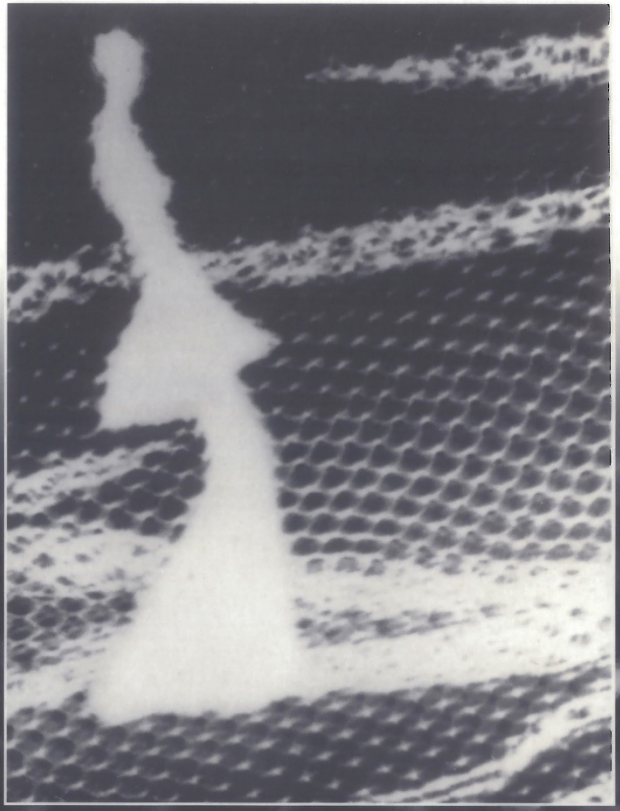
THE PHENOMENAL WOMAN

Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity



CHRISTINE BATTERSBY

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What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
(Shakespeare, *Sonnets* 53)

But what if the 'object' started to speak?
(Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* p. 135)

I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.
(Maya Angelou, chorus from 'Phenomenal Woman', *And Still I Rise,* p. 8)

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This book owes its origins – in an indirect way – to Margaret Whitford. It was she who first pointed out to me the analogies between the position that I argue for in my *Gender and Genius* (1989) and that developed in Luce Irigaray's early writings. Her comments led me to further explore the complexities of Irigaray's philosophy in a series of graduate seminars at the University of Warwick, and these helped me to become clearer about which aspects of Irigaray's philosophy I wish to endorse.

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1
Introduction: Fleshy Metaphysics

PHENOMENAL: *extraordinary, exceptional, prodigious, unnatural, marvellous, amazing; often used hyperbolically in reference to some object or person of extraordinary power, gifts or other quality which excites wonder.*

PHENOMENAL: *in philosophy, that which has the nature of a 'phenomenon' (pl. 'phenomena') and is the object of sense experience; applied to that which only seems to exist but which is a mere illusion of the senses; often opposed to that which is 'real', 'objective' or 'noumenal'.*

In the history of western metaphysics 'woman' is phenomenal in a double sense. She's something wonderful, amazing, astonishing, peculiar. But she's also just a surface deviation; mere 'appearance'; unrepresentative of that distinctive, underlying 'essence' of humanity that philosophers have associated with 'truth'. She falls outside 'essence' – or the defining characteristics of a species or thing – in ways that have been supposed to make it a mistake to look for an essence of female nature or experience.

I write from within a post-Kantian tradition of philosophy, analysing the philosophical concepts of the transcendental ego, 'personhood' and related notions of spatial and temporal self-identity. However, since the subject of woman has always only ever been at the margins of philosophical discourse, I move between two conceptual and experiential registers. On the one hand, there are the language and traditions of philosophy in which the 'real' world has been constituted as the merely

'phenomenal' world. On the other hand, there is also the language of women's singularity and the need to talk of that 'real' or 'phenomenal' female body which has fallen outside the universals of philosophy.

In my current project I am seeking to use the antinomies of the female subject-position to think identity anew. I am not positing an 'other' form of subjectivity which is that of the 'feminine' or 'female' subject. Instead, I am asking what happens if we model personal and individual identity in terms of the female. Rather than treating women as somehow exceptional, I start from the question of what would have to change were we to take seriously the notion that a 'person' could normally, at least always potentially, become two. What would happen if we thought identity in terms that did not make it always spatially and temporally oppositional to other entities? Could we retain a notion of self-identity if we did not privilege that which is self-contained and self-directed?

Immanuel Kant's 'Copernican revolution' sought to rewrite philosophical tradition by placing man – instead of God or the object – at the centre of the reality which we inhabit. My own feminist philosophical turn displaces the apparently gender-neutral Kantian self at the centre of the knowable world. However, instead of dispensing with the self in ways now fashionable in the postmodern tradition, I am attempting to construct a new subject-position that makes *women* typical. In effect, this means dispensing with the (Kantian) notion that the 'I' gives form to reality by imposing a grid of spatio-temporal relationships upon otherwise unformed 'matter'. Focusing on the female subject involves treating humans as non-autonomous, and instead thinking relationships of dependence (childhood/weaning/rearing) through which one attains selfhood. It also involves thinking the process of birthing as neither monstrous nor abnormal. Mothering, parenting and the fact of being born need to become fully integrated into what is entailed in being a human 'person' or 'self'.

In 1994, as I started to write the opening chapters of this book, I sat looking at the sunset over the sea, and chatting with one of the villagers from the obscure Cornish village which I had decided to make my base. He was in his mid-forties, had not been to college, and had instead worked on boats, as well as at a variety of clerical jobs. Now on long-term sick-leave, he was embarked on a programme of distance learning, and this included some Philosophy courses. As I started to talk about my project for a feminist metaphysics, and the need to think through a philosophy that deals seriously with birth, the man became excited and uneasy. He then suddenly offered the following unexpected remark:

> 'It's odd. Philosophers say that it is not really possible to understand and accept the idea of one's own death. However, that is not what I find hard; it's rather to believe that I was born. Indeed, when I try to think of my own birth, my brain goes all red and I feel sick and dizzy. I once tried to tell my mother that I could not accept that I had been born. But she told me I was just being silly.'

Of course, as the man knew well, it is absurd not to accept that one has been born. But this man's remark is also acute, in that it reveals a central failure in our culture. Philosophers have notably failed to address the ontological significance of the fact that selves are born. Furthermore, there is also a more general inability to imaginatively grasp that the self/other relationship needs to be reworked from the perspective of birth – and thus in ways that never abstract from power inequalities, or from issues relating to embodied differences. We carry on idealizing autonomous 'individuals' who have equal rights and duties, and look away from the fact that 'persons' only become such by first moving out of a state of foetal and childhood dependency on others. Just thinking about being born made this (fiercely independent) man's 'brain go all red'. And yet this man's illness made his continued existence as an embodied self intimately dependent on the care of others: doctors, home-helps, social-workers, family, friends, neighbours.

In so far as we focus on these issues, we do it primarily in terms of ethical and political dilemmas. We see the failures in modern western philosophy and in our modes of imagining most clearly in current debates about abortion and about medical technology, for example, or in the current row over the 'identity' of a Europe that is made up out of individual states. However, this book does not deal with the question of identity on such overtly ethical or macro-political levels. Instead, it works more abstractly – and explores an ontology in which 'self' and 'other' intertwine in ways that allow us to think identity alongside radical novelty, power-dependencies, singularity and birth. In so doing, I will offer a critique of the metaphysical pessimism implicit in much poststructuralist and postmodernist feminist theory. But my conclusions are not just relevant for those immersed in the complexities of contemporary feminist discourse.

The response of my friend from Cornwall shows that even though this book starts from a feminist perspective – and asks how we need to rework notions of identity if we are to take the female human as norm – the conclusions that I reach are also relevant to males. Indeed, I would suggest that the model of identity that I put forward is more adequate for men (as well as women) than the classical philosophical understanding of the subject, substance and identity. There are imaginative

and conceptual gaps – places where the 'brain goes red' – even for males who attempt to think the continuity of their lives in apparently more 'commonsensical' terms.

'Common' sense is pretty strange if it leaves this man from Cornwall unable to think his own birth. Although some of the arguments in this book might seem counter to 'common' sense and at odds with some of our most 'intuitive' certainties about the nature of 'subjects' and also of 'objects', the arguments are no more strange than some of the models adopted in recent science. And, indeed, some of the underlying metaphysical schemas of the 'new' physics will be used in chapter 3 in support of the metaphysics of sexual difference argued for in this book. I write about embodied selves that are paradigmatically female; but I would nevertheless hope that the male reader can overcome this barrier (which, after all, a female reader has to negotiate most of the time) and follow the development of the argument. There are important consequences for *him* – as well as for *her* – as I explore the theoretical grounding for a self which is born, and which is gradually shaped as it negotiates and renegotiates otherness, registering the resonances and echoes that the repeated movements produce.

As far as my female readers are concerned, I am only too aware that many of them will be distinctly uneasy with a feminist metaphysics that includes an emphasis on birth. Women have very good reasons to feel uncomfortable with any attempt to link female identity to reproductive capacities. I will need to return to this point later, in order to emphasize that 'sex' (one's identity as a 'female') is no more a brute 'given' than is one's 'gender': the 'femininity' – or 'masculinity' – that a woman's behaviour might reveal. But perhaps it is enough to point out here that the hypothetical link between 'woman' and 'birth' that matters is 'If it is a male human, it cannot give birth', not 'If it is a female human, it can give birth'. I will be suggesting that the dominant metaphysics of the West have been developed from the point of view of an identity that cannot give birth, so that birthing is treated as a deviation of the 'normal' models of identity – not integral to thinking identity itself.

Metaphysics Defined

Many feminist theorists would also object to my starting point on the grounds that any feminist metaphysics involves a contradiction in terms. In subsequent chapters I will argue that some of the most powerful critiques of metaphysics emanating from within feminism are only

effective because these feminists keep Aristotelian parameters for metaphysics in place. In fact, the term 'metaphysics' came from the way that Aristotle's writings were ordered by his followers. Thus, Aristotle's analysis of being (*ousia*) and substance came after or beyond (*meta*) his writings on natural sciences (*physica*). As a consequence, the word came to stand for the branch of study (ontology or the science of existence) that was treated in these writings and that was supposed linked with, but ulterior to, the sciences proper. 'Metaphysics' became synonymous with that which transcends the physical, and with the study of 'being', 'substance', 'time', 'space', 'cause', 'essence' and 'identity'. Furthermore, ontology was regarded as necessarily bound up with the study of a 'primary' and separable substance or 'being' that is fundamental, non-relational and that remains constant through change.

What will be argued in this book is that other approaches to being, substance, time, space, cause, identity, and so on, are possible, and those who refuse to accept this are clinging to an Aristotelian tradition of 'metaphysics' that philosophers before me have also rejected. Thus, with Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century it became possible to distinguish two kinds of metaphysical enterprise. There was, on the one hand, 'speculative' metaphysics that dealt with an 'unknowable' and immaterial substrate of things-as-they-really-are. This 'noumenal' realm is Kant's equivalent of Aristotelian 'being', but any speculation about it is rendered illegitimate – at least as far as knowledge is concerned. For Kant there was, on the other hand, 'descriptive metaphysics', which analyses what it is to 'exist' within the parameters of this space-time world: a world that was for Kant collectively structured via the underlying framework of human understanding, senses, imagination and reason. Descriptive metaphysics was, therefore, implicitly relational – and the 'substance' that was posited in respect of the space-time world reflected the relationality between 'self' and 'not-self'.

This book develops a kind of 'descriptive' metaphysics, and thus operates within a post-Kantian tradition of metaphysics. But it departs radically from Kant in that it seeks to add sexual difference to the Kantian frame by querying the space-time structures and subject–object relationships that Kant viewed as both universal and necessary for any subject that could think itself as a persisting self. In particular, it is argued that considering the question of sexual difference – and taking the embodied female as norm – makes it possible to focus on other possible modes of 'descriptive' metaphysics apart from the one necessary and 'transcendental' structure laid down by Kant as necessary to 'all' human understanding whatsoever. Thus, my own feminist metaphysics rejects those parts of Kant which retain – and rework

– Aristotelian 'substance'. I argue that to think a persisting self it is not necessary to posit a permanent, underlying substrate that persists beneath matter and that remains always the 'same'.

In effect, those who argue against any feminist metaphysics are blocking the imagination of an ontological alternative to those substances that the Aristotelian tradition posits as the bearers of qualities and attributes. In subsequent chapters I will be developing a relational model of identity that can deal with the specificities and paradoxes of the female subject-position. However, since within feminist theory metaphysics is an underdeveloped field, a relational model of identity is more strongly associated with various forms of 'feminine' ethics than with a concern with an ontology that can take the female human as norm. In particular, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) is often positioned as fitting with a model of the self as always in-relation. Given that I have strong objections to Gilligan's 'ethics of care' – and given that I also need to discuss relationships of 'care', community and dependence in discussing the ontological constitution of selves – it is important to insist that a model of identity that works with relationality does not entail an ethics of care. Some further comments on this will be found in the conclusion to this book.

Indeed, this is a book of feminist metaphysics, not a feminist ethics. Although I do not give up on notions of 'female identity', I will argue throughout this book that there is not *one* dominant 'feminine' response to the paradoxes and predicaments of the female subject-position in western modernity. Women's predicaments are infinitely variable – and so are women's experiences. The identities of individual women are scored by a variety of forces and disciplinary structures. Not all of these scorings relate to issues of sexual difference. Race, nation, religion, education, family-background, neighbourhood, class, wealth – all contribute to configuring and patterning the individualized self that persists through time. My analysis does not, therefore, start with the 'inner' experience of feminine modes of consciousness or of 'feminine' subjectivity. It is not another contribution to the ongoing debates about feminist epistemology, 'ways of knowing' or problems about epistemological (or ethical) 'objectivity'. Indeed, Adorno's attack on epistemology considered in chapter 7 is, in part, endorsed.

Instead, I am interested in models of identity for 'the object' – and, in particular, for a body that is capable of generating a new body from within its 'own' flesh and from within the horizons of its 'own' space-time. In other words I treat 'woman' as 'object', in order to find new models of the self/other relationship and new ways of thinking 'identity' – and, in particular, persistence of an embodied self through mutation,

birth and change. The argument of this book will focus on the 'female', rather than on the 'feminine': on 'sexual difference' rather than on 'gender difference', but the analysis of 'essence' offered in chapter 2 of this book allows for individual difference – and, indeed, shifts in meaning in what a term denotes – whilst also emphasizing that for us (in our culture) to be a female human is tied to a body that could birth.

Recognizing natality – the *conceptual* link between the paradigm 'woman' and the body that births – does not imply that all women either can or 'should' give birth. Instead, an emphasis on natality as an abstract category of embodied (female) selves means that we need to rethink identity. The 'self' is not a fixed, permanent or pre-given 'thing' or 'substance' that undergoes metamorphosis, but that nevertheless remains always unaltered through change. Instead, we need to think of identity as emerging out of a play of relationships and force-fields that together constitute the horizons of a (shared) space-time. We need a metaphysics of fluidity and mobile relationships; not a metaphysics of fixity, or even of flexibility. However, that metaphysics must also be able to explain how a subject might be scored by relationality into uniqueness.

There will be appeals to my own specificity and to others' reports of their experiences at stages throughout the analysis. However, for the most part the argument proceeds by raiding the philosophical past for models of mobile identities that work without underlying permanent 'objects', 'substances' or unchanging and universal 'forms'. Although the position I am arguing does not fit with the dominant discourses of classical, modern or postmodern philosophies, it is important also to register that philosophical ages are not homogeneous, and that there always have been a variety of metaphysical traditions. Thus, both before and after Aristotle there were ways of thinking identity that privileged 'becoming', rather than 'being'.

The position that I am adopting does not lack philosophical precursors – and various philosophical voices will gradually be put in dialogue in these pages. Theodor Adorno, Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, are amongst those who play an important role – although if the book has a 'hero' that hero is (perhaps surprisingly) Søren Kierkegaard, since it is the latter who develops furthest the model of a relational self using 'woman' as key. Simone de Beauvoir, Henri Bergson, Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway and Friedrich Nietzsche also play key (though largely mute) parts. I am also aware that other philosophers could have been given a supporting role: amongst them, Denis Diderot (for mobile identities), Alfred North Whitehead (for 'process metaphysics'), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (for embodiment) and Hannah Arendt (for 'natality' and also for her attempt to rework Kant).

The Five Features

These raids on previous theorists are always conducted with the problem of sexual difference to the fore. This involves taking natality seriously, but also four further characteristics of the female subject-position that make the position of the 'female' paradoxical (both excessive and lacking) if the male subject is taken as norm. The first of these additional characteristics relates again to the ontological dependence of the foetus on the mother, and to the fact that (in our culture at least) the woman is socialized as the primary carer for any children. This means that the 'female' subject-position is normalized as linked to a set of relationships in which power-dependencies and inequalities are basic. For the human female, inequalities in power relations cannot simply be treated as atypical, abstracted or put to one side. The idealized equal, individualized and autonomous subjects of Enlightenment thought do not fit the position of a subject who is normatively female, even though much contemporary ethics and metaphysics carries on using models of identity that treat power differences and relationality as philosophically irrelevant. For the (normalized) 'woman', society is not ever – not even ideally – a collection of equals.

The next (third) characteristic of the female subject-position that is relevant here is also linked with the ontological dependence of the foetus on the mother during the process of birth. For the (normalized) 'female' there is no sharp division between 'self' and 'other'. Instead, the 'other' emerges out of the embodied self, but in ways that mean that two selves emerge and one self does not simply dissolve into the other. The consequences of this are extreme in terms of the models of 'self' and 'other' that typify western modernity. This 'self' does not emerge out of the exclusion or abjection of the 'other' (as is too often suggested in poststructuralist philosophy). Instead, it is from intersecting force-fields that 'self' and 'other' emerge.

This 'self' is not a 'thing' – a 'substance' that remains permanent through change – it is more like an 'event' that is 'born' in the space and time of interactive forces. This does not mean that 'selves' no longer exist; nor that there is no way of talking about persistence of the self over time. On the contrary, I will argue that thinking about the female subject-position allows us to retain a notion of self, but construe identity in terms of living forces and birth, not as a 'state' of matter that is dead or as a characteristic of a 'soul' or a 'mind' that remains fixed and constant, no matter which of its qualities or attributes might change. This self is scored by relationality, and attains its uniqueness in 'experience' as potentiality is patterned through directional movements over

time. For this self the 'other' is within, as well as without. Rhythmic repetitions provide the 'labour' that allows identity to emerge from conflictual multiplicities. In chapter 9 I will turn to thinking identity in a world of sound and music, in order to make it easier to grasp how identity can establish itself via a pattern of relations, and an intertwining with otherness.

Models of the self/other relationship based on sound will be remarkably helpful. However, in our culture, at least, female identities are fleshy identities, and this is the fourth characteristic of the female subject-position that I need to mention here. In this regard I need to talk briefly about the English language, which is unlike the other main European languages in that it is has two terms – 'female' and 'feminine' – with related, but different, meanings. 'Femininity' denotes a set of psychic or behavioural dispositions that are more commonly associated with women than men; but there is no contradiction in talking about a 'feminine male'. By contrast, a 'female male' involves a category-mistake – or, more precisely, a medical or biological 'problem' that it is currently deemed necessary to 'normalize' either hormonally or surgically. To be 'female' involves a reference to embodiment, in a way that to be 'feminine' does not.

Foucault (1980) has argued that it is only in the nineteenth century that western Europe insisted on 'normalizing' the bodies of hermaphrodites to fix identities to a sexual binary so as to rule out sexual indeterminacy. However, what matters to the argument of this book is not whether there might not be other (better) modes of dealing with sexually ambiguous bodies, but that the metaphysics developed is one that tries to think what happens if we develop a metaphysics based on the subject-position that in English is linked with the 'female', not with that linked to the 'feminine'. I will return to these issues in chapter 2. But this distinction is important if it is to be grasped how my position departs from more standard accounts of the 'feminine' in postmodern and poststructuralist theory. What matters to the argument of this book is that I am concerned with embodied subjects, not with 'souls', 'spirits' or an immaterial 'I' that is only lodged in the flesh.

This is particularly important, since not only is the subject-position of the 'female' more integrally linked with embodiment than that of the 'feminine', it is also more tied to fleshiness than that of the 'male'. As my historical analysis of the category of 'genius' in my *Gender and Genius* (1989) showed, males were allowed transcendence of their biological subject-position via the tasks of spiritual production. The paradigm genius was both 'feminine' and male. By contrast, women were deemed 'unsexed' by their 'genius'. They were seen as tied to a body

that was designed for biologically reproductive – not culturally productive – work. In so far as there were women of genius they were not simply masculine women, they were 'made male'. Indeed, it became a kind of cliché to say: 'there are no women of genius; the women of genius are men' (Lombroso, 1863, p. 138).

The 'female' subject-position is linked to fleshy continuity, rather than to an autonomous and individualized 'soul' or 'mind' that merely inhabits the flesh. However, the dominant model of the human in western modernity is disembodied: a 'spirit', 'soul', 'consciousness' or '*cogito*' whose 'personhood' is bound up with rationality and soul, rather than with flesh. As Susan Bordo puts it,

> Not all historical conceptions view the body as equally 'inescapable'. . . . But what remains the constant element throughout historical variation is the *construction* of body as something apart from true self (whether conceived as soul, mind, will, creativity, freedom . . .) and as undermining the best efforts of that self. That which is not-body is the highest, the best, the noblest, the closest to God; that which is body is the albatross, the heavy drag on self-realization. (1995, pp. 4–5, second ellipses Bordo's own)

Susan Bordo is careful in her phrasing. She does not claim that there have been no changes in the history of western attitudes towards the body. Indeed, she recognizes that for the ancient Greeks body and soul were regarded as inseparable, except in death. She asserts only that over this history the body has been devalued (in a variety of ways), and that throughout women have been linked with the 'unbearable weight' of the body:

> 'weighed down,' in Beauvoir's words, 'by everything peculiar to it'. In contrast, man casts himself as the 'inevitable, like a pure idea, the One, the All, the Absolute Spirit.' (1995, p. 5, quoting Beauvoir, 1949)

Even Bordo's careful phrasing does not quite capture the complexities of our philosophical past, however. Whilst not denying that 'the body' is generally a negative term in the history of western philosophy, there are nevertheless writers in that tradition (Nietzsche, Deleuze, Foucault, Sloterdijk, for example) who valorize the body. The question then becomes are (mature) female bodies also valorized by these thinkers? Or do the very real possibilities opened up by their writings still continue to take as norm a (male) body that is incapable of birthing new selves from within the embodied self? Sloterdijk's sexy – but also sexually neuter (male) – bodies are subject to critique in chapter 7 below. We will also explore Deleuze's use of 'woman' in chapter 9. Here

I will argue that 'becoming woman' need not be conceptualized as no more than a 'flight' from all 'molar identities' – as Deleuze, and so many post-Deleuzian feminists and postmodernists, now suggest.

And that brings me to the fifth and final characteristic of the female subject-position that I need to mention here. This also derives from this historical link between the female and an embodied, fleshy self, and relates to the conflictual expectations bound up with the female subject-position. The 'experience' of the female human in our culture has direct links with the anomalous, the monstrous, the inconsistent and the paradoxical. Whatever the (very great) differences between women, all female (not 'feminine') subjects in western culture have to negotiate the paradoxicality of a mode of selfhood that is positioned somewhere between freedom and rationality, on the one hand, and passive and thing-like embodiment, on the other. This fifth feature is that woman is 'monstrous', but in a way that allows us to think identity otherwise.

'Here There Be Monsters'

I will be using this monstrosity – this 'phenomenality' – productively. Thus, I will argue that 'woman' is not simply all that has to be excluded in order for the (masculinized) self to establish its (fragile) autonomy and identity – as the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and so many post-Lacanian feminists and deconstructionists, would insist. Instead, I will be developing what might be termed a 'metaphysics of immanence' (in Kantian language), or also a 'metaphysics of becoming'. In particular, I will be interested in a metaphysics of morphological transformations and identities that emerge through repeated patternings, intersecting force-fields, and flow. In chapter 6 this is related to Irigaray's account of the 'red blood' that metaphorically links the mother to the daughter. There I develop further Irigaray's notion of the 'other of the Other', which in Lacanian and Derridean frameworks cannot possibly exist. I also offer a critique of Judith Butler's position on Irigaray's 'monstrous' rethinking of identity, since Butler remains closer to Lacan and Derrida than to Irigaray herself. The quarrel with Butler is taken further in chapter 7, where her deployment of Nietzschean weapons for epistemological ends is contrasted with that of Adorno in the context of developing an 'anti-metaphysical metaphysics'. However, I am also indebted to Butler's 'queer' philosophy, which directs attention to power inequalities between women that have been underplayed by Irigaray herself.

Butler opposes any kind of metaphysics of identity and uses temporality to disrupt the categories of 'woman' and 'women' by parodic interventions. By contrast, I will explore what happens to the notion of 'subjects' and 'objects' if we start from a consideration of the paradoxes that characterize the human female. In chapter 3 I will appropriate the concept of 'dissipative systems' from contemporary physics, and employ this model of structuring to help us think the female subject-position – as well as related concepts, such as 'patriarchy' or 'post-colonial' or 'diasporic' identities. Then in subsequent chapters, via an engagement with the ontological positions of Kierkegaard, I will move on to explain how habit, repetition and the temporary equilibrium of force-fields can be used to explain how stability can emerge in a world of 'events' and 'becoming', and how we can think 'essence' without positing underlying 'substances' that remain unaltered through change.

I am not concerned to argue the only metaphysics possible is this 'metaphysics of becoming'. Instead, my concern is to show that it is not necessary to think in terms of fixed 'essences', permanent 'substances' or unchanging 'being' to secure stable patternings. Persistence of a 'subject' or 'object' over time can also emerge from within intersecting force-fields, dependence and flow. The subject that I will posit is neither completely free nor autonomous, but is also not simply passive. It is both marked – 'scored' – into specificity by its relationships with 'otherness', and yet is itself also capable of agency and of resisting modes of domination. This self is not only shaped by 'the other', it is also self-shaping as potentiality is transformed into actuality via echo and the feedback-loops of memory.

In developing the notion of such a self, this book will, of necessity, open a dialogue with those postmodern feminists who have regarded any account of 'feminist metaphysics' with deep suspicion – or, worse still, with hostility. I will be claiming that the accounts of 'metaphysics', 'modernity' and 'postmodernity' offered in many postmodern feminist texts are generally too simplistic – even where it is allowed (with Jean-François Lyotard) that postmodernity does not come after modernity, but is implicit within modernity. (See Lyotard, 1982.) Here, however, it is necessary to offer a caution. As is well known, 'postmodernism' is a notoriously slippery term and has developed in markedly different – indeed conflicting – ways across a variety of disciplines (and countries). (See Bertens, 1995.) What I have termed 'feminist postmodernism' is not typical of all forms of postmodernism. Furthermore, many of the most influential theorists on 'postmodern' feminisms would (or did) explicitly distance themselves from such a labelling: including Judith