

**BRAIDOTTI, R (2002). METAMORPHOSES:
TOWARDS A MATERIALIST THEORY OF BECOMING.
UNITED KINGDOM: POLITY PRESS**

Helena Ferreira

Rosi Braidotti was born in Italy but grew up in Australia, therefore, having double-nationality. It was in Canberra Australia, in 1977 where she started her formative years at the Australian National University, having been awarded with the University medal in Philosophy and the University Tillyward Prize. She did her PHD in Philosophy at Sorbonne in 1981. In 1988 she was nominated Professor at University of Utrecht in Holland and she took on the position of Founding Director of the Dutch School of Women's Studies, an assignment she carried out until the year of 2005. Braidotti was a pioneer in the studies of European women and she has been considered a world reference in gender studies and critical theory. Her research areas straddle the fields of continental philosophy and epistemology, combining feminist and gender theories and post-structuralist thought.

"I am rooted but I flow" is Virginia Wolf's poetic sentence that Braidotti selected to begin the prologue of her work. Having roots, nonetheless flying or flowing is the central idea, which traverses the above, referenced philosophical work, which the author considers as "a map that draws the trajectory of changes, transformations and becomings" (p. 10). Bearing in mind that change is the only constant that defines the XXI century, this century entails the challenge of rethinking processes much more than concepts since the real question does not lie at knowing who we are but rather who we want to become. In order to accomplish this, it becomes hence paramount to explore new figurations, alternative representations and social locations for this nomadic, hybrid subject who is always already involved in a process of becoming. These figurations constitute "living maps" which attempt to trace a cartography of power-relations whereby the positions of dynamic, shifting entities can be defined as well as their strategic, and embedded, locations of resistance. Drawing upon her vision of a nomadic subjectivity and resting on Gilles Deleuze and Luce Irigaray's philosophies of difference, Braidotti sets out to delineate a cartography for the present in terms of its cultural, political, ethical and epistemological questions, emphasizing its creative and constructive potential. Influenced by the French-rooted tradition of philosophy, born in the XVIII century, and developed by authors such as Bachelard, Canguilhem, Foucault, Lacan, Irigaray and Deleuze - the latter prioritizing an erotic imaginary of sexuality and desire - Braidotti zigzags through a complexity of concepts such as: embodiment, immanence, sexual difference, rhizome, memory, permanence and sustainability. She warns her readers that they should not consider the perceptions derived from these concepts as irrevocable truths. On the contrary, "they are better thought of as propelling us in the multiple directions of extra-textual

experiences” (p. 10). In the first chapter, Braidotti argues that the history of philosophy has always envisaged “difference” as negatively and pejoratively charged, colonized by hierarchical, exclusionary ways of thinking. Thus, one of the purposes of contemporary feminist theory is to efface the negative connotations, which have clung to the idea of “difference. The feminist subject is no longer, as heretofore, the mirror of men but a sexualized, en fleshed subject who is multilayered, multifarious and rhizomatic, fully aware of inequalities and committed to asserting and affirming diversity and difference as positive and alternative values. The new figurations of feminist subjectivity, conscious of their en fleshed and embodied locations go beyond the metaphors which attempt to represent women as agency-driven subjects, institutional elements, signs and symbols of a dominant and conceptual discourse of power. As a way to give meaning and substance to the diversity of women within the category “sexual difference”, perceived as the oppositional axis of the phallogocentric subject, Braidotti proposes a politics of location bound up with the notions of political and epistemological accountability. This politics of location, as she argues, imply a process of consciousness, which entails a political awakening. This also depends upon the others’ intervention; that is to say, it posits the delineation of cartographies of power, which rests upon a form of self-criticism whereby the subject elaborates upon a critical and genealogical self-narrative insofar as he/she interacts with others. This process also depends on an external scrutiny, allowing thus that the analyses produced by the en fleshed come to the fore and cast some light on the knowledge each one of us has of him/herself. It is this sense of responsibility/accountability for one’s locations which will pave the way for the figurations of alternative, feminist subjectivities, such as the lesbian, the cyborg, the inappropriate other, the nomadic feminist and so on. They will differ from the classical metaphors since they express materially inscribed cartographies within the subject and in that sense they will prepare the ground for a self-reflexive exercise, which replaces the parasitical relation that had hitherto informed the process of metaphorization of the others. Drawing upon the post-structuralist work of philosophers of difference like Foucault, Irigaray and Deleuze, Braidotti focuses upon the material and sexualized structure of the subject, which is intimately enmeshed in social and political relations. Sexuality, being envisioned as a social and symbolic institution, oftentimes material and semiotic, becomes the main location of power, according to a complex dynamic which encompasses micro and macro relations. Bearing in mind the dualist model, sex constitutes the socially and morphologically allocation of identity and the erotic form that befits the socialized subjects whereas gender is a generic term which can describe the type of mechanism that partakes of a complex interaction of forces within a polarized, dualist system. Hence, Braidotti recognizes the importance of the sensitive, affective transcendental which positions the en fleshed feminine subject in an in-between locus of transcendence and immanence, thus interconnecting this subject with a multiplicity of differences within itself and in relation to others.

The second chapter sets out to analyze Deleuze’s work under the sway of a feminist reading: besides the manifest empathy for questions of difference, sexuality and transformation, Deleuze also invests the site of the feminine with a positive force. In this respect, for Deleuze “the other” does not constitute the emblematic and invariably vampirized

mark of alterity as in classical philosophy. Moreover, neither is it the fetishized and altered “other” as in deconstruction. “It is a moving horizon of exchanges and becomings, towards which the non-unitary subjects of postmodernity move and by which they are moved in return (p. 69). As far as gender identity is concerned, Deleuze does not circumscribe his analysis to an oppositional dichotomy between male subject/female subject but goes to great lengths to describe a multiplicity of positions of a sexualized subjects whereby the differences in these positions signal different fluxes of becoming, in web-like, rhizomatic interrelations. In the light of this view, the subject is endowed with multiple sexualities. Deleuze was one of the greatest creators of alternative and post-metaphysical figurations of the subject: bodies without organs, becoming, rhizome. His central figuration is the minoritarian becoming: the nomadic, the molecular, the becoming-woman, taking up a space of dynamic marginality inasmuch as it traces quick, trajectories that decentralize male subjectivity, that of the occidental macho, pushing it into peripheral positions. Like Irigaray, Deleuze argues that there is no minority becoming for men since he has become the privileged referent of subjectivity, standing for the majority, the “dead heart of the system”, advocating therefore that the process of becoming woman is a fundamental step in the process of becoming for both sexes. It is still in this chapter that Braidotti introduces Lichtenberg’s concept of metamorphoses, which she defines as the “becoming-thresholds of borderlines” (p. 114). Lichtenberg freely adopting Deleuze’s theory seeks to destabilize the Oedipal machinery, proposing a matrix which she perceives as a uterine, de-territorialized space insofar as it engenders the virtual feminine as a positive difference. This process generates met(r)morphoses which point to multiplicity and plurality and, at the same time, establishes a relationship between pre-natal connections among non-unitary subjects. The coexistence of opposites sets up against the totality and the “sameness” of the historically rooted phallic signifier. The met(r)morphosis empowers fluidity and flows. The illusion that there is a path of truth or only a center of resistance is thus replaced by a long process of learning to experiment on possible, sometimes very small, transformations through endless repetitions that will rather secure and assert the constant flux of met(r)morphoses. The minority becoming, molecular, women does not constitute an end in itself but rather a highly differentiated, turbulent space of multiple and dissymmetrical becomings.

In the third chapter, Braidotti goes into great detail to prove that diluting phallic sexuality and the identity into undifferentiated flows may take different forms and speeds depending on one’s geo-political, sexual or any other location as is the case of becoming-animal. In order to do so, Braidotti expands on Deleuze’s ideas, faithful to his anti-phallic vision of creativity, thereby writers live in a permanent state of alertness and vigilance deriving from the effort in captivating and retaining the signs stemming from their plan of immanent contact with other forces, like the ones embodied by animals. Braidotti pits this example against the main character in *La Passion According to G.H.* by Clarice Lispector which shows that a white, resigned woman will gradually lose her personality, as it is socially defined, ending up as part of a complex interweaving system of space and time. This character encapsulates the multiple possibilities that dwell

within her. “No longer an individual, a person, she turns into a particle of living matter, intelligent flesh that can think and remember, a living example of radical immanence, de-human, post-human and all too human at the same time” (p.161). Braidotti defends that, comparing these two narratives, Deleuze’s analysis of becoming /woman/insect becomes inadequate in its sexually undifferentiated approach and questions whether Deleuze is indeed located in a position which allows him to be close enough to the feminist claim to the empowerment and reevaluation of alternative feminine subjectivity, but distant enough to ignore it. The last word, according to Braidotti, over the radical transformation of women, over the process of becoming-women, becoming-insect, may stem from the practice of sexual difference as a conceptual and political project whereby the nucleus or the core of these transforming practices are thus the met(r)amorphoses. She also concludes that the interlocking of *bios-zoe* and *technos* which lies at the heart of cyber-teratologies of late post-modernity is tantamount to the creation of new figurations of political subjectivities aiming at an uncertain and destabilized imaginary, troubled by great changes and variations.

In the last two chapters, Braidotti casts some light on some aspects of contemporary culture, which have become particularly recurrent and popular. These stem from a fascination for technology and biotechnology, the gothic and the monstrous, which quite often appear, tied up with social representations of symbolic cultural phenomena. At the beginning of chapter four, Braidotti recalls the purposes she had set up at the beginning, reinforcing the figurations which evoke the changes and transformations which are ongoing in the *g. local* context of developed, technological societies. As she argues, the nomadic or rhizomatic mode in critical theory aims to account for processes, not fixed points. As far as difference is concerned, she advocates that it is both a problem and a solution, which can be interpreted according to the language of monstrosity inasmuch as one attempts to find fitting cultural illustrations, which may translate the changes and transformations happening at present time. Thus, one should turn to minor genres, the marginal and the hybrid such as the science fiction, the horror and the cyber punk. Science fiction allows displacements and discontinuities which destabilize one’s vision of the world, steering away from the human epicenter whereby it is possible to establish a continuum among the animal, mineral, vegetal extraterrestrial and technological worlds, pointing to a bio-centered and human egalitarianism. Braidotti defends that, by resisting the undifferentiated sexual position, one values the processes of changes and transformation as ways of actualizing a virtual cultural feminine in a network of interconnections with other forces, entities and actors. This open, multi-layered feminine is defined as met(r)amorphoses, as has been referenced. “The Matrix is neither flesh nor metal, neither destiny, nor teleology: it is motion, in spatial as well as temporal means” (p. 206). In the fifth chapter Braidotti poses a fundamental question, that of cyber-technology. The contemporary cyber-technological imaginary expresses simultaneously two contradictory political tendencies. As a reactive, negative answer, it expresses the fear and anxiety of the majority, embodied in the dominant subject position of the male, white, heterosexual, urbanized, property-owner speaker of a standard language in a historical time where his

certainties are collapsing and crumbling. As an affirmative and empowering gesture, it expresses the political passions of the entire minority inscribed subjects who have opted for the transformative policies and the processes of becoming. Since the XIX century the Western culture has been faced with the threat and promises of meta(l)morphoses, that is to say the generic becoming-machine and presently the process of subject transformation follows the same path. Through met(r)amorphoses or meta(l)morphoses, a monstrous hybrid, and yet beautiful, subject comes into being, one who looks, feels and dreams in an uncommon way. Far from being a catastrophe it opens new forms of life and new forms of cohabitation between humans and Others. Braidotti thus recommends that we adopt a nomadic approach because if we flow we are indeed rooted.

Helena Ferreira, is majored in Organizational Psychology - Specialization in Human Resources, from the Higher Institute of Languages and Administration of Bragança, Post-graduate in Non-Profit Organisations Management from the Porto Business School and Master in Communication Sciences - Specialization in Advertising and Public Relations, from the University of Minho. At the present time, she is a PhD student in Cultural Studies, which is a doctoral program between the University of Aveiro and the University of Minho. She has published several articles and conducted communications, mostly in partnership with others, in communication subject area. She is currently volunteering as a researcher in the Agency of Communication and Education of Citizenship and Gender Equality Project.

E-mail: hcarla@ua.pt

Universidade de Aveiro / Universidade do Minho Instituto de Ciências Sociais,
Campus de Gualtar 4710-057 Braga Portugal

* **Submitted: 16-02-2015**

* **Accepted: 20-04-2015**