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ON THE ONE AND ON THE MULTIPLE



PHILOSOPHICAL DUALISM: THE UNITARY AND THE NONUNITARY SUBJECT—A QUESTION OF “EITHER-OR”

An Introduction: About the Proscribed Names in Contemporary Theories of Subjectivity and (Gender) Identity

Adherence to a determinate theoretical horizon provides one with the comfort and safety of philosophical certainty. It is a twofaced certainty established by the hybridization of the transcendental (or thought) and the real: the comfortable sense of unshakability in one’s philosophical knowledge and the safe sense of “knowing the reality.” Even when the proclaimed truth of reality is one of constant mobility, transformation, and instability, the stabilized truth of the reality forms a securely established reality from which one is reluctant to be sundered. It is that stability which one risks losing through a decision to “radicalize” one’s critical position from within the “domicile” discourse (the school of thought one adheres go). By “radicalization” I mean getting to the roots of the discourse that has become one’s theoretical inertia. Therefore, the use of the word “radical” is etymological.

“Getting to the roots,” the “radical” theoretical position, at least the one argued for by this particular text, consists in questioning the content and mechanisms of autoconstitution and autolegitimization inherent in the founding conceptual constructs of a theoretical discourse.

Specifically, it would mean inquiring about some of the fundamental ideological-theoretical presuppositions that constitute the theoretical lineage to which one subscribes, those that virtually situate themselves as givens within and according to the discourse. It would be a matter of calling into question the putative truths that are removed from the ambit of interrogation, those that suppress questioning through mechanisms of discursive autolegitimization and that in fact function as axioms within that discourse.

With regard to the traditional genre classifications of the realms of truth-production (those that *disciplined* “science,” “philosophy,” “theology,” and so on), I would like to remind the reader that science as a “genre” allows axioms to be questioned. The “genre” of philosophy, however, discourages the adherents of competing doctrines from tackling the questions that could undermine whatever doctrinal construction they may profess. Thus, the effect of undermining seems to be always and as a rule understood as destructive. In science such a gesture would be seen as one that brings forth and problematizes a fundamental aspect inherent in a conceptual construction without dismissing it altogether. In the philosophical practices of truth production, one can detect a repetitive and autogenerated instance of thought’s self-censorship in the name of preserving fidelity to a certain discursive legacy.

Nevertheless, I believe that this sort of questioning from within of a particular discourse contributes to its conceptual vitality and to the reinvigoration of the doctrine it underlies. My aim here is to open up from within the discursive horizon of certain questions pertaining to the axiomatic structures that underlie the contemporary gender theory, which is predominantly poststructuralist. The aspiration that inspires this undertaking is not a pretension to getting ahold of the material truth out there and, thus, to rectifying the claims deployed on the basis of those problematic axioms. It is rather a desire to break through the inherent inhibitions of the doctrine, to liberate oneself from scholastic obligations and thus to defy whatever hinders the free and uncensored movement of thought.

From the outset, I am aware that the act of interrogating will itself be—to a certain consciously established extent—irresponsible, insofar as it abandons the stance of scholastic “responsibility” by striving to re-create a naïve state of wonder. The goal is not to attain definitive and irrefutable solutions, but merely to propose a few stimulating examples of questioning. Accordingly, the ambition is reduced to the mere exercise of an awakening of thought from the rigidity of doctrine. The aim is to produce an emancipatory move of stepping out from the scholastic enclosure that constrains the discourse of contemporary gender theory. This attempt to use theory to scratch the surface of some deeply ensconced ideational fundament may result *at least* in hinting at a radically new positioning of thought.

I would like to initiate this line of investigation by examining the status of an apparently fundamental presupposition within the post-structuralist and postmodernist (post-Foucauldian, post-Lacanian, and deconstructive) feminist theoretical horizon: that of the *essentially* nonunitary nature of the subject. The status, the conceptual content, and the immanent rules of discursive connections between some other fundamental distinctions are inherently related to the status of this claim within poststructuralist feminist discourse. So are those of stability and fixity versus mobility, of the one versus the multiple, and the real versus language, to mention just a few. Thus we arrive at my initial questions: Doesn't this proposition's very stability render it exclusive? Doesn't the stabilization of this particular truth introduce binary, oppositional, and dualistic thinking into the constitutive layers, into the very tissue of the discourse? My investigation will seek to focus on these and some other closely related questions, including that of the position of the instance and concept of the real vis-à-vis that of discourse and language. This question will impose itself as the central one.

The initial motivation for this theoretical endeavor originates, perhaps, more in the personal and experiential realm than in any intellectual or scholastic ambition to exercise and demonstrate one's competence in the domain of truth-production. My position at the outset

of the investigation is that of one who has begun to feel uneasy about her existence as constituted according the dominant “postmodernist ideologies of being.” The deconstructive promise of a never-ending textual and discursive (inter)play and the optimism of an unrestrained transformability of identity and freedom implied by the Foucauldian legacy are always already undercut by the impossibilities upon which these utopias reside. Namely, the playfully transformable existences of multiple identities are supposedly made possible by the impossibility of the one and the static, an impossibility professed by these ideologies (which in the years of my intellectual and personal formation had already begun to establish themselves as academic and intellectual orthodoxy); and it is precisely the fundament of an impossibility that gives rise to the aforementioned malaise. The impossibility of producing discourse about certain instances, such as the one, the real, the stable, and so on, creates irrevocable hindrances for thought. By being rendered “unthinkable,” these notions introduce insurmountable aporias into the heart of the language at our disposal today.

This is another source of intellectual and existential discomfort. Resorting to celebrating paradoxes as the propagators of the postmodern era have done does not seem to me to have the intended effect. Praise of the paradox propagates yet another unending flux of the much praised unrestrained textuality. It gives me the impression of being a hysteric denial in the face of the obstacle (of the real). It reiterates the constantly reproduced linguistic reality by retreating to the infantile safety of the known in the neurotic oversaturation with discursiveness and textuality.

Thus, I would like to consider ways of overcoming such inhibitions and interdictions within the poststructuralist feminist discourse without diminishing the theoretical accomplishments and political advantages it has brought about. Let us tackle first the claim concerning the nonunitary nature of the subject which has attained the status of an axiom in poststructuralist and postmodern philosophy. The modal

instance of nonunity seems to have achieved the paradoxical status of a certain defining substance.

The poststructuralist propagation of the idea and the installation of the reality of the nonunitary subject are inherently related to the insistence (of the same theoretical provenance) on the subject's radical instability. It relies on the premise about its inherent mobility, transformability, and multiplicity. The presupposition of the subject's essential instability is, in fact, the founding assumption, which enables the autoimposition of the axiom about the subject's nonunitary nature.

Let us consider the putative truth of the subject's constitutive instability and examine the initial contention of this discussion, namely, that this idea has always already been stabilized as a theoretical position by the discourse, which professes it. It seems that the claim concerning the subject's unarguably nonunitary constitution and "principle of being" is something that cannot be critically questioned within this theoretical horizon, except for the purposes of reasserting the same claim. Any other attempt is hindered by the self-imposed constraints of ideological correctness.

Could it be that the stabilizing factor is already inherent in the founding assumptions of those poststructuralist, constructivist, and deconstructive discourses? Could it be that the assertions about the nonunitary and unfixed nature of the postmetaphysical subject work as the stabilizing gesture of coming to terms with the sense of uncertainty (which has culminated in past years in the rise of the precariat instead of the proletariat)? Our guiding question can be differently formulated: might there not be some underlying conceptual structures, occluded by the very regulations of the discourse in and through which they exist, that remain beyond the reach of the theoretical approach upon which the concept of the nonunitary subject is based, namely, deconstruction?

The motivation for asking this question, for granting its relevance and legitimacy, becomes more apparent when we begin to notice to what extent this "postmodern" insistence on a nonunitary conception of the subject, far from diminishing binary oppositions, actively

perpetuates a more insidious variety of dualistic thinking. Thus, the relentlessly self-avowed “postmetaphysical” position with regard to possible conceptualizations of the subject, insisting as it does on the subject’s exclusively nonunitary status, allows as its only possible alternative that of the opposing metaphysically unitary and stable subject. Despite the poststructuralist insistence on nonmonolithic thinking in all significant feminist writing that advocates the idea of the nonunitary subject, any position that allows the possibility of a subject residing upon (any sort of) a unifying principle is by definition dismissed as metaphysical. It is also dismissed as oppressively stabilizing and totalizing. The problem lies precisely in the logic of this dismissal, which functions “automatically” and “by definition.” (We will examine the evidence for this claim in the discussion below.)

Nevertheless, my intention here is not to argue against the poststructuralist and deconstructive critique of the ideal of the unitary subject, an ideal upheld by the entire philosophical (or “metaphysical”) tradition from Cartesianism to positivism. First and foremost, it is important to reiterate that I find the core of this critique convincing. Indeed, it is simply one of my own axiomatic starting points. (I state my position here without the intention of entering into a scholastic discussion and defense of this conviction, which is of an axiomatic character for me. Such an exposition would lead to an entirely different investigation.) My thinking has been formed, or rather, I have been “intellectually raised,” like so many of my generation, by the postmodern academic and political thinking of the authorities of the era.

Therefore, what I would like to problematize is solely and precisely the question of dualism: the binary and oppositional self-positing of poststructuralist theorizing that argues for the nonunitary nature of the subject. I will propose instead that the dichotomy between *either* an exclusively metaphysical and unitary *or* an exclusively nonmetaphysical and nonunitary thinking about the subject creates a vicious circle whereby each of the two mutually exclusive positions reciprocally generates its other.

It is precisely insofar as it posits itself in our “world” (of ideas, concepts, and linguistic availabilities) solely and exclusively according to this binary logic that the thought of the nonunitary subject situates itself as agonistic, oppositional, and exclusive with respect to other discursive possibilities. A meticulous survey of the seminal texts of feminist theory that proclaim their poststructuralist (or “postmodern”) provenance will reveal the inflexible rigidity. Namely, in accordance with the rules governing the poststructuralist and postmodern philosophy, any contention in favor of (any sort of) unity for the subject must be summarily dismissed as metaphysical or reactionary. In fact, it will show the complete absence of any claim about the subject’s unity in any instance, context, or sense whatsoever. In addition to this, it will reveal this discourse’s constitutive inability to think the questions of unity, of the one, and of the real in a way that is not metaphysical. This discourse suffers from an immanent, fundamental, and insurmountable inhibition in the use of language when attempting to make reference to the self-evident fact of a certain force of cohesion within the subject. It remains reluctant to explore possible instances and configurations of unity, which is emphatically not a unity of differences, but of oneness and singularity.

Poststructuralist (feminist) discourse is vitiated by a debilitating lack of linguistic resources for tackling these questions. Moreover, its inability to address such issues without dismantling their relevance altogether and consigning them to the conceptual junkyard of metaphysical remnants produces the chief points of aporia in this form of discursivity. The utter lack of conceptual tools for conceiving of the subject’s unity in a way that might be post- or nonmetaphysical underlies such celebrated paradoxes of postmodern discursivity as “one, yet—multiple: The one *is* multiplicity and the multiple *is* oneness!” But such paradoxical formulations continue to assume that the multiple is the truth of the one while refusing to acknowledge the converse. Multiplicity and nonunity are that which truly exists, while oneness and unity are fallacious, a mirage of a kind. Yet the question remains: could there be a poststructuralist, constructivist, and deconstructive critique of the

(Cartesian) unitary subject that could also and simultaneously allow us to conceive of the subject as residing in some mode of immanent oneness and stability that would not be a constrictive and exclusive metaphysical formation? Is it possible to conceptualize a subject according to some paradigm of unity that is not totalitarian, a subject of auto-transformative oneness, of identitarian mobility, in short, multiple in one sense yet an instance of oneness in another? And could we conceive of both instances as immanent?

Within the horizon of discursive possibility proper to poststructuralism, this is a conceptual stance that should be both permitted and granted its minimal pertinence. It should be done so from a perspective that is methodological as well as political. But the grave linguistic hindrance identified still remains: namely, the critical lack of the conceptual tools required for such debate. The challenge is thus to undertake the task of creating a discursive basis for thinking unity (of the subject) in terms that are neither metaphysical nor totalizing. Thus the task we shall set for ourselves is to conceive of an instance of unity or oneness for the subject without dismissing the relevance of the poststructuralist discovery of the multiple and transformative subject. It is an even greater challenge to demonstrate how such a discussion might be neither contradictory nor deficient in theoretical rigor.

Conceptualizing Unity “After” Its Deconstruction

The concept of “unity of the subject” as we meet it in the poststructuralist, deconstructive, constructivist legacy of the critique of the unitary subject represents a peculiar synecdochic construct. Namely, it seems that the notion of unity necessarily implicates the traditional attributions of “totality,” “fixity,” and “exclusiveness.” These are *pars pro toto* identifications that regularly appear in the form of a conceptual totality.

The ideological minimum of the “project of the nonunitary subject” is indebted in its greatest and methodologically most significant part to

Derridean deconstruction. However, this deconstructive critical composition seems to silently refuse subjecting itself to any deconstruction. In its domicile ideology, the conceptual structure of the fragmented, unstable, multiple, inclusive, and nontotalitarian subject has never been subject to radical critique insofar as it is a *structure* itself. This possibility is always already impeded by the axiomatic presupposition that the only standpoint of radical critique of the notion of the nonunitary subject is the one of the essential opposition of its perennial other, that is, the metaphysical position.

However, let us assume the possibility of a deconstructive look upon this conceptual conglomerate, which will reside in immanently deconstructive epistemic presuppositions. With this assumption made, what remains is to engage in a heuristic reading of the language economy of the discourse. Let us endeavor to reconstruct the traces of power distribution through acts of naming some concepts that are founding or central to the discursive constitution of the nonunitary subject. The principal question in this sense is: is there a term that holds a hegemonic position among the other key words within this conceptual complex?

I will argue that there is such a hegemonic term. In fact it is the empty place of a term, the absence of a name, the “Name of the One.” The dismantled one presides over the subsidiary concepts of the dismissed totality, stability, autonomy, exclusiveness, and so on. In effect, they are the automatic deduction of the one; they are also its automatic reduction. Oneness is a priori reduced to “these sinister effects” of its eventual “reign” and, in addition to this gesture of aprioristic deduction, it is also reduced to its results. Hence, the autogeneration of the acclaimed postmodern synecdoche of the nonunitary subject. The one is normally conflated with its own “bad produce,” first and foremost with the procedure of totalizing and, thus, universalizing. The subject as a possible one, or as the possibility of some unity for the subject, is unavoidably identified with the (Kantian) modern(ist), autonomous, self-sufficient subject of exclusion (with respect to the other). On the other hand, oneness as singularity is identified and

conflated with seclusion and exclusion, implicating the sovereign subject of soliloquy.

Venturing into an ontological discussion over the one and the multiple and the dichotomy they form is not my intention here. Instead, I would like to address the question of the discursive exclusion and censorship of the “Name of the One.” It seems that in the entire post- and anti-metaphysical philosophical-ideological legacy, there is a tacit aprioristic expulsion and moral condemnation of any position from the perspective of the one and, thus, of the unity as singularity (not as differences). Both terms are inescapably related to and degraded by the notions of totality (and totalitarian repressiveness) and universality (understood only and exclusively as a thinking act of hegemonic universalizing).

Within this entire context of the anti-Cartesian critique of the unitary subject, the feminist constructivist and deconstructive theories of subjectivity seem to suffer from self-censorship regarding the very use of the Name of the One in the affirmative sense (or in even the sense that risks being interpreted as affirmative). There is both tacit and overt autoprohibition with respect to the possible operating with (or application of) any sort of logic of the one or thinking in terms of the one, precisely because of the axiom of postmodern antimetaphysics, according to which any theorizing that claims the reality of a certain one and oneness is a priori universalistic, totalitarian, exclusive, and so on. Thus, the place of the “one” in the signifying chain in the politico-theoretical language of the postmodern word (= the discourse) is an empty place.

I would like to call for a retrieval of the position of the “one” within language, the position that it rightfully owns, together with its legitimacy as linguistic reality. Moreover, this retrieval should be accompanied or even enabled by the simultaneous reclaiming of the “right” of the name (of the one) *not* to be identified in the aforementioned reductionist manner with the “universalistic” and the “totalitarian.”

My contention is, thus, that in the feminist (and not only feminist) discourses of deconstructive critique of the unitary subject, the *use* of

the term “unitary” is insufficiently examined in terms of its oppositional relation to the favored “nonunitary.” Or differently put, it sometimes seems to be functioning as an almost magic utterance of condemnation, a sort of anathema of the nonabsolutistic era, since, in the discourses professing the nonunitary subject, the “unitary” automatically, that is to say, with no critical stance, with no intellectual pausing, also entails the notions of stability, totality, fixity, and so on.

The feminist critique of the unitary subject, traditionally defined (also by itself) as marginal in the landscape of the intellectual power-network, is already rigidified within its own position, and in such a way that it can only produce the pure opposition of its own constructed other. The position of its theoretical other is fixed and its conceptual content unchangeable. It is, as a rule, considered always already diagnosed by a certain instance of an internal autoregulation of the discourse pertaining to the “mainstream autonomy theories”; Marilyn Friedman writes, “Feminist philosophers have criticized mainstream conceptions of autonomy . . . those conceptions ignore the social nature of the self. . . . Mainstream autonomy theories assume that we should each be as independent and self-sufficient as possible.”¹

This is one among the myriad of examples of generalization of the kind that produces this eternal theoretical other *in* the contemporary feminist (poststructuralist) theories of identity and subjectivity. To Friedman, “autonomy theories” appear to be synonymous with “unitary subject theories” and the latter seem to be synonymous with “stable identity theories.” She proposes the position opposite to “the mainstream autonomy theories,” drawing on Judith Butler’s conception of subjectivity: “Feminist criticism of mainstream theories of autonomy is that they presume a coherent, unified subject with a stable identity who endures over time and who can ‘own’ its choices. This presumption is challenged by postmodern notions of the subject as an unstable, fragmented, incoherent assortment of positions in discourse.”²

Here one sees an example of that reductionist interidentification of several predicates. It is detectable also in the following quotation, in

which one can also notice the inhibiting effect of this package of attributes that must all go together as one. The lines, taken from Rosi Braidotti's *Metamorphoses*, display that aporetic and inhibiting situation in which the argument in favor of the nonunitary subject is installed on the grounds of excluding the possibility of other, new, and nonmetaphysical forms of unity and coherence for the subject.

Sexuality is crucial to this way of thinking about the subject, but unless it is coupled with some practice of the unconscious . . . it cannot produce a workable vision of a non-unitary subject which, however complex, still hangs somehow together. . . . I would like to point out, however, that whereas in the psychoanalytic tradition these internal crevices are often the stuff that nightmares and neuroses are made of, they need not to be so. I would like to take the risk of arguing that the internal or other contradictions and idiosyncrasies are indeed a constituent element of the subject, but they are not such a tragedy after all.³

It is precisely the exclusion and the suppression of the thinkable one that creates this situation. Braidotti embarks upon a courageous project to transcend or bypass this aporia, to establish some insight into the substance and the ways of that “glue” which holds together that “subject-which-is-not-one,” without abandoning her poststructuralist position. She is attempting to accomplish this by resorting to psychoanalytic instruments of critique and to the notion of the unconscious.

Further on, just one paragraph below the one quoted, Braidotti takes all precautions not to betray the vision of the nonunitary subject, while she actually continues with her search for that which holds together that “bundle” called subject: “I take the unconscious as the guarantee of the non-closure in the practice of subjectivity. It undoes the *stability of the unitary subject* by constantly changing and redefining his or her foundations.”⁴ However: “Non-unitary identity implies a large degree of internal dissonance, that is to say, contradictions and

paradoxes. *Unconscious identifications play the role of magnets, building blocks or glue.*⁵ The latter statement leads Braidotti to the following one: “Following Irigaray, the most adequate strategy consists in working through the stock of cumulated images, concepts, and representations of women. . . . If ‘essence’ means the historical sedimentation of many-layered discursive products, this stock of culturally coded definitions, requirements and expectations about women or female identity—this repertoire of regulatory fictions that are tattooed on our skins—then *it would be false to deny that such an essence not only exists, but is also powerfully operational.*”⁶

If we decide to follow the argumentative line linking these several quotations together, we can see that Braidotti is not only in pursuit of that “thing” which glues together the “bundle called subject,” that is, in search of its *unifying* “forces,” “principle(s).” She also seems to grant a certain legitimacy to the notion of “essence.” Thus, by *reinventing* the notion of “essence,” she takes the argument even further in the direction of some idiosyncratic reclaiming of the instance of unity. This is a reinventive and idiosyncratic arguing for unity, since it is embedded in a position that is one of an advocate of the notion of the “nonunitary” subject.

Some might find Braidotti’s position contradictory. However, it is not. Her line of argumentation and inference is impeccably logical and highly convincing. She is arguing for the existence of some unifying processes in a certain instance of the subject, whereby the subject itself is *ultimately* nonunitary. Moreover, her claim might not even be paradoxical, since it seems to be perfectly compliant with the norms of formal logic. Namely, Braidotti’s argument, sublimated in the way I proposed, consists in the claim that the coexistence of unity and non-unity is made possible by the simple fact that the existence of each of the two rests on a different ontological level and represents a different, distinct epistemological moment.

What, in Braidotti’s text, produces those rhetorical swings of overly alert vigilance regarding the possibility of being “misread” as someone who propounds an idea of subjectivity different from that of the

poststructuralist notion of the nonunitary subject? In other words, we can trace an overt intention to *identify* with a particular theoretical “school,” to self-identify as an advocate of a certain “truth” as propagated and defended by a determinate discursive community.

The open self-declaration of belonging to a determinate line of thinking (about a specific issue) within the same discursive and textual act (on virtually the same page) that contains a claim which can be interpreted as being in opposition to this declared belonging is a statement of disavowal of any connection with a different theoretical lineage. It is an act of ideological self-identification and a statement of renunciation of any association with a different theoretical school. The repetition of the statement of self-identification is a performative act of self-subjection to a certain ideology—in this particular case, the post-structuralist one.

The defensive language of Braidotti’s argument for (some) unity of the subject, reflected in those repetitive self-declarations, speaks of the importance bestowed upon the question of theoretical-ideological belonging. This cautious language is voiced most “loudly” in the little words such as conjunctions, adverbs, and so on, for example, in the “however” and “still” in the sentence “it cannot produce a workable vision of a non-unitary subject which, *however* complex, *still* hangs somehow together.”⁷ But it also speaks of the discourse’s powers of inhibition with respect to the potentially free course of argumentation, the movement of thought.

On the occasion of a seminar devoted to her work and aimed at younger feminist scholars from Eastern and Central Europe, Judith Butler was asked by one of the students if the nonunitary subject, through its constant inconstancy, is not always already facing the question of “survival,” the possibility of its death. At one point in this dialogue, Butler says:

And I do think that certain forms of social transformation do involve passing through the fear of death. And I don’t think it’s a bad thing.

And what's of course interesting about the fear of death is about who I am. I could say at a certain point in time, that this is who I am and I cannot imagine myself any other way. I will dissolve if I do x, y and z. I will become undone fundamentally if I do x, y and z. And then it turns out you do x, y and z, hopefully within a community in which others are doing the same, and indeed something in you is undone, or even dies. But there is some new possibility that also emerges in its place.⁸

In this quotation, the same tone of cautious rhetoric can be detected that prevents the speaker from falling into the metaphysical "trap" of allowing any possibility whatsoever for a unity of the subject. In a word, the transformative subject is but a social one, and this subject is called an "I" only when its possibility of "dying" or being "undone" is spoken about, which in this (Butlerian) context means when it undergoes a social change and, thus, expresses political engagement.

When the existential lacuna appears out of the absence of any (new) sociopolitical position, what reemerges in the place of the old "I" is not, in the discourse of Butler, some new "I" or different state or "nature" of the "I," but "some new possibility." Thus, in the lacuna of crisis, it seems as if there is no "I," as if there is no "I" of crisis, no "I" of the "space" between (different sociopolitical and cultural subjections), no "I" without the philosophically competent awareness of its social and political position, since, if there were any, it would be that "thing" which, in Braidotti's words, "glues" the subject together. If there were any, there should be some unifying principle presupposed. The a priori exclusion of any possibility of allowing a mode of unity within a concept of a subject that is in its ultimate instance nonunitary is, through its dichotomous restrictiveness, inhibiting of thought and pushes the discourse into the clench of aporia.

This is how even Judith Butler finds herself claiming something like this: "Think of the many years of Turkish migrant workers in Germany, for instance. A population that is not a citizen, that are not citizens, that are also not effaced from the view. Not absolutely absent, there,

but spectrally human. They do not form part of the figure of what is human.”⁹ It seems to me that in the postmodern and poststructuralist discourse there is some tacit yet highly sturdy *prohibition* against thinking about the legitimacy of (let alone granting legitimacy to) a certain instance of a unity or mere exploitation of the “Name of the One” in affirmative connotation. The background of this prohibition is constituted by the unquestioned—or rendered as unquestionable—synecdoche of the unity with its unavoidable attributions of “totality,” “fixity,” “domination,” “repression,” and so on. Highly illustrative of this theoretical practice is the following quotation from Jane Flax: “The postmodernists regard all such wishes for unity with suspicion. Unity appears as an effect of domination, repression, and the temporary success of rhetorical strategies.”¹⁰

Beyond the Dichotomy?

In order to enable the release of thought from the grasp of dichotomy, it seems necessary to grant oneself the right of disloyalty to the school of thinking one adheres to, since, as we have seen, it is the self-declarations of belonging to an “ideology” (or to a school of thought) that produce the positioning of thought which is exclusive and dichotomous. As for the poststructuralist theories, the belief that one is enclosed within one’s own discursive horizon to the extent of being (self-)produced as a theoretical subject by and through the discourse itself only makes that constitutive exclusiveness insurmountable.

One of the possible approaches to the nonexclusive and nonpositional theoretical repositioning is the critical situating of thought proffered by François Laruelle’s non-philosophy. It consists in the simple gesture of radically stepping out of any sort of theoretical autoreferentiality. This means performing a doctrine-unattached leap of abandonment out of the enclosure of thought within the tradition of a certain discourse and the epistemological and political obligations

of adherence. The leap itself, made on the basis of a mere “non-,” one unequipped with the knowledge of any existing discursive grounding, is a leap of and into uncertainty. However, that act of stepping out, while producing itself, coproduces a discursive possibility of an unrestrained flow of thought.

Such a gesture of radical abandonment of any scholastic belonging is, however, not possible without a radical stepping out of the stance of self-sufficiency, of self-circumscription of a disciplinary field or discourse. The non-philosophy of François Laruelle professes such a gesture of a radical stepping-out with respect to philosophy and its narcissistic self-perception as self-sufficient, or, as Laruelle puts it, of the “principle of sufficient philosophy” (*principe de philosophie suffisante*: PPS). This is an attempt to undermine the autopoisoning of philosophy based on “its being animated and entangled by a certain faith or belief in itself as the absolute reality, intentionality or reference to the real that it pretends to describe or even constitute, or to itself as the real itself.”¹¹

Therefore, Laruelle concludes: “This is its fundamental autopoisoning, that which one could also call its autofactualization or its autofetishization—all that we assemble under the principle of sufficient philosophy (PPS).”¹² We should note at this point that in Laruelle’s terminological apparatus the notion of “philosophy” and the notion of “the world” are interchangeable, synonymous. The term “the world” is used in a sense analogous to the notions of “discursiveness,” “the language,” “the transcendental,” or “the conceptual world” of a society and a time. Without going any further into a technical explication of the nonphilosophical method of suspension of the “principle of sufficient philosophy” (PPS), let us only draw the analogy that the thinking subject’s stance of loyalty in the last instance to a discourse and ideology implies the self-sufficiency of the discourse and ideology. Such self-enclosure of thought, a circular autocompletion resulting from the pretension to having consensually marked the horizon line of “the thinkable,” is inhibiting for the authentically investigative thought.

In this vein, let us attempt to suspend the principle of discourse's self-sufficiency, let us endeavor to assume a stance of radically stepping out of the discourse we are subscribing to, which, in this specific case, is the contemporary feminist vision of the nonunitary subject. Let us thus allow the possibility that there might be a "good one," a "good unity," namely, one that does not necessarily have to exclude the multiplicity. In total, let us assume the possibility that both instances (of unity and of nonunity) can be part of the subject's constitution and simultaneously operative without being mutually exclusive. Let us assume that this "coexistence" is made possible by the very potentiality of the two instances to be operative on different levels within different structural subconstructs of the subject.

Before entering into any further reflection on this assumed "peaceful coexistence," let us briefly consider the question of our theoretical positioning in a "certain outside" of the dichotomy. Where is this position to be "located"? Or what constitutes it? If one assumes that the two do not create any division, that their simultaneous workings do not imply any exclusion of each other, the thought is then situated beyond duality. Duality always already implicates dualism, if it resides in the founding assumption that there is no possibility of thinking the two beyond their *relation* of two.

Thinking, however, beyond relation and relationism is thinking in terms of singularity. The minimal form of relationism is the binary. The situation of non-relatedness is one of radical solitude. It can only be the instance of oneness. This is a situation of thought in which even relations are being thought beyond relationism or nonrelatively. In other words, the reality of a certain relation, interaction is seen in its singular positivity. Therefore, the position of nondichotomous thinking is located in and constituted by the *one*, as one of the "first names of the real."¹³

The one I am attempting to (re)claim here, with the help of the epistemological apparatus proffered by François Laruelle's non-standard philosophy, is exempt from debts to any philosophical legacy. Any relation to such a legacy, any referring to a philosophical tradition of

thought and its implication in our invocation of “the one,” will inevitably render it totalizing and universalizing (totalitarian) or, conversely, particularizing. Since, the philosophical one, according to Laruelle, is always already unitary or a unity of differences.¹⁴ Thus, let us venture to conceive of the one as an instance of the singular relieved from any historical (= discursive) responsibility, and within that very instance of singularity let us conceive of a uniqueness and a phenomenal and epistemic solitude. Furthermore, let us conceive of this singular position as absolved from any responsibility to be relative, that is, as void of the stipulation to be relational or to establish any relation whatsoever, since any sort of relationally constituted viewpoint is, in its minimal instance, always already a gesture of constituting a *couple* (with another concept). Coupling is binarism, binarism entails dichotomy.

Therefore, let us attempt to conceive of an instance that will preemptively undermine the process of coupling and the production of dichotomy, which is described by Laruelle in the following way: “The one is a *nonthetic* [*non-thétique*] Identity in general, that is to say, at the same time nondecisional (of) itself and nonpositional (of) itself: without will for essence [*sans volonté pour essence*], without topology for existence, without the contest for movement forth [*sans combat pour moteur*], without space or figure for manifestation. . . . The one is the transcendental minimum, the minimal petition of reality—that is to say, the reality presupposed by any petition in general.”¹⁵ Let us resort to the approach of thinking in terms of nonthetic oneness and suppose a unity within the subject that would be neither in an exclusive nor in an oppositional relation—nor, for that manner, in any sort of binary relatedness—with the subject’s aspects of multiplicity and of nonunity. The assumption that there is an instance of unity does not exclude the presupposition that there are also instances of nonunity. In the paragraph by Braidotti quoted above, we read about the “bundle” (that subjectivity is) but also about the question of the “glue” that holds it together. Let us permit ourselves to ponder the idea of an instance of unity or oneness within the subject without the obligation to place it in

any particular relation with the instances of nonunity. Such a relation would condition it, shape it, and act as an element of its constitution. Consequently, we will construe a relationally defined unity and find ourselves once again entrapped in philosophy. Therefore, let us attempt to think in terms of the “Vision-in-One” (as in Laruelle’s work).

The “unitary subject” that we can invoke by drawing on the theoretical resources of François Laruelle’s non-philosophy is not unitary in the sense of a cohesive unity of organized differences. Rather, it is a unity in the sense of the persistence of “a certain one” of a stubborn sameness, underlying the identitary and subjective complexities and transformations.

THE QUESTION OF (SUBJECT’S OR SELF’S) CONTINUITY: A POSSIBLE LOCATION OF ONENESS FOR THE SUBJECT OR FOR THE “I”

The Subject and the “I”

It seems that the theory of gender identity of predominantly poststructuralist or postmodern scholarship has inaugurated a furtive substitution of the name of “I” with that of the “subject.”¹⁶ By resorting to the *name* of the “I,” I am not referring to any philosophical or theoretical tradition behind it. I am not even referring to a philosophical concept tout court. Rather, I am referring to a name containing the pretension to signifying the reality of the self as a totality encompassing all of its experiences.

When I say “pretension to encompassing all experiences,” I mean a tendency toward conceptual appropriation of all experience, including that which is beyond the language, namely, the effects of the body and the effects of the real. In other words, I am referring to the naming of “I” in a sense (as) devoid (as possible) of scholasticism and erudition. I am referring to its principally infantile and most common and

colloquial use. The notions of the “infantile and common use” of language (or common sense), the Symbolic and language are surely not immune to historic contextualization.

Let us regard the name of “I” as a position in language that has become a suppressed in contemporary feminist philosophy by its being substituted for the name “the subject.” Let us consider what limitations are imposed on thought by the suppression at issue, as well as on the sheer rough experiences of selfhood that ultimately evade any reflection.

In the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis, it would be a methodological fallacy to attempt to substitute the concept of the subject with the name of “I” that refers to an imagined sum or totality of experiences. If one thinks only of that *tuché* (of the real) which only strikes the *automaton* (of the signifying chain) as if only to remind it of its sovereign rule and unattainable position, it becomes clear that it is simply impossible to conceive of such substitution. The subject is the effect of the signifier, while the real reveals itself only through its lack within and for the subject. Still the psyche undergoes the traumatic workings of the real. How can “I” refer to these experiences as mine if the name of “I” is not at my disposal? It also belongs to the territory of the real that “I” do not control. “I” am a mere function in the signifying chain. I am not “I.” I am a subject.

In Lacan’s technical terminology the names of “moi”/“je” subsists side by side with, as well as distinct from, that of the subject (*sujet*).¹⁷ The notion of “moi,” which is grammatically a declined form of “je,” has a rather clear technical designation in Lacan’s terminology. It seems that the use of “je” remains more vague and elusive and shifts from the technical to the colloquial. This possibility of the term’s sliding is what makes it close to the common and nonerudite use. My claim here is that its theoretical or scholarly elusiveness is not a reason to strip it of the possibility of being at play in these or any other theoretical considerations.

The same kind of elusive workings of the name of “I” are to be found in Foucault’s theme of “the care of the self” (*souci de soi: de moi, de toi, and so on*) or of a topos of resistance that seems to evade its placing in

the structure of the subject in the strict sense of the word. It is always at work in his (or, for that matter, in Lacan's) writing whenever it becomes impossible for the term "subject" (*le sujet*) to cover the undiscovered, unexplored territories of the theoretically imagined self, which are not subjected to reflection.

Nonetheless, it remains a commonplace that both Lacan and Foucault (and their respective legacies) have performed an act of philosophical takeover of the position once held in the philosophy by the ego (or the "I") in the name of the subject. To conclude, my argument here is simply that this act of "dethronement" has its own lacunae and that they are symptomatic. Namely, there are remnants of the philosophically imagined self that are "untranslatable" into the notion of the subject as advocated by this theoretical legacy that is rather heterogeneous yet relatively in unison; moreover, it is precisely in the texts of the forefathers of what is nowadays known as poststructuralist theory that we find at play the elusive name of "I" supplementing or complementing that of the subject.

At this point of the discussion, I would like to propose going back to the question of the dichotomy of the unitary and nonunitary subject with an approach that integrates the aforementioned lacunae into the poststructuralist concept of the subject. The lacunae are the cracks of absence in the "voice" of "I," in the incapacitated and silenced uttering of an "I" that is too awkward and too inarticulate to substitute or fit into the conceptual structure designed for the name of "the subject."

Before we proceed, it should be pointed out that there is no clear-cut distinction between the notions of identity, subject, and subjectivity and the name of "I" in the considerations present in this book. In fact, every now and then, they will appear as interchangeable or act as synonymous. Their overlapping of meaning seems to be of a "metonymic" character, rather than a "metaphoric" one. The latter would imply interidentification consummating in a single identity or signifier that appropriates all the others, whereas what I have in mind is a meaning shifting across the terms, along the lines of their closeness, namely, a

“sliding” in the naming that takes “place” along the borders that intersect the notions (or the names) in question.

Subject’s Survival or the Continuity of an “I”: Questions of “Location/s” of Perseverance

2.2.1

Even when conceived of as a continuous process of transformation, an instance of constant transformability and multilayeredness, the subject is, nonetheless and still, subject to and the subject of continuity. It is subject to a process of perseverance of an instance that provides the basis for a certain degree of unity of the transformable subject. The “subject” refers to itself by the name of “I” and it imagines itself as inescapably identical to itself. The importance of the question of “persistence and survival” is one of the central claims of Judith Butler in *Undoing Gender*. In this book we meet a plethora of examples that resort to the words “I” and “self,” even though they are identical in meaning with the notion of “subject.”

Continuity is perseverance of a certain “same”; this “same” is indispensable in providing the possibility of numeric unity, that is, of oneness, which bears the chain of continuous subjective and identity transformation. Mathematically speaking, it is this *one* multiple subject or self that undergoes the processes of her or his transformability. Of course, this is no news to anyone, including the proponents of the theoretical project of the nonunitary subject. Therefore, what precludes the (feminist) poststructuralist language from uttering a word of this simple, self-evident fact, let alone theorizing its role in the construction of subjectivity?

There are two possible answers to this question that I am about to propose which are seemingly contradictory. Namely, the relevance of the “self-evident,” “simple” fact is perceived as an implication of its irrelevance, precisely because of its self-evidence. This seemingly absurd

claim and the situation it creates—of dim, unsaid, and peculiar interchangeability in the two contradictory implications—are in full compliance with the logic of the discourse they pertain to, when they are seen in the context of their own conceptual world.

I will argue that the answer is already implicated in the preclusion itself. The poststructuralist feminist discourse seems to have assigned the status of the ineffable and the unthinkable to that “self-evident” instance of oneness or unity of the self or the “I” underlying the transformability of the subject. The very constitutive presuppositions of the school of thought in question create the implication that this is an instance outside the realms of language or outside the language at the disposal of this particular school of thought. Therefore, what seems to be implied is that this relevant instance is not so relevant after all.

In the position of “the one” there is a strikingly obvious coincidence with that of the real, issuing from the Lacanian psychoanalytic legacy that poststructuralism adheres to. Within the fringes of the Lacanian theoretical horizon, the real is interchangeable with both a substance and an instance. In one possible and clearly only approximate rendition of the point, let us say (resorting to ontological language) that the real is not an entity; it is a function. It is not a *quid*; it is a *quale*. It is a position that can be assumed by any-body or any-thing. It is a “status” that any-one and any-thing can assume for the other and for herself or himself.

Still, it seems that there is one “substance” which is always already assigned to assume the position of the real as its only possible positioning or rendition. Having the priority of residing only in and through the real, it is a substance that seems to be unquestionably exclusive to this topos; and this substance is the substance par excellence, the body or “the materiality.”

The body—physicality or what is understood by “materiality”—in poststructuralist and (post-)Lacanian context is defined by its very inaccessibility to thought. It is equated with the real. It must be mediated through the Imaginary or via the language in order *to be there* for

the subject. It is “impossibility” in the sense of its impossible immediacy. Inasmuch as it is “the bodily,” it is the ineffable. It is beyond language and thought, and as such it is defined by its absence.

It seems that for poststructuralism, the notions of the real and the body as “materiality” are virtually synonymous. However, this is an oversimplification—and, to some degree, inaccurate—when the original writings and teachings of Lacan are taken into consideration; and we will return to this question in this book. Still, it appears that in the poststructuralist theory of gender identity, the interchangeability of the two concepts is in fact taking place. Moreover, it is taking the place of an axiom.

Anything produced by language—which is, in fact, anything not belonging to the domain of the “material”—is deemed to be radically and inexorably beyond the real. Or, it is the real, that “world of the impossible” or “impossible world,” which remains to be conceived of as inaccessibly beyond the world of language. So, in the context of the poststructuralist theory of gender identity, it is inconceivable to thematize the real of an identity. The very predication would only be a *contradictio in adiecto*, the utterance itself but nonsense, since it is the radical detachment from the real that has created the Imaginary, the language, and, through that, the identity.

It is becoming ever more evident that the “outlandishness” of the real is generated by an underlying dichotomy of metaphysical origin nesting in the very foundations of the poststructuralist “production of worlds” (conceptual frameworks of explanatory practices). Clearly, the binary structure of opposition between “materiality” and the “idea” (= sign, culture), inherited through Marxism from the tradition of metaphysics, has subsisted as such even in the debates devoted to its deconstruction. This is another feature that the concept of “the one” and that of the real have in common. It is also captured in the binary structure of the classical metaphysical opposition and mutual exclusion of the one and the multiple, symmetrically coupling with the idea and matter.

As we saw above, besides the shared feature of being grasped in such a constitutive way by a dichotomy of a metaphysical character, the names of the one and the real have a few more traits in common that are of fundamental significance. These are the status of the ineffable, the status of the inaccessible, and, as I hope to demonstrate in the text, a constitutive intertwining with the concept of the body. (In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler endeavors to overcome the mutually exclusivist interrelating between body and language, and this something I will be tackling in the next chapter.)

2.2.2

In *Psychic Life of Power* by Judith Butler,¹⁸ I found one of the rare explicit references in poststructuralist feminist philosophy to a possible *site* of continuity for the subject; and in a later work by the same author, *Undoing Gender* from 2004, I found a reiterated unequivocal claim about the “tasks of persistence and survival” for the “I.” In *Psychic Life of Power*, following Foucault’s line of theorizing the notions of the subject, power, and discourse, and more specifically his conceptualizations of the “body” and the “soul” and their respective roles in the subject formation, Butler refers to the body as “*the site*” of subject’s transformativity. When considered as a possible site of transformation, the body is referred to in its “materiality” or physicality, that is, in its aspects of the real. In that sense, this “site of transformations” is inescapably the same and one. Thus, what is clearly said is that the subject is never really identical to itself, and is always already a process; and what is implicated is that the “site” of transformability subsists as the same and one. Surely the imagined body as a territory of signification undergoes change. Nonetheless inasmuch as it is “the site” that Butler refers to, it is the body proper conceived in its opposition to the “soul” (both terms are provided by Foucault himself). Therefore, the body in this context is physicality and it is the real, detached from the workings of the Imaginary and the language; it is a passive *site*. After stating clearly that “for Foucault, this process of subjectivation

takes place centrally through the body,¹⁹ Butler engages in a critical reading of Foucault's main idea, which aims at amending his theoretical position by way of introducing a psychoanalytic perspective to it. Or the other way around: "that criticism will entail re-emergence of a Foucauldian perspective *within* psychoanalysis."²⁰ The main goal of such a theoretical move is the introduction of greater emphasis on the subject's inherent dimension of ambiguity. And what is meant by that is that the "subject" (or "identity") as the imprisoning effect of the "soul," "insofar as [it is] totalizing,"²¹ is, apart from being constraining, also an instance that has "formative or generative effects."²² These formative, generative effects are the results of precisely "the prohibition and restriction" imposed by the constraints of soul producing the "frame" of "imprisonment." Imprisonment is but the *form* of subjectivity generated through those processes of restriction and discipline. The subject is the only possible active instance. It is an agency, and yet again it is that *passive* imprint of constraint and imprisonment. Hence, the claim about the subject's constitutive ambiguity. This theoretical move of Butler is enabled by her critical rethinking of the clear-cut dichotomy between body and soul in Foucault, which she aims to undermine, bypass, or surpass: "The transposition of the soul into an exterior and imprisoning frame for the body vacates, as it were, the interiority of the body, leaving that interiority as a malleable surface for the unilateral effects of disciplinary power."²³

This quotation which speaks of the body-soul (interiority-exteriority) opposition is inherently related to her critical observation that Foucault, in particular in *Discipline and Punish*, reduces "soul" to the subject taken as a "position" within the Symbolic order, to use Lacanian parlance.²⁴ With this in mind, Butler says that Foucault's discourse on subjectivity, if not supplemented with psychoanalytic theory, leaves little space, if any, for the "location" of resistance of the subject.

Where does resistance to or in disciplinary subject formation take place? Does the reduction of the psychoanalytically rich notion of psyche to that of the imprisoning soul eliminate the possibility

of resistance to normalization and to subject formation, a resistance that emerges precisely from the incommensurability between psyche and subject?²⁵

Butler rejects recourse to the “romanticized” notion of the unconscious as a possible answer (proposed by psychoanalysis) to the question of the location of resistance (*for* the subject): “What makes us think that the unconscious is any less structured by the power relations that pervade cultural signifiers than is the language of the subject?”²⁶ She attempts to transport the ambiguity that marks the Foucauldian subject—its two-faceted, passive-active character ensuing from the subject’s “complicity” with the power in the disciplinary formation—into the unconscious. The result of such a gesture is, however, not fruitful. Namely, it becomes even more difficult to establish the location and trace the mechanisms of resistance within the psyche. It is at this point, a virtual dead end in the discussion, that Butler reintroduces the question of the “body”: “Before continuing this interrogation of psychoanalysis, however, let us return to the problem of the bodies in Foucault.”²⁷ By searching for that which is outside the Foucauldian “soul,” outside the subject articulated by the mechanisms of power—that mere “position” within the Lacanian Symbolic—as the possible *locus of resistance* (for the “I”), Butler is attempting to locate that thing which “glues the bundle [called subject] together.” How do I come to such a conclusion? To answer this question let us consider the following hypothesis.

If while one is searching for that topos of critique (regarding one’s own subject-position) one finds oneself drawn into and taken by that transformative instance (which is a process), one remains inside the confines of a construct that is substitutable (for other identity and subject constructs). The locus of resistance is, however, a potentiality of situating oneself with a stance of critical detachment from the continuous autogenerated processes of subjection (of “being a subject”). Thus, it is a situating beyond the instance of transformability (which, by definition, belongs to the domain of the subject). It is an instance that

continues to be there as a possibility of critical distance (or of a critical stance) with regard to the ceaseless processuality. In other words, this is a “location” of an always already possible critical positioning. It is the topos of emergence of *any* resistance to the oppressions effectuated through *any* subjectivity, and thus not taken by the power *structures* pertaining to the subject. This topos can only be that “thing” Braidotti calls the “glue” for the nonunitary subject. It is an instance of *continuity* and persistence (of the critical stance) beneath, behind, or beyond, or merely parallel to and detached from, the processes of subjection and identification.

The implicated link between resistance and continuity (of the “I”) that I see in *Psychic Life of Power* is confirmed or affirmed by Butler herself in *Undoing Gender*, when she says “the possibility of my persistence as an ‘I’ depends upon my being able to do something with what is done with me.”²⁸ *Undoing Gender* is a book that insists on the task of survival of the self. Still it “undoes” neither the concept of subjectivity as conceived in *Psychic Life of Power* nor the argument concerning the topology of the resistance and continuity as proposed in the same book. (The latter is explained further on.)

Can the body be the site of revolt?

Exploring the possibility of identifying the locus of resistance in Foucault (in particular in *Discipline and Punish*), whereby the “soul” or the “subject” have been dismissed as clearly named and claimed as “an instrument of power,”²⁹ Butler inevitably invests the core of her investigation in the direction of the issue of the “body” as that possible location (of resistance).

In this particular work of Michel Foucault, according to Butler’s meticulous reading, the “subject” is nowhere to be read in the vein of its (the subject’s, which is also power’s) notorious ambivalence. This means that any possibility for the subject to also be interpreted as the bearer, location, or agency of resistance is already in advance dismissed; it is for this reason that she invites us to “return to the problem of

bodies in Foucault.”³⁰ This invitation is immediately followed by a question: “How and why is resistance denied to bodies produced through disciplinary regimes?”³¹ This is an introduction to the subsequent brief investigation of the possibility of the “body,” as conceptualized in Foucauldian discourse, being that *sui generis* topos of resistance. We read: “It appears there is an ‘inside’ to the body which exists before power’s invasion. But given the radical exteriority of the soul, how are we to understand ‘interiority’ in Foucault? That interiority will not be a soul, and it will not be a psyche, but what will it be? Is this a space of pure malleability, one which is, as it were, ready to conform to the demands of socialization? Or is this interiority to be called, simply, the body? Has it come to the paradoxical point where Foucault wants to claim that the soul is the exterior form, and the body interior space?”³²

If the answers to these questions were to be affirmative, we would be facing a rather conservative position by Foucault. And it would indeed be so, not only because such a statement would bear the anachronistic overtones of the traditional metaphysical contempt for the body, but also because it would leave *no space for a potentiality of resistance and critique*. Following Butler, I would also dismiss, already in advance, such a hypothetical reading, since it is in utter disagreement with the most fundamental presuppositions and concerns of the Foucauldian discourse: his statement about the soul’s imprisoning effects on the body is a sufficient reason for such dismissal. In addition to this, let us mention that the concept of the “soul” in the context of the entire Foucauldian discourse is also, of course, neither reduced nor reducible to imprisonment and constraint: it is in addition the instance of liberation and pleasure, and subject to the advocated practices of self-cultivation (*souci de soi*) in volume 3 of *The History of Sexuality, The Care of the Self*.³³ My insisting—following Butler’s insisting which is of the same kind we find in *Psychic Life of Power*—on such textual renditions that might resonate with overtones of conservatism is merely for the purposes of demonstrating the complexity, multidimensionality, and the instances of impasse in Foucault’s writing.

Butler continues with her investigation of the possibility of the body being that site of revolt par excellence: “This ‘subjection’ or *assujétissement* is not only subordination but a securing and maintaining, a putting into place of a subject, a subjectivation. The ‘soul brings [the prisoner] to existence’; not unlike in Aristotle, the soul, as an instrument of power, forms and frames the body, stamps it, and in stamping it, brings it into being. In this formulation, there is no body outside of power, for the materiality of the body—indeed, materiality itself—is produced by and in direct relation to the investment of power.”³⁴ These lines show clearly that, according to this particular discourse, power and the subject are merely synonymous, whereas the subject is *also* to be understood as the constraining soul effect, the imprisoning imprint on and grasp of the body. The search for any grounds of any pertinent assumption that the body (in its immanence) might represent that locus of insubordination and revolt turns out to be futile. It is futile because the body is not outside the reach of power and should be understood as the “material” resonance of the power structure pertaining to the disciplining soul.

The logic of Butler’s argument is obvious: resistance should be located outside the subject and the power (inhabiting the subject); since it is proven that even the body is invaded by the power and discursiveness (structuring the subject), resistance is not to be found there (in the body) either. Further on in the same chapter of *Psychic Life of Power*,³⁵ Butler engages in a critical reading of the sparse account of resistance that Foucault offers in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality, The Will to Knowledge*,³⁶ where he clearly states that there can be “no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of Revolt.” Instead, one can talk of “multiple possibilities of resistance enabled by power itself.”³⁷ This ambivalence of power that is at the same time the disciplinary and constraining force of the law *and* the very potentiality of resistance instills both of these facets in the subject, producing it as that same ambivalence. The process is “reconstructed” by Butler as follows: “For power in Foucault not only consists in the reiterated elaboration of norms or

interpellating demands, but is formative or productive, malleable, multiple, proliferative, and conflictual. Moreover, in its resignifications, the law itself is transmuted into that which opposes and exceeds its original purposes. In this sense, disciplinary discourse does not unilaterally constitute a subject in Foucault, or rather, if it does, it *simultaneously* constitutes the condition for the subject's de-constitution."³⁸ This reading of the law's possibility of "transgressing" itself by means of its ceaseless reiterations is Butler's own reappropriation or reinvention of Foucault's theory and is the product of her methodological innovation, which consists in interconnecting Foucault's thought and Lacanian psychoanalysis. The "conflictual" nature is brought to the Butlerian subject by way of the relentless resignifications of the law, which is always the same. The parallel to the disciplining force of Power is found in Lacan's law.³⁹

Let us carefully read the passage from the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, which is the departure point of Butler's thesis about "the law's autotransgression": "there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat."⁴⁰

It seems to me that Foucault's explication about the multiple workings of the resistance(s) is valid on the level of the social, that wider network of power relations. Furthermore, in this sense, it has no real bearing on the question of the *construction* of the subject and its inner organization, in particular with respect to its double potentiality of power. When referring to "individual resistances," Foucault is rather vague regarding the question of the "location" of that "odd term in

relations of power"⁴¹ which is resistance. He speaks of "focuses of resistance . . . inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behaviour."⁴² The fact that the subject is constituted by power does not explain anything about how the law and resistance organize themselves within that *construction* called subject.

If we are to understand the subject as the instance of a sort of self-articulation of the power (or its articulation within the self), regularization of what might be the anarchic flux of those *quasi*-libidinal forces of power, we can presume the existence of that double nature of power on the level of the subject. This, however, is not the subject we meet in *Discipline and Punish*, at least not according to Butler's reading. Nevertheless, considering the ambivalent nature of power, and the ambivalence of the subject as being both an agency (of power) and a product of subjection, let us assume that, in any of Foucault's works, the subject's disciplinary nature is to be understood as always already permeable. Consequently, should we presume that the lacunae in the subject's disciplinary "nature" are the *loci* or the substance of resistance and revolt?

At this point, we are facing the immediacy of the question of how this other facet of power's double nature is articulated on the level of the subject. This is a question of location and structure, but also, and even more so, of conceptual content. In other words, what does the concept of resistance in Judith Butler's subject consist in? What is the subject's capacity of resistance "made of"? What concept constitutes it? Or, what is its name? Power is the "substance" of both the subject's discipline and resistance; and what we are searching for is that instance which can transform power from the oppressiveness of discipline into a force of revolt. That instance is also the critical stance, and we are in a search of the "location" and the conceptual content it is made of.

Having rejected the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious as the location and content of resistance as "romantic,"⁴³ Butler in her appropriation and combination of both the Foucauldian and the psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity offers no counterproposal. Although

Butler has declared power to be the carrier and the origin of resistance, she does not profess a conceptualization of how power is transformed from disciplinary effect to revolutionary force. In *Undoing Gender*, which engages with the questions of subject's (self's) "survival" and "persistence," we also do not find an answer to the question about the mechanisms, content, and topology of this transformation. The only thing we meet regarding this issue is a reiteration of the statement about the ambiguous nature of power or norms.⁴⁴

In effect, Butler's (and Foucault's) theory fails to provide a clear response to this question. Subjectivity remains to be explicitly formulated as a disciplinary instance, and is only implicitly understood as the agency of resistance. It is proclaimed by both Foucault and Butler as such—the agency of resistance and critique—on the basis of the implications provided by the presence of power as its constituent. Therefore, one concludes: the "location" of revolt has to be looked for elsewhere and outside of what is strictly known as "the subject." Furthermore, this "location" has to be the site of resistance for or within a certain self or an "I."

Since the revolt or resistance is that which enables the subject's self-critique and self-transformation, one is obliged to assume that there is a certain *continuity* of an "I" behind these transformations. After all, if a subject can "die" for a new one to be "born," one has to imagine a "territory" or a "period" of absence or lack, a fissure in the endless positive processes of change; certainly, if one assumes that the dissolution of the subject is lived, experienced, appropriated as one's own subject-dissolution, or death. If the extinguishing, the disappearance, of the subject is an experience of a self-dissolution, there is an instance that undergoes this experience and claims it as its own: it is "I" who is dying as the "I" I knew. It is the instance of continuity behind the changes, which claims possession of these changes as its own.

Moreover, in the context of Butler's (Foucauldian) theory, this instance of continuity is to be presumed to be the location of resistance,

because it is from the standpoint of only that instance that one can introduce, undergo, and endure subjectivity transformations.

Connecting Continuity with Unity (in the Sense of Perseverance of Oneness)

How can we situate the idea of the self's continuity within the poststructuralist theory of gender, which professes the multiple and transformative subject? What is the position it can assume without establishing a conflict with and undermining the fundamental presuppositions of the discourse? At first glance, the notion of continuity seems to introduce an unavoidable conflict with the main stakes of the discourse in question. This is a discourse of consistent and relentless critique of the metaphysical, and the idea of continuity echoes with overtones of the eternal, stable, and fixed. These echoes are the product of the problematic implication about a relatively stable instance behind the processes of vicissitude and change. The stable instance bears a resemblance to unchangeable substance. Thus, it seems to imply an essence, a human essence universally shared by that multitude of posthumanist subjectivity. But if we are to understand that instance of continuity not as a substance, but as a stance, I cannot see the reason for any "conflict of discourses." In the context of poststructuralist discourse(s), there are a number of (in)stances that are perpetually there, such as the subject, the real, power, and so on, displaying that mere faculty of continuity within the discourse itself and the imagined reality it creates (a noneternal one, not representing an essence, but mutational and staggering—and yet, an instance of continuity).

The instance of continuity in its immanence functions as a unifying force for the self or the subjective processuality. In other words, continuity is the perseverance of a certain numeric one. Moreover, this enduring one underlies or undergoes the processes of indentificational multiplicity and subjective transformability. In the Foucauldian context, the instance of continuity and perseverance seems to have been assumed by a

“substance,” that continuous numeric unity of the *body* which participates in the processes of subjection as that which is exterior to language.

It is significant that Butler raises the question of the body as a possible site of the resistance, concluding that such a possibility is precluded or hindered by Foucault’s discourse. Nonetheless, she embarks on an investigation into the reasons for these hindrances, and with that she seems to demonstrate her initial presumption that the body should be the right place to look for the possible location of resistance. In *Psychic Life of Power*, Butler opens this line of investigation with the following question: “let us return to the problem of bodies in Foucault. How and why is resistance denied to bodies produced through disciplinary regimes?”⁴⁵ What inspires Butler to pose this particular question? Is it the fact that what is being disciplined is the body and that thus it is the body which is called to its own resistance to whatever subjugates it? Foucault remarks that “the dissociated Self”—the one “adopting the illusion of a substantial unity”—is possible precisely through the destruction of the body, that “volume in perpetual disintegration” (inflicted by language and ideas).⁴⁶ So, it seems that Butler expects the body to resist this “force of destruction,” to strive necessarily for its self-preservation, for its survival, for its continuity. This also implies that the body is the instance which has the inherent capacity for and immanent tendency toward continuity; it is precisely this characteristic which provides the basis for the expectation that the site par excellence of the resistance should be the body. Thus, we can deduce, following this line of reasoning, that there is an instance of continuity for the “I” provided by the incessant effort of the body to preserve itself against the disintegration brought about and upon it by the subject.

From the discussion thus far, we can see that, through the presumed corporeal continuity, Butler provides a potentiality to conceive of a certain continuity for the “I,” marked by transformative subjectivity.

Also, let us add the following observation: in spite of the fragmentations brought about by the many subject deaths that an “I”

undergoes, some continuity for the subject is also assumed in the sense of the continuity of the memory line of experiences (unless we are speaking of psychotic subjects). This continuity of the memory unifies the many subject-situations under a single name. In both Butler's and Foucault's writings, it appears to be an "epistemological given" that this interrupted sequence of subjectivities is located within a circumscribed psychic "space" as a single unit or set.

Evidently, in the discourses purporting the "death of the unitary subject," the workings of self-sustainability of the "one" next to the "multiple" are always already tacitly admitted, but never clearly referred to. The silence imposed over the "Name of the One" is in inherent, inextricable relation with the "prohibition" of the use of language regarding the questions of continuity. One can assume operations of a self-imposed, ideological control over the "good" and "bad" words in the context of these particular discourses: words to be subject to repetition and words to be avoided.

The silently admitted instance of continuity in the discourses of the nonunitary subject, transformed into a stance of speech or text, could allow the opening of spaces for discussion, linguistic possibilities for thematizing questions of forms and instances of unity for the subject in process.

The Radical Solitude in Continuity

"Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation, but I think it exposes the constitutive sociality of the self, a basis of thinking a political community of a complex order," writes Judith Butler in one of her later works.⁴⁷ And I concur with her position. Grief is a state of being exposed in one's constitutive dependence on others, since "the ties we have to the others"⁴⁸ indeed "compose who we are."⁴⁹ Still, those "many people" who "think that grief is privatizing" are probably also right, since the grieving, or rather, the mourning, entails the hard labor of self-preservation performed by the "I" in the face of the dread of its possible annihilation.

The relentless, autogenerated process of corporeal and psychic self-preservation against the threat of disintegration by “the dissociated Self” is a state of irrevocable solitude. This is a process of repetition of the single labor of autopropagation, of ceaseless repetition of an act of unilateral autoaffirmation. I am resorting to the term “unilateral” in its Deleuzian sense of “unilateral difference,”⁵⁰ which is a singular, unrelated act of affirmation, of a “sheer yes.” The “sheer yes” of the survival is always already an autoreferential affirmation doomed to endless repetition.

The autoreferential stance is always already translating itself into an autoreflexive one.⁵¹ We are speaking of an autoaffirmative process of self-preservation striving toward the continuity of that particular “auto-.” This ceaseless duration of self-preserving labor takes the figure of curving of the self into itself, similar to the Nietzschean idea of the self’s will that turns upon and against itself as the origin and perpetual act of autoreflexivity and, hence, subjectivity.⁵²

And this is a state of insurmountable, radical solitude. The question whether it is prior to, posterior to, or contemporaneous with the “entrance on the scene” of the other is, in fact, irrelevant. When it is relative or viewed as denuded of any relation, there is an instance of radical solitude in the self involved in the autogenerating and autoreflexive processes of subject production. In other words, behind, beneath, or parallel to the mobility of the multiple and transformable subject, the hard labor of self-preserving continuity is taking place, creating a state that is an irrevocably solitary one.

This is a self-enclosed reality of mere labor at a point where the organic and the sense of selfhood merge into each other, a denuded effort of self-preservation that is ultimately elusive to the authority of language. It is the instance of the unsurpassable “imprisonment” in one’s own self. This instance is the real of the “I” that is unmediated through the other and through language. This irrevocably *solitary* instance delineates the limits of automediation through the other. It introduces the limit to the reach of language.