivity. Sabina becomes in fact his personal "witch hunt," a way of refocusing his own diaspora. In conversations with her father, Bogna gradually learns to answer back, using words of a refined quality, and inventing words to refresh their context. She refuses in the end to listen to her father reciting the dreadful "King Olch" poem, and "covers her ears, since all she can hear is "hajlihajlo-hajlihajlo," an echo of documentary propaganda films she watched with her school in the theatre: "I saw that my father had stopped now and rebukes me...because my behavior was not up to the Wegners' level. Only Schönmyth children, uncouth village yokels, were so badly behaved....You said yourself, father, that Szotka returned to die in Hitler's country" (157-58). The memory dynamic at work is to conjure her mother (and therefore her origin) into existence; to recreate
herself in a maternal memory that she also wishes to relive in the present. However, as the memory is obsessively "replayed," it instigates the involuntary incursion of traumatic loss (of mother, identity) and, as Caruth has argued, it possesses the victim of loss (3-12). "Finally I start to cry, I feel surrounded...they are everywhere, I hear Hitler's language...it is also my parents...who are speaking German, when they want to keep things secret" (112). The penetrating (not-quite-her-own) memory of Jews, Hitler, and Stalin is partly responsible for Bogna's recurring state of serious depression, resulting from her past and present inability to defend herself against massive historical trauma and her own private anguish: "Although I didn't want it, I understood more and more. My inquisitiveness, untamable but well hidden, made me catch the meanings of foreign words immediately. Angry, I called myself 'Deutsche,' I showered slander on myself, Deutsche Schweine, but my German dictionary was expanding with new concepts" (233). Bound to this process of self-accusation, Bogna reminds us of Consolata's posture that under pressures of shifting borders begins to consolidate patterns of resistance. Their vanquishing of a depressive moment, indeed a closure to grief, derives precisely (and becomes possible) at the crossroads of significations. To elucidate the possibility of such closure, I return to Kristeva and Butler. The suspended signifying structure (which I trace in Bogna's anguish) informs Kristeva's psychoanalytical departure on the status of the semiotic as a transgression seeking to displace and subvert the paternal constitution of the subject. Butler, referring to Kristeva's position, denounces this type of subversion (disruption of cultural form) as a doubtful strategy depending upon the stability/reproduction of the "paternal metaphor" (Lacan, *Ecrits* 8). In my discussion, however, the Kristevan transgression of borders, and in particular the intermingling, relational subject positions involved in its practice, are ultimately effective as disturbing identity and order (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). To reject Kristeva's notion of transgression is perhaps too facile. Rather, I posit its significance in an attempt to distinguish two moments that are in constant danger of collapsing—one assigns stigmatized minority to the negative place or mystification within the dominant culture; one questions this minority (as resulting from fantasy) breaking against itself and beyond the system. The latter, I believe, is the case in Kofta's narrative, effectively exposing the limits of the paternal law without conceding that (as Butler understood it) the semiotic is invariably subordinate to the symbolic.

Besides Hitler and Stalin, the symbolic paradigms of good and evil that Bogna "brings from school," a new figure begins to emerge as a site of fascination: the evil woman of Jewish folktales told by her Jewish neighbor. Pandavid, who survived the war miraculously "hidden behind a wardrobe," spoke Polish beautifully, better than they did (*Złodziejka* 96). The tales, unwearyingly depicting a woman as a messenger of Satan, and Rabin Urele or Szolem as correcting paternal figures of the Law, provide her with a key to her mother's "mystery of permanent indecisiveness" (256). Bogna's mother—read with Kristeva—suffers from the inability to represent her affective states, an inability that either results in "psychic mutism," or expresses itself in a barren, sterile language that the subject experiences as "artificial, "empty," and
"mechanical" (New Maladies 9). Aniela's family, distributed on both sides of the border and bearing the names Schönmyth, Szejnmit, or Szyjmit, is ridiculed continually and humiliated by her husband. Her marriage is a disappointment, making scarcely any difference between the taste of cultural alienation and that of home oppression. Coming from a poor family, a home full of "crying children," Aniela dreams about a peaceful place, like a cloister. But for reasons that remain unknown to the reader, she "gave up her childhood plans," decides to "marry rich" (117), and succumbs to a different type of silence where desires remain unspoken. Plunged into this family puzzle, Bogna remembers her parents stubbornly defending their families against each other, her father in words and her mother in tears. And although a provisory, strategic balance has been established between her parents, there is no balance between them and Sabina. Bogna's need to identify reasons for her mother's as well as her grandmother's degradation is persistent, penetrating: "I knew that my mother would allow nobody to humiliate her as my father did. My mother was no Cinderella. My father did just what she wished; he married her, because she was beautiful" (117). The evil woman, the mother, and the grandmother intersect in Bogna's post/memory with the subject of illicit power that, as Butler has argued, connotes both belonging to and wielding, and eclipses the conditions of its own negativity (Psychic Life 14).

The emergence of an alternative subject position, accompanying this process, coincides in Bogna's remembering with the increasing awareness of her aging body, her craving for sublimation, and her detachment from bodily folds, wrinkles, and flabbiness. Sleeping with a cover over her head, she submerges herself in the cooling water of the bathtub, stubbornly attempting to recreate the moisture and warmth of prelinguistic safety, conflating the symbolic with the semiotic: "I left a woman locked in a cube of restlessness on the outside. She fled away like a soul from a dead body. I breathe through my bronchi, lightly, with relief. I am dangling. I am not afraid of being old. It can be like a caress devoid of eroticism, a pure pleasure of unconscious babyhood, a return to the hot springs, an existence without a convulsive shudder" (33). Bogna also remembers the mirror as the "stage" of sudden anger, jealousy, and separation from her mother's body. Lacan's "mirror stage," providing the ideal grounding for the child's delusions of self-sufficiency and omnipotence, meets here with Bogna's desire to transform (transgress). Coinciding with a yearning for the irretrievable semiotic chora as well as a constant struggle against depression, the memory of the "stage" initiates precisely what Kristeva rendered impossible: feminine sublimation. Changing forms and appearances cunningly, depression is sometimes a woman-vampire who salivates at her sight full of devouring desires (47). Sometimes it is her godmother, a gloomy fairy-tale figure who touched Bogna at her birth with her poisoned magic wand (27). Emerging in Bogna's fantasies as a castrating/abject figure (vampire) and a sacred form of the feminine (godmother), depression "performs" on her (body) a different ritual (baptism), a sacred/secret sacrilege, like the Sabbath of religious discourse. When the priest uttered his Christian formula, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost," the godmother/depression whispered into her ear: "you will carry the second name
after your godmother who loves you and will always be there for you; then she kissed my forehead with her burning lips" (27). As if following Irigaray's suggestion, the "proper" naming of a child appears thus in Kofta's text as a secondary replacement of "the most irreducible mark of birth: the navel. A proper name...is always late in terms of this most irreducible trace of identity: the scar left when the cord was cut. A proper name, even a forename, is slipped on to the body like a coating—an extra-corporeal identity card" (Irigaray, Bodily Encounter 39).

Echoing Bronfen's reading of the navel as "a willfully unexplored part of the human body" (3), Bogna's depression harks back to a different type of discourse; that of "the scar left when the cord was cut" (3). In exploring this scar, she revises her identity in relation to her family, in particular her grandmother, who, like the depression-ghost of the archaic mother, refuses to disappear, even when dead. In this intractable negotiation, the alternating processes of identification converge into an aporia of origin, an illusion of the subject's beginning. In other words, the normative symbolic order (power), with its production of monolithic subjectivities, is clearly eclipsed by another power: an alternative subject position deriving from the paradox of the subject's autonomy (Butler), indeed, the paradox of the navel. "For although the navel is open to the exploration of the touch, its most intimate point remains impenetrable to the eye, already inside the folds of the body—though it is separated as well from the actual body interior by a piece of knotted skin" (Bronfen 4). This paradox of autonomy, impenetrability of origin and formation, "is heightened when gender regulations work to paralyze gendered agency at various levels. Until those social conditions are radically changed, freedom will require unfreedom, and autonomy is implicated in subjection" (Butler, Undoing Gender 101). In her resistance against these paralyzing contradictions, Bogna craves for "a cold composure, even death," but knows that these are transitory conditions, that to imagine death to be composure is "a self-deception" (47). Death, as she learns from her grandmother, is a type of life; the border between death and life is at once permeable and intangible, like the borders between nations. "Sabina Schönmyth dragged the dead behind her always and everywhere. Day and night, untiring, the procession followed her....She believed in after-life, but not the same way the parish-priest wanted it in the small church next to the bus-loop" (212). Sabina's resistance against the "proper" community is a revolt that blurs the demands of secular and religious institutions. Like Consolata and Kummernis, she is always already slipping across borders: "Grandmother Sabina emerged as a terrible but fascinating person from bad fairy tales. Such creatures had snakes and toads in their service, ate worms and were evil to all who came into their clutches. But they had power and were strong...when I first saw grandma...smiling with her hair neatly bound at the back, with a parting in the middle....I wandered whether I could give her my hand without fear that she would tear it off" (209).

Suspended in Bogna's memory between the "weird" mother's mother, the other woman (foreign, forbidden to be visited), and the witch (as referred to by her father), Sabina willfully resists her stigmatization. Later, reinscribed as a "fragile ap-
partition," Sabina does not identify with any permanent structure, but dwells on the edge of a communal integrity in her own complex relationship within. In this strategic un/belonging, Sabina demonstrates both her resistance and her "troubling porousness," alluding to her "ghostly" body, a site of transitions and foreign elements: "in a cover of permanent mourning, in transparent black stockings through which her bones were shining, she was an intermediary state between life and death. She walked gently on the pavement. Old shoes were slightly distorted....She was afraid of wind, because everyday she was lighter, her flesh and bones were...losing weight. At some point she will fly off, and her permanent widow's veil, the plural memory of all her husbands and other men, since my father was sure, she had lovers; well, the veil will be flowing in the sky...and then rise shattered by the wind of memories" (217). Embodying an impossible cultural adjustment, Sabina continues to live in a suspension of identity, in the feminine syndrome of being in a minority. Discouraged rather in defining a distinctive but endorsed position in the context of her displacement, Sabina creates her own heretical fraction, a conspiracy against the rationality and plausibility of the dominant discourse. Her hut "built right after the war from the bricks of the ruined house of the Schönmyths" (168) symbolizes a crossroads of antagonistic structures: a secret/sacred place of refuge for the mother, marking each return with maternal authority, and of pleasure/fascination for Bogna. Designed as to exclude the compulsory (postwar) assignment of people to available housing spaces, the hut was a one-room place; its walls upholstered with wine-red velvet: "the hut built of red German brick, soaked, according to father, in Polish blood. When I approached the door, my mother beside me, I quickly licked the brick. It was hard to tell the taste" (207-08). There, Bogna meets Szotka, Sabina's even more peculiar sister, who "could not say properly a single Polish word," murmuring "some German names of long forgotten relatives...if only my father knew who taught me German!" The trips were a sweet secret between mother and daughter (159). Belonging and cultural authenticity, detectably underscoring the purpose of these trips, remains unresolved (since neither of the sisters is "truly German"; 160). Bogna's identity, already hyphenated by difference, increasingly disintegrates under Sabina's refusal to belong. In its pretense to a spontaneous self-affirming act, or a posture of a monolithic identity, authenticity collapses into a paranoid reaction to the dominant group, the authority. As if "added" to the Polish landscape, Sabina represents Irigaray's "other woman," a woman "without common measure" who exceeds attempts to confine her within a theoretical system. To ignore her (the way Bogna's father ignores Sabina) implies a persistent awareness of her presence as the other, and a simultaneous will not to name the other except by an insult.

It is from Sabina, whose "natural state was motherhood alternating with widowhood" (257), that Bogna learns not to be afraid of what Cixous refers to as the relationship to the law, to the social ("Extreme Fidelity" 134). Bogna admits that she "loved grandmother Schönmyth because of her gift of true life and congenial dyeing" (330). In her continual desire to identify herself with the eccentric figure of her grandmother (249), Bogna associates her deviations from normative structure with
the "porous" nature she inherited from Sabina, the "ghost" of the pre-Oedipal mother, a phantom of the "speaking subject" chasing Bogna's biography: "will you remember your grandma Sabina?—my grandmother asks, sitting up in her bed. She takes three gold wedding rings off her fingers...holding them on her palm, she gives me a sign to come closer. She takes my hand and gives me one of the gold circles. The other two go to my mother" (245). Accentuating continuity (process) within the structure (of the Law), Kofta's narrative connects the fates of all the female characters in a metamorphic relationship to one another. The importance of continuity stands in relation to the mother as a sacred/secret figure, "the goddess with her divine daughter that was always missing in the Holy Trinity" (296). Continuity, both in its flowing, prelinguistic and its "speaking" form, appears in a connection with the kinship structure (law), as deposited and memorized in feminine rituals: "I straighten up the lace of the pillow under my mother's heavy head, like an old experienced woman watching over a dead body. Many times I have seen women sitting at their neighbors' coffins....Every next woman was guarding the one who passed away before her. Continuity, not relationship...is stored in my memory" (255). This continuity, representing transitional sequences and circularity of experience, suggests that the memories converge at the point of unexplored, and perhaps inexplicable climax, a paradox of the navel. Consisting of phases, (old age, maturity, childhood, womb), the female characters/memories are "brought back" into one small room (the navel), in which they contemplate the paradox: "grandmother resigned, reconciled with death, belongs to the past; mother, reconciled with life, represents the present time; I am owned by the future" (343). This metamorphic trinity, translating for Bogna the otherwise indigestible identifications with hybridity, suggests a porous but also sovereign affirmative subject position. "Every child is born of a woman, like a little god, like a divine son or a divine daughter....The conception is always immaculate, because no reasonable...woman believes in the connection between what one does in bed and the birth of a child" (240). The Christian doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, significant in defining and assigning the social function to a "woman" in Polish culture, is recreated by Kofta as a "curable" split. In her reference to the Immaculate Conception, Kofta attempts to bridge the gap between women and the Virgin Mary by merging their experience of a sacredness that is to be located beyond religious doctrine. This formulation is particularly significant in the context of Bogna's discovery that Bernard Wegner was not her natural father, and that there is yet another German "messing up" her biography. Even worse, "that German was [probably] an SS-man" (320), "a tall blond man in a black leather coat" (330), detected in a photograph carefully hidden at the bottom of her father's wardrobe. While absorbing her newly discovered nondigestible context, she holds on to her memory as a source of knowledge, of flow and continuity, rather than of oppositions, "cohesive, yes, yes, no, no, this is bad, this is good. Monolithic like paranoia" (341). Her biography/memory becomes such a transgression, deliberately violating borders, and hence appropriating cultural dispossession as a strategic un/belonging.

Both Tokarczuk's and Kofta's narratives speak about processes of cultural identification as transgressive and paradoxical sites of un/belonging. Although beliefs in
coherent identities (which these texts repeatedly question) are imaginary, these processes of identification are not (as such) imaginary, but rooted in the vulnerability of the characters and narrators entrapped in their stigmatized hybridities. It would be more precise to say that their contested identities transgress the culturally privileged discourse of tradition, passing into sites of new identifications either with the institution (law, religion) itself, or with other subjects, by the intermediary of their common desire to abolish the institution. In unplotting their biographies, the protagonists resort to a conceptual fluidity of home and community that is "composed of distances, relationships, analogies, and non-exclusive oppositions" (Kristeva, "Desire" 78). Both narratives can be seen as authographies with an inherently subversive structure that builds new relations and therefore new resistances to culture. As a distinct and dislocating experience, writing thus becomes a provisional, performative, and strategically feminist structure in process. This relational, transgressive cosmogony disrupts the "imaginary," repressed, and persecuted zones of culture, setting up a new frontier, where signifying structure, contrary to Kristeva's belief, does not collapse despite its transgression. I conclude with my earlier argument that the witch as an aesthetic (literary, narrative) figure is not a temporary escape route to the outside of culture but a concrete (collectively imagined) representation of woman as an ongoing, subversively repetitive alternative to the dominant order. Adopting ambiguous, provisional positions in between (dramatic) performance and religious ritual, the female figures discussed here express their cultural presence (rather than absence) in fantastic structures of culture, the idea of fantasy being both licensed and illicit. What this form of fantasy offers, in contradistinction to herstorical celebrations of "orgasmic freedom" and identifications with the semiotic loss, is the enticing promise of how things might look if we altered the confining conditions of the dominant culture. Defined thus as a strategically provisional form of cultural subversion, the fantasy emerges above all as a site of negotiation between competing spaces in culture. In shifting our attention to differences within the very same structure of cultural identifications, the fantasy points towards continuous change, and in embodying this change, towards processes of embodied cultural mediation.

Towards Feminist Passions and Fantasies of Gender

What I attempted to illustrate in this chapter was a hypothesis that the witch, as a fantasy figure of identity transgressions, points to the primary importance of "sexual difference" (Irigaray) as the specific symbolic domain of the feminine. This feminine, contesting its own metaphorical representation (Braidotti), suggests a new theoretical framework for explicating the transgressive locations within the feminist philosophical and narrative discussions of the social (identifications with a particular culture, kinship, religion, system, nation, or home). Equally important to my discussion was to ask how we might use these emerging complexities of location (and of the feminine, in particular), to mobilize multipronged, constructive responses across trans-Atlantic and trans-European feminist divides. How might "femininity" as a fantasy of gender be strategized and embodied for a broader feminist purpose? Ei-
ther as a transgression of phallocentric agency (Braidotti), or as a constituted subject that "eclipses power with power" (Butler), it seems crucial to keep this feminist purpose in check, so as to create broader coalitions within the social fabric of existence.

The call for a renewed perspective from which to approach femininity intersects with the shifts in the political debate from the issues of difference between cultures and ideologies towards differences within the very structure of a particular identification (Braidotti). In tracing these intersections, I discussed transgression in its ethical conjecture, as a manifestation of incompatibility with the hegemonic order of belonging and as the representable difference (Balibar) of any constructed subjectivity that continues to be inscribed with stigma. I suggested, following Braidotti, that we look at transgression both across the heterogeneity of Western cultures and across new complexities of difference within the homogenous clusters of culture.

The discussed narratives and theories equally account for the shifts in theoretical thinking about agency transgression: shifts that defy dualistic, oppositional, and melancholic reasoning. Defined as an incongruity with the normative gender, or alternatively, as a fantasy of gender, the historical and, by necessity, performative concept of femininity stands in an unnecessary tension with "sexual difference." What Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, has questioned in terms of and as "gender," she also questions in *Undoing Gender*, transferring the very same defining logic from "gender" onto "sexual difference." Like gender, "sexual difference" for Butler "is not a given, not a premise, not a basis on which to build a feminism: it is not that which we have already encountered and come to know; rather, as a question that prompts a feminist inquiry, it is something that cannot quite be stated, that troubles the grammar of the statement, and that remains, more or less permanently, to interrogate" (*Undoing Gender* 178). Detecting, in particular, Butler's framework of defining through conceptual negation, I have turned to Irigaray's project of converting "sexual difference" into an empowering affirmation of alternative subject positions. In a remarkable extension of this ongoing project, Braidotti's concept of "sexual difference" is of particular importance, as it denotes movement and "becoming" as well as permanent interrogation without suspending the subject (as Butler often does) in a vacuum of aesthetic significations. For Irigaray in as much as Braidotti, "sexual difference" is a figuration of the future, one that would assume the multitude of the subject not only as value but as the very condition of its existence. Braidotti's reading of "sexual difference" cuts in fact much deeper to radically shift our attention to the process of the subject formation, to the continuous trans/positions that the subject inhabits while producing new sites of transformation, new ways of "becoming." Crucial to this process of "becoming" is the inexhaustible context of difference, a complex web of identifications (subjectivities) that makes it difficult to posit transgressive practice once and for all.

In discussing transgressions I propose to disconnect theoretically feminine subjectivity from repression, negative ambiguity, and ultimately depression as the only alternatives to sublimation. Kristeva's *transgressions* (the abject, the semiotic) and Butler's performativity of gender certainly give rise to discursive innovations
that could subsequently contribute to modifications of signifying practices, but the absence of credible constructive alternatives to the symbolic order are felt on both sides. Melancholic returns to the "loving party," crucial to Kristeva's original loss and Butler's notion of desire, deriving precisely from the unrealized potential for verbal or otherwise culturally valid expression, interconnect psychoanalysis with compelling acts of gender performance and performativity with melancholia. Butler's concept, like Kristeva's appraisal of transgression, seems to valorize change and transformation for its own philosophical sake, diminishing thereby feminist capacity for its concrete social and political manifestations. These significant limitations of theories that remain imprisoned in the ivory tower suit the phallogocentric purpose to interpret "transformation" as reducing and even overcoming of "sexual difference," and thereby to obliterate specific historical feminine configurations of gender (Braidotti). What remains at the structure of the social in the face of such obliteration is a normative monolithic subjectivity that uses the diminishing value of "sexual difference" as a pretext to reinstall phallocentric forms of authority and reasoning. Theorizing the relation of embodied subjects with their enduring dispositions in the social dimension, Braidotti's political proposal of "ethical passions" offers a new perspective on the feminine configuration of gender. What derives from a politics defined in terms of ethical passions (a project inspired by Nietzsche, and read with Irigaray and Deleuze) is a political economy of desire, allowing both for a theoretical space between the primary loss and subsequent repression of the maternal body, and for concrete culturally specific manifestations of the plentitude of pleasure as encoded in the feminine (Metamorphoses 53). This combination of feminism, psychoanalysis, and politics enables us to add "a dose of suspicion" concerning the motivation and intentionality of the subject, without immediately condemning the subject to a nihilistic void, or relativism: "On the contrary, by injecting affectivity, self-reflexivity and joy into the political exercise, it may return political beliefs to their full inspiration" (Braidotti, Thinking Differently 178). Instigated by this reasoning, the narratives selected for this (inter)relational context were discussed in view of "transcendence" as evoking forms of heresy and sacred disorder, alluding to or recognized as specifically "feminine" traces of jouissance, a rejection of binaries on theoretical and political grounds. Formulated by Cixous and Irigaray as transcendental forms crossing the illicit border towards bodily context, eroticism, and sensuality, feminine traces have been further located by Clément beyond (Western) religious and symbolic structures. In these figurations, the feminine is no longer perceived as a symmetrical opposition to sameness (operative in the herstorical narratives), but as a system of "different legality" (see Clément and Kristeva), a permutation of her(m)etic jouissance and a strategically provisional discourse of pleasure (Irigaray, Braidotti). The witch figure, emerging out of these theoretical discussions, constitutes an affirmative and transgressing subject position, not a feminist given but a project under construction, a metamorphic continuum that violates symbolic restrictions and makes the limits of these restrictions compellingly political.
Throughout the narratives, the witch comes to present forms of heresy, stigma, and cultural provisionality that undermine the very structure of subjectivity, social relations, and collective fantasies that are maintained by these forms. Radically neither a word nor a concept, but rather a condition of possibility and move, the "witch" as a subject is continuously departing from Western logocentric models, and continuously "becoming" in its cultural intelligibility. If Irigaray has diagnosed the strategy of a self-conscious mimesis as the subject of a feminine future, Braidotti suggests that this future is already with us, and, in this vein, the narratives I discussed, as the domain of the contagious imprint of this subject, turn up as witnesses to and explorations of it. But what this subject also narrates is an experience of its incommensurability. As an overlapping cultural trait (of language, system, or geography) or a moment of crossing or transgressing culture, the experience is charged with tension, instilling constant changes in subject value. This topography of the witch, radical in its persistent desire to transcend the hostilities of the dominant structure, interferes with that very structure and transforms its foundations. A key difficulty with respect to this interference, and, in due course, with respect to the "transformation" of the social, rests in the Western logocentric understanding of the "undecidable structure" (Derridean *pharmacon*, Kristevan semiotic) that simultaneously reinforces and loosens the various forms of subordination to the symbolic. Revising, in this sense, the reminiscence (trace) of the historical witch as a culturally "undecidable structure," the narratives irrefutably trouble the Western logic of the other and its passive philosophical constructions fixed in the inaccessible. Braidotti's proposal of "becoming," as a system of "logical" or linear inconsistency, reads dissolution of the reflexive (passive) subjectivity precisely as a possibility to subvert phallocentric entrapments in which the "feminine" and, ultimately, "sexual difference" have dwelled for centuries. If we accept this paradoxical positioning of the subject, with its cultural "undecidability" on the one hand, and its metamorphic potential on the other, the restrictions imposed on deviance and its assumed lack of cultural heritage provide us with the potential for a conceptual shift.

I understand this shift as an emergence of subculture, of "in-between spaces" that Rajchman has addressed in reference to history. The "critical experimentation within society shows that history is not linear or progressive, any more than it is circular or cyclical. It shows that if history is a 'web,' it is one with many gaps and holes which allow it to be constantly rewoven in other ways, and that it thus always carries with it the sort of 'in-between' time and spaces" (ix). It is precisely this location of "'in-between' time and spaces" that comes forward in the narratives as a subversive form of un/belonging, a complex mediation of gender, ethnicity, and social positioning, and a strategic wavering between incongruent cultures and philosophies. Whereas in the radical feminist construction of the witch discussed in previous chapters there are still traces of opposition, with nature, femininity, or the semiotic on one side, and culture and the social structure on the other, the witch figures discussed here blur the nature/culture boundary, rendering the very production of its meaning an artificial designation. Simultaneously, and again, in a significant contrast to
the narratives of the historical and archaic figurations, these narratives explicitly evoke awareness that (cultural) transformations are never complete. Far from being logocentrically accomplished, the protagonists mark new cultural territories, new ways of pronouncing a collective reappraisal of "sexual difference." In a decisive cut from the sexual politics of compulsory heterosexuality (or the heterosexual matrix of power), "sexual difference," as emerging from this theoretical and narrative discourse, points toward the singularity of each subject position and the complexities of its transgressing experience as a fantasy of the feminine. The feminist fantasy of the feminine is both about transgressing and surviving. To follow Butler's insight, "The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy—through censorship, degradation, or other means—is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons" (*Undoing Gender* 29). Gender, as approached by Butler and Braidotti (and despite their different positions), is always already at the intersection with power (*Metamorphoses* 17), and therefore of a "transgressive" complexity. Equally for both, categories are coalitions "alternately affirmed and relinquished according to the purposes at hand" (*Gender Trouble* 16). In this sense, the transgressive potential of Braidotti's "feminine" meets indeed at the crossroads with Butler's definition of the body as never free of an imaginary construction. Butler's response to Braidotti's position opens precisely as a coalition: "There is transatlantic exchange at work between us: we both cross over. Can we return to the bipolar distinction between European and American with ease?" (*Undoing Gender* 203). As a (motivated) fantasy, governed both by politics of location and its "embodied accounts," the "feminine" does not exclude or reject the social (the culturally sanctioned) body. It builds upon this body, defines its limits, makes these limits apparent, and, as a result, subverts their traditional symbolism encoded and fixed with particular values. In revisiting its relation to "gender," this "feminine" constitutes "a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself" (*Gender Trouble* 93). Fantasy is part of these permutations, as a space of rezoning and articulation of possibilities, it moves us beyond the sanctioned and acknowledged territories of culture. The "beyond" is neither a new (semiotic) horizon on the outside of culture nor a leaving behind of the (historical) past, but a sense of disorientation, minoritization, and a disturbance of linear reasoning, of a fixed direction. There is an immense potential in transgression, suggesting ways in which stigmas and recognition are perennially translated one into the other, in which social order produces modes of reflectivity as it simultaneously limits forms of sociality. The witch as a boundless fantasy of gender is thus a fantasy of un/belonging opening ways out of limiting significations. Although cross-gender, cross-cultural, cross-body identification makes subjects politically vulnerable, it simultaneously allows for a rezoning of tabooed borders and stigmatized territories. In her borderlessness, the witch conveys a permanent deferral of meaning and of linear development of thought; she communicates a paradox of the navel, autonomy engraved with subjugation that is at once refused by and initiated within phallocentric culture. My
formulation of fantasy as un/belonging, situated theoretically in the transgressive condition of the feminine subject, converges with a number of theoretical concepts, such as resistance, parody, or subversion, and finally, the emergence of a subculture as a political form of expression. As an experience of self-affirmation that first appears at odds with the social, un/belonging (or nomadism, to use Braidotti's term) permutes and transforms the social structure. In my discussion, I used un/belonging as a key metaphor for a cultural interconnectedness, a common thread in the variety of witch-stories, which are differently but all related to a move beyond the psychoanalytic idea of the body. This body, no longer exclusively a map of semiotic inscriptions or culturally enforced codifications, is a surface for the nomadic fantasy of gender: of body (and, by necessity, of "embeddedness" as "bundle of contradictions" (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 21) in the process of cultural mediation. The critical promise of such bodily fantasy, "when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called fantasy. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise. It establishes the possible in excess of the real" (*Undoing Gender* 29).

The lines drawn by fantasy, as every fantasy has a concrete outline and limits to itself, are best understood as invitations to cross over, and that crossing over towards a multi-layered theoretical position constitutes what otherwise disintegrates and divides: a fragile but politically constructive space of un/belonging. This un/belonging, posited as a "nomadic position," allows us to see Irigaray's "disruptive excess," Butler's suspension of the category "gender," Kristeva's concept of "porousness," and Braidotti's embodied subject of becoming as converging in a common intention to elaborate a theory of cultural legality. After all, as Butler admits, against her earlier theoretical standing, it was Kristeva who said that Lacan made no room for the semiotic and insisted on offering that domain not only as a supplement to the symbolic, but as a way of undoing it. And it was Cixous who saw feminine writing as a way of making the sign travel in ways that Lévi-Strauss could not imagine at the end of *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*. And it was Irigaray who imagined the goods getting together, and even implicitly theorized a certain kind of homoerotic love between women. (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 208). In bringing this common intention together, the method of thinking I employed was that of a convergence of feminist thought, which, disabling fixed points of reference, shifts our attention towards interconnectedness, from the concept of difference towards a process of differentiation. Instead of polemical disagreements, visibly resulting in the fragmentation of feminist agendas, what is needed is an affirmative engagement in a feminist activism across Western and Westernized cultures. What is needed is a productive connection that will mobilize a common aspiration towards thinking through difference, and consolidate the very capacity to transform conditions. Considering the dangers and the potentials for global alliance as well as transformation, Braidotti's insistence on transforming possibilities might be difficult at times, but it certainly overcomes the feminist exploration of grief and negativity (and the passive mode of thinking that derives from it). As a mobile feminist consciousness, it moves beyond
philosophical abstraction to find the way through and beyond it, without assuming the position of dominance or mastery. Mobility, multiplicity, and political flow are not the end of agency, but the very condition of its feminist premise.

In this concluding frame, I return to my central argument that the witch figure, deployed in the 1970s to convey the diasporic status of a female sexuality, has undergone significant theoretical transformations over the last three decades. These transformations reflect on central traits in the reformulation of second-wave continental and Anglo-American feminist thought into third-wave feminist postulates of transnational difference and the heterogeneity of women's agendas. The latter, dislocating the centrality of the dominant subject, inevitably comes to the conclusion that the subject is never strictly defined by gender. What is and what will be incessantly produced are waves of transnational immigration, wars, cultural and political displacement, rapidly developing technologies (of communication as well as of the body), and therefore waves of continually new inequalities and new forms of difference. The challenges for feminism are in this sense inexhaustible, and have as much to do with mainstream North American and European capitalist and post/communist histories as with the specificities of feminist cultures within these histories, to which the concept of "difference" is undeniably fundamental.