

On Spirals

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PartSuspended is an international artist collective currently engaged in a project called *Spirals* (2013-ongoing) - a poetic journey that crosses geographical borders and unites European female voices in an exchange of languages, cultures, personal narratives and modes of expression.¹ In this collection of essays, four members of the collective examine the spiral form as applied to women's experience.

To support the proposal that women artists have successfully rehabilitated the use of metaphor, Barbara Bridger cites one of the earliest uses of the spiral form at Newgrange in Ireland, Louise Bourgeois' more recent engagement with spiral forms and PartSuspended's recent response to the notion of circularity.



Georgia Kalogeropoulou explores rage as a point of ignition of spiralling action in time and considers the myth of the Medusa as a symbol of female rage. Using psychoanalysis and philosophy she analyses how desire connects with rage and explores possibilities of non-violent revolutionary action.

Hari Marini follows a spiralling route folding inward, from the wide space of cities to streets leading home. Marini discusses how city-space is produced and gendered, and how considering space as unfinished and under constant change opens up possibilities. She also looks at the ways that streets are contested places and the importance of acknowledging female walkers. In conclusion, she discusses the meaning of home for PartSuspended's collective work in the *Spirals* project during Covid-19 lockdowns.

Noèlia Díaz-Vicedo explores the role of the female poet in the construction of spirals through the intersection between body and language into motion through reading or performing. By using the theoretical understanding of the 'nomadic subject' developed by Rosi Braidotti, she also considers the extent to which this ongoing movement expands to destabilize the gap between our experiences, and the spaces we have available to find alternative forms of signification.

Note

1. <https://www.partsuspended.com/productions/current/spirals/> (accessed 27 November 2021).

Spiral as metaphor

Barbara Bridger

Any discussion of metaphor in relation to women's writing inevitably leads a reader or writer into contested territory.

The arguments are clearly set out by writers grouped under the heading *écriture féminine*, a term first used by Hélène Cixous in her 1975 essay 'Le Rire de la Méduse'¹. These writers saw the structures of Western language as instruments of patriarchal expression and wanted to transform them. In order to do this, they employed a number of diverse strategies, all designed to disrupt the existing phallogocentric systems.

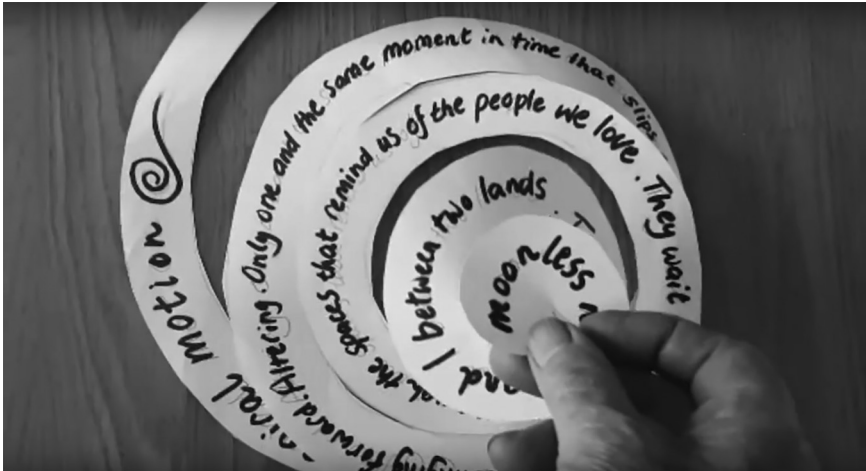
écriture féminine used puns and homonyms, played with words and their sounds and created new etymological roots to challenge established meanings, the concept of representation, the 'unified phallic subject' (Rabine, 1987: 28) and the barrier between the signified and the signifier. Cixous describes the process:

In me the song which, the moment it's uttered, gains instant access to language: a flux immediately text. No break, soundsense, songsound, bloodsong, everything's always already written, all the meanings are cast' (Pas de coupure, sonsens, chantson, sangson, tout et toujours déjà écrit, tous les sons sont jetés.)²

Cixous' writing uses parataxis³, moves between the past and the present, the internal and the external, the real and the fantastic, to achieve a hybrid, decentred form and, in an

attempt to create a 'uniquely maternal language' that 'speaks before the word' (Illa, 1980: 61–66), she, Irigaray, Kristeva and others incorporated the bodily signifiers of feminine erotic drives into their texts and exploited the metaphorical power of a mythic mother.

In this last strategy, metaphor, which was previously considered to be 'the opposite of a rational and scientific approach', was rehabilitated in women's writing, where it provided a link to pre-thought, to Kristeva's 'semiotic' and to 'deeper essences or ontological questions' (Defroment in Wilcox et al., 1990: 116–117).



According to Françoise Defroment, metaphors achieve this by giving flesh to thought. Connected to more primitive forms of language, they anchor thought into matter, giving it body and thinkable substance. This avoids the separation of abstraction and keeps thinking integrated into the material experience of life. When employed in this way, the use of metaphor also provides an example of those strategies often referred to in *écriture féminine* as 'writing from the body'.

Defroment supports her arguments by drawing attention to the way Cixous uses the birth act to bring together the processes of procreation and writing. This conjunction integrates nature with culture and recognises the gesture of writing as a physical act. It is a way of re-addressing metaphor and charging it with literal meaning.

When Cixous cites the tides of the body, the ebb and flow of language, the swell of inspiration and the undercurrent of the unconscious, she is claiming these features as constituent elements in an extended, metaphorical, feminist approach.

....it proceeds [...] through Cixous' toying with the music of words and through her use of metaphors – images prior to language – both revealing the body of language and producing a body language. (Defroment in Wilcox et al., 1990: 121–122)

It's a method that refers back to metaphors suggested many years earlier by Virginia Woolf. She drew contrast between the hard nugget of a fixed, inflexible, masculine truth 'cut off from its content and in a position to be looked at' and the 'small fish', a modest but living, moving metaphor for women's thought.⁴

Feminist writers were determined to write themselves instead of being written, but in order to do so they had to challenge the hierarchies of power and in order to do that, they needed knowledge of the theoretical concepts that underpin it.

Defroment claims that the extended, modified, feminist approach to metaphor 'not only catches the thinking process itself and gives it poetic scope, but also implies a different handling of theory.' She draws our attention to Virginia Woolf's⁵ assertion that fiction is likely to contain more truth than fact and claims that, 'Woolf's writing of theory is remarkable for it breathes in and out, it is pure movement. It ebbs and flows with the same rhythm as her fictions' (Defroment in Wilcox et al., 1990: 118).

A fluid boundary between theory and fiction, as well as being a resistance to formality, can also be interpreted as a challenge to academia. This is an argument put forward by Anita Burrows when she describes the 'porous' aspects of her own approach,

I find myself more and more attracted to the porous, the statement that permits interpretation (penetration?) rather than positing an absolute. Not vagueness –

I want each component to be clear – but a whole that doesn't pretend to be ultimate, academic. (Barrows cited in Koolish, 1985: 7–8)⁶

All the elements and arguments outlined above have influenced PartSuspended's engagement with metaphor as represented in the form of the spiral. Our investigations into this form are based on an assumption that the spiral metaphor does have the ability to capture certain approaches to thought and give them poetic scope.

To support our position, I will now look at some examples of the use of the spiral that confirm it as an 'image prior to language'⁷ with strong links to women's bodies. I start by going back to a very early instance of the spiral in a sacred megalithic monument in Ireland.

Newgrange is a passage tomb sited in the Boyne Valley in Ireland dating back to circa 3,200BC. It consists of a large mound constructed of stone and earth, roughly eighty metres in diameter and surrounded by almost a hundred kerb stones. One of these, the entrance stone, is highly carved and features a triple spiral or triskele.⁸

There is evidence that Newgrange was used to a limited extent as a tomb, but it has also been speculated that the monument may have been a very early calendrical or astronomical device. Four and a half minutes after sunrise on Midwinter's Day the sun shines through the roof of Newgrange and falls on the floor of its main chamber. Calculations based on the movement of the earth have further revealed that five thousand years ago, when the monument was first constructed, the light would have entered at exactly sunrise, taking the form of a narrow beam bisecting the chamber and falling on a triskele carved on the rear wall.

It is thought that the positioning of the floor of Newgrange may have been deliberate and intended to track the path of the sun at the solstice, making it one of the oldest astronomically orientated structures still in existence.

Newgrange's sensitivity to the movement and position of the sun demonstrates the close relationship between Neolithic people and the cyclical elements of nature. It provides strong evidence of a very early link between the spiral form and patterns of

growth and evolution. In addition, the name Newgrange in early Irish is Brú na Bóinne. Brú in Irish means 'womb', so as well as functioning as a tomb, the monument is associated with the possibility of reproduction, birth and rebirth.

This link between underground chambers and the womb is also evident in other parts of the world. The Hypogeum at Hal Saflieni, Paola, Malta is an extensive Neolithic complex made up of a spiral of interconnecting chambers, cut from rock and set on three levels. The monument is widely interpreted as a womb⁹ and both of these examples seem to confirm the spiral as a form capable of fulfilling Cixous' desire for metaphors that can connect to the body.

Further exploration of the relationship between women's bodies and underground spaces can be found in Luce Irigaray's reading of Plato's allegory of the Cave. In her 1974 text 'Speculum de L'Autre Femme' (Speculum of the Other Woman), Irigaray suggests that when Plato describes the cave as a long shaft, an 'underground chamber like a cave with a long entrance to the daylight' (Plato 514a), he is describing a womb.

Irigaray also observes that the prisoners in the cave are always referred to as men. To subvert this and to confirm the cave's association with the womb, she renames it as 'l'antre', 'la matrice', 'l'hystera', 'la terre' (the den, the matrix, the uterus, the ground/earth).

She also critiques Plato's description of the prisoners' transition from the dark, watery, womb-cave to a sunlit exterior and questions the assumption that this 'birth' is a move from fiction to fact, a transition that devalues the former and requires the emergent beings to forget their relationship with the past as represented by the mother.

As well as resisting formality and academia, Irigaray is presenting a feminist critique of patriarchal discourse. In Plato's allegory, this discourse is represented by the sun and it's worth noting that at Newgrange the midwinter sun (often gendered masculine in early cultures) illuminates the triskele (often gendered female).

Moving into the twentieth century, I now discuss a more contemporary use of the spiral form by an artist who is clear about its symbolic and metaphorical significance.

I refer to the work of Louise Bourgeois. In her artistic practice, Bourgeois frequently revisits aspects of her childhood and one form that constantly recurs in these explorations of her early life is the spiral. Speaking of its personal significance Bourgeois says,

The spiral is important to me. It is a twist As a child, after washing tapestries in the river, I would turn and twist and ring them... later I would dream of my father's mistress. I would do it in my dreams by ringing her neck. The spiral - I love the spiral - represents control and freedom. (Gardner, 1994: 68)

Bourgeois uses the spiral repeatedly in her representations of women. In 1952 she constructed one of her first spiral women from twisted, piled slats of painted wood threaded onto a stainless steel rod.

Later, the wooden rectangles of this early piece give way to more rounded forms. *Spiral Woman* (1984) is a hanging sculpture. The figure is bound by a thick coil of bronze, with only her limbs still visible. Trapped by the spiral, she hangs suspended and spinning in a constant state of vulnerability. This is a spiral that controls (movement?)

chaos? anxiety?), but there is also a sense of jeopardy. What happens if the figure falls, or the coil unravels? In Bourgeois' own words, 'There are lots of spirals.... but they are not automatic. The spiral is a vacuum.... It represents something.... the void, the anxiety void, the void of anxiety.' (Bourgeois, 2018: 64).

The spiral form is present again in Bourgeois' *A l'infini* (2008–2009) where it turns and holds falling female bodies, disembodied limbs and the act of birth. The interwoven lines have been likened to the DNA double helix and, like the spirals at Newgrange and Hal Saflieni, this work can be seen as a reference to the cycle of life and death.

Bourgeois also uses the spiral to make more direct references to motherhood. It is present in *Nature Study* (1986) a free-standing bronze sculpture, where a hand emerges from a spiral knot of tubular forms cradling a female figure that lies with head pointing towards the finger tips and legs towards the spiral. The female figure has no arms and her hair twists and weaves back into the knot,

The slender fingers suggest that the hand is that of a woman, while the gentle way in which the smaller undeveloped figure is cradled conveys a sense of maternal nurture. Indeed the way in which the hand appears to emerge from inside the coil, as though presenting the figure to the outside world, is evocative of birth, or perhaps re-birth, given the post-pubescent body of the figure. In this respect the work may represent the cyclical nature of motherhood and childbirth: the mother, represented by the hand, produces a daughter who will in turn become a mother herself. The title, *Nature Study*, also lends itself to this idea of a natural order or cycle of things, while the tight, spiral form, coiling from its source in the figure's hair, is suggestive of the knotted and intertwined nature of familial relationships.¹⁰

Bourgeois charts her artistic and personal relationship with spiral forms in the catalogue for her exhibition *Spiral*,. She writes that for her the spiral is,

.....an attempt at controlling the chaos. It has two directions. Where do you place yourself, at the periphery or at vortex? Beginning at the outside is the fear of losing control; the winding in is a tightening, a retreating, a compacting to the point of disappearance. Beginning at the centre is affirmation, the move outward is a representation of giving up control; of trust, positive energy, of life itself.

Spirals – which way to turn – represent the fragility in an open space. Fear makes the world go round. (Bourgeois, 2018: 6)

She also associates the form with her rage...

starts with a jab and goes
round and round larger and
larger faster and faster
like the children who swirl
faster and faster

- (Bourgeois, 2018: 14)

.... and uses the spiral to describe her relationship with objects and spaces

The room turns
 with its little objects around me like
 planets around the central sun –
 before I was conscious of the walls and
 I was constantly leaning against
 them and feeling their strength
 I feel a centrifugal force.
 [...]

control of the space
 grip on
 be sure of it because you need it
 the centre of gravity to change from
 the container toward the contained.
 the butterfly that flutters around the
 lamp and all of a sudden the lamp
 goes off, what is happening to it
 (Bourgeois, 2018: 34)

When Bourgeois writes, ‘The room turns with its little objects around me like planets around the central sun’ she’s alluding to the astronomical significance of the movement of the spiral, an aspect of the form that refers back to Newgrange’s operation as an early calendrical device.

The parallels between the Neolithic use of the spiral and Bourgeois’ more recent artistic explorations of the spiral, confirm it as a significant and enduring form. Its repeated incidence in natural forms, in biology, physics and astronomy and its historic connection to cycles of birth and death, give the spiral the ability to act as a metaphor that can connect language to the body, can anchor it to matter and keep it integrated into our material experience of everyday life. It’s a form that incorporates notions of growth and expansion and yet it embraces order and containment. For these reasons, the spiral is profoundly sympathetic to women and to their experience of life.

The *Spirals* project has been a rich and rewarding investigation that PartSuspended continues to explore and I end my discussion by including PartSuspended’s poetic interpretation of the spiral’s astronomical associations, as contributed to *Something Other’s* issue ‘On Circularity’ in 2020.¹¹

Members of PartSuspended have travelled Europe exchanging languages, cultures, personal narratives and modes of expression in a range of multimedia performances/spirals acts.

Our contribution to ‘On Circularity’ takes five still images from videos of these performances and adds grammatical notes on the etymological origins of the word ‘spiral’; found texts exploring the presence of the spiral form in our galaxy; new texts responding to the image and an extract from the original performed poem.

Here is one section from our contribution: *Paths of Her* by Hari Marini¹².



3. *Spirals: Paths of Her* by PartSuspended (Broadstairs, 2018)

spiral – from Ancient Greek σπειρα (*speira*, “wreath, coil, twist”)
 a spiral is a shape which winds round and round,
 with each curve above or outside the previous one.

In the centre of a spiral galaxy is a concentration of stars known as the bulge.

This is made up of older dimmer stars and is thought to contain a black hole with a surrounding faint halo of stars configured in globular clusters that orbit the galactic core.

A circular mask. I feel trapped and claustrophobic just looking at you.
 Can you breathe?
 I wonder what is stuffed inside the netting, trapped against your face.
 The arc of clear skin above just makes it worse.
 Is the face behind the mask scratched or cut? How can you bear it?

Towards the black hole. Without hesitation. Without will power either. The stellar halo surrounding the black hole attracts your attention. You enter the magnetic field. There is no return. No escape. No one can escape. Swirling down the thick galactic centre. Then there is light.

Can't you see? Swallow your tongue. You are suffocating - it is an act of love. You are rotating the earth, you alone.

*and when she can't breathe
 from the rhythm of people's steps
 sucking in their little moments
 she escapes to the repetitive sound of the waves*

*that remind of the big moments now forgotten
she stretches her fingers flicking the dust away
from anything that goes unnoticed*

(‘Path 8’, Hari Marini)

Notes

1. *L’arc* No. 61, pp.39-45
2. Paris: *Editions des femmes*, (1976: 84) (Translation:Defroment).
3. A very useful discussion of parataxis, including a definition, in *Parataxis and Narrative*, Bob Perelman, *An Anthology of New Poetics* (ed) Beach C.(1998).
4. See also Carol Gilligan’s “web” image for women’s thinking. Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
5. *A Room of One’s Own*, p6.
6. Anita Barrows, *Form and Fragment*.
7. *ibid*
8. A motif consisting of three interlocked spirals. From the Greek τρισκέλιον or τρισκελής.
9. ‘...These were a people who searched with a sense of purpose and dedication, with a knowledge and awareness in tune with the totality of darkness and light. Theirs was a language of the amalgamation of science and art [...] The cyclic time factor of the life-death-rebirth pattern is reflected in these people’s obsession with the mystic spiral pattern’ (England, 1980: 43). ‘Symbolically the sanctuary represents a labyrinthine womb, and it is most unlikely that the early Maltese were not conscious of this symbolism’ (Ferguson, 1985: 156).
10. Allan Madden, The University of Edinburgh, November 2014, Tate catalogue
11. PartSuspended responded to an invitation from Maddy Costa, Diana Damian Martin and Mary Paterson to contribute to an issue of Something Other ‘On Circularity’ in 2020 <https://somethingother.blog/2020/10/16/spirals-circles-galaxies/> hosted by Live Art Development Agency in May 2020. The audio version of this piece can be found here: https://www.partsuspended.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/spirals-circles-galaxies_final.mp3
12. Hari Marini *28 διαδρομές της / 28 paths of her*, September 2019, Translated by Theo Kominis, Foreword by Barbara Bridger, Translation editing by Andreas Tsanakas, AKAKIA Publications

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Desire and rage: A female spiral

Georgia Kalogeropoulou

Hannah Arendt writes in *The Human Condition*:

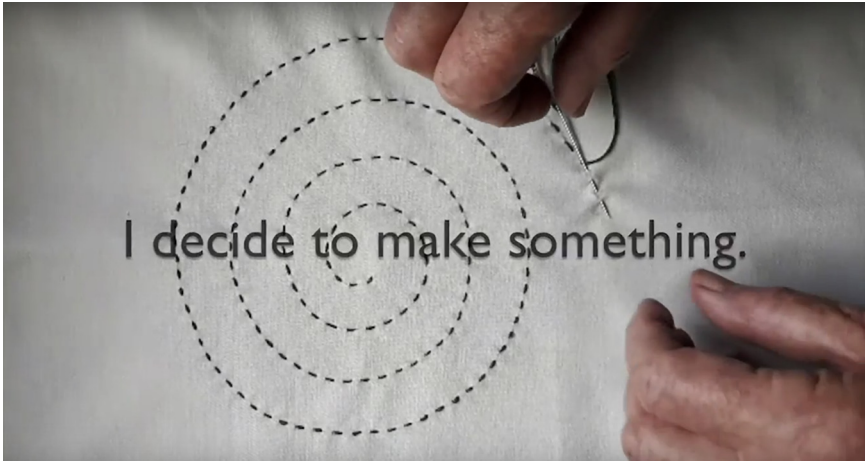
The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognisable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life. This individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement which so to speak, cuts through the circular movement of biological life. This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order.¹

The two shapes of the circle and the line have functioned throughout the whole of human history as powerful metaphors of time. One can say that the shape of the spiral is a synthesis of the circle and the line. And indeed, from an abstract point of view, we might be tempted to see an ongoing spiral movement in human history where linearity coexists with circularity.

Many thinkers have tried to describe how human time unfurls in a movement incorporating preservation of the past and change towards the future, the Hegelian dialectics being probably the most prominent example. Nietzsche's eternal recurrence also comes to mind, but one does not have to be a philosopher to sense the ubiquity of the spiral. The circularity of time is obvious to all human beings, it is a part of the universal experience of time, as is the linearity of time, the dimension that allows us to imagine a progress that extends from the past into the future via the present.

When we begin to tell our story, we position ourselves inside historical time. The object as well as the scale of our narration can vary infinitely, and we may choose to refer to huge chunks of time, or focus on small details, speak of events that take place locally in a small spatiotemporal extension, or encompass large horizons of meaning and experience. The larger our horizon, the more we may have an illusion of objectivity. However, a question that needs to be answered every time a story begins is how can

writing account for the singularity of human life, and how it can do justice to the ephemeral side of experience? Subjective narratives of particular, embodied subjects have an important role to play in the understanding of time and history; they are a necessary complement to philosophy and abstract thought and they can give us insight into the reality of life and action, especially if our aim is not only to understand the world but also to transform it in a meaningful way towards greater equality and greater freedom for all.



This is why an understanding of the evolution of ideas cannot be complete without an understanding of human emotions. We may think that feelings, as opposed to concepts, are elusive, volatile, personal, singular, but if we truly want to give depth and consistency to our analysis we are obliged to acknowledge their power in the shaping of reality and the fact that they persistently remain outside the sphere of language should not discourage us.

Women's writing has unapologetically acknowledged and revealed the richness and the power of emotion and it has the potential of reflection emitted from a place of radical otherness in our patriarchal societies. The feeling I want to analyse in the present paper is rage, as it is to be found at the root of any action with the potential to subvert.

Rage is not the same as violence, and it should not be reduced to its psychological manifestations, or be simply identified with destruction; it should rather be understood as a dimension of the political inside the psyche, and analysed in conjunction with desire, inasmuch as the latter always carries a revolutionary charge that menaces the social order. Rage is not a simple feeling. We can say it has a Darwinian component, it can be in its very core a manifestation of the fight for boundaries or identity, but it is not the same as blind fury. Rage is an existential component of the human psyche non reducible to mere aggressiveness. It is connected with self-righteousness, with the desire to be free, with the revolutionary dimension of the human psyche.

Female rage in particular has been demonized, pathologized or at best mystified by the dominant patriarchal discourses that structure the power balance in our modern societies. There is a kind of primal terror that accompanies representations of female rage, and assigns it a place close to madness, neutralising its political potential. Rage is subsequently internalised as fear and used as a means of submission to undermine the

voices of female subjects and confine them to the position of a particular, as opposed to a masculine/universal subject.

If we look closer at the nature of the terror that accompanies representations of female rage, we can clearly see how it reveals itself as a terror caused by female desire itself. A great example of this can be found in the Freudian analysis of the myth of Medusa, a powerful symbol of female rage. Freud's analysis, precisely because it is emitted from a phallogocentric point of view, can show us how female desire is mystified by the male gaze.

Freud writes,

We have not often attempted to interpret individual mythological themes, but an interpretation suggests itself easily in the case of the horrifying decapitated head of Medusa. To decapitate = to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something.²

This 'something', according to Freudian analysis, is the female genitals and the spectator, identified with the universal subject, is a boy presented with the sight of his mother's vagina.

The analysis continues,

The hair upon Medusa's head is frequently represented in works of art in the form of snakes, and these once again are derived from the castration complex. It is a remarkable fact that, however frightening they may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror. This is a confirmation of the technical rule according to which a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration. The sight of Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone. Observe that we have here once again the same origin from the castration complex and the same transformation of affect! For becoming stiff means an erection. Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact.³

The fact that the father of psychoanalysis needs to see the snakes of Medusa's hair as a proliferation of penises is quite amusing and revealing of the one-sidedness of the mainstream psychoanalytic gaze, but let's read a bit further,

If Medusa's head takes the place of a representation of the female genitals, or rather if it isolates their horrifying effects from their pleasure-giving ones, it may be recalled that displaying the genitals is familiar in other connections as an apotropaic act. What arouses horror in oneself will produce the same effect upon the enemy against whom one is seeking to defend oneself. We read in Rabelais of how the Devil took to flight when the woman showed him her vulva. The erect male organ also has an apotropaic effect, but thanks to another mechanism. To display the penis (or any of its surrogates) is to say: 'I am not afraid of you. I defy you. I have a penis.' Here, then, is another way of intimidating the Evil Spirit.⁴

The understanding of female sexuality in terms of a primordial lack is not a psychoanalytic invention. It is rather a cultural commonplace that reflects the patriarchal power structure of western civilisation. Freudian psychoanalysis has given a pseudo-scientific

alibi to the perpetuation of the terror caused by female desire by calling it 'a dark continent' - a metaphor that perpetuates the mystification.

Let's read now Helene Cixous' take on the Medusa myth:

The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. That would be enough to set half the world laughing, except that it's still going on. For the phallogocentric sublation is with us, and it's militant, regenerating the old patterns, anchored in the dogma of castration. They haven't changed a thing: they've theorized their desire for reality! Let the priests tremble, we're going to show them our sexts! Too bad for them if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men, or that the mother doesn't have one. But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst, in truth, that women aren't castrated, that they have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing.⁵

Gender wars

The sexual difference may appear too rigid in both Freud's and Cixous' analyses.

A rigid perception of gender can be said to be dated in the light of queer theory and the current forces that traverse the field of gender identity; indeed, not all men have penises, and not all women have vaginas. Also there is more in this world than men and women.

When thinking about time and identity, it is of the utmost importance that we transcend a substantialist point of view and embrace the playful ground of repetition. We need to invent an ontology that does not look for a core in being, but can apprehend the multitude for what it is. As Deleuze expresses it, the disguises and the variations, the masks or the costumes do not come 'on top' of things, on the contrary they are the genetic elements interior to repetition itself, they are its integral components⁶.

This road can lead the analysis of the unconscious towards a real theatre.

If we accept the hypothesis that there is not a first term that is then repeated, we can see how the masks cover nothing, they only cover other masks. Repetition is this axis that constructs itself through the disguises. It forms from one mask to the other, with the help of the variations, inside the variations and repetition is the form of time.

However this does not mean that we can pretend that the issue is over, or that the master signifiers of masculinity and femininity should just be abolished from theory. This would not be reflection, it would just be wishful thinking, as the power structures that sustain the meanings of sexual difference are very real and strong, and this war is far from over. As Butler expresses it,

...the subversion of paternally sanctioned culture cannot come from another version of culture, but only from within the repressed interior of culture itself, from the heterogeneity of drives that constitutes culture's concealed foundation⁷.

Psychoanalysis may have hosted male fantasies for a long time, but it remains a powerful and self-reflexive tool. It has shown how the nature of societal prohibitions interweaves with and reveals the modalities of desire; it can help us understand and access the revolutionary potential of this limit between body and psyche that is the unconscious, or rather, the drive.

Always in a state of turbulence, anti-social by definition, the drive is the matrix of desire. We can imagine the drive not as a smooth spiral but as a powerful turbulence, and this is the kind of imagery we need to develop: a spiral that has a fragmented dimension, that has some irregularity; a pattern that repeats itself but also allows for radical change and unpredictability. The drive is a limit, and, as Deleuze puts it, 'the limit doesn't point to what holds the thing under a law, to what finishes it or separates it, but it means that from which it unfurls, it unfurls all its power.'⁸

How can words give us a sense of the spiral? In exploring the infinite movement of vanishing, the moment where difference vanishes, which is also the moment where she appears. As Deleuze expresses it,

the notion of limit changes completely its significance: limit doesn't refer to the boundaries of the finite representation, it refers to the matrix where the finite determination doesn't stop to disappear and be born again, unfolds and unfolds inside the organic representation.⁹

We can think of rage as a point that ignites a process.

Now the fact that it is a point doesn't mean that it can't have history, can't be analysed. It is a starting point, a point of ignition, an origin.

This is where the spiral starts: origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming.

In the words of Walter Benjamin,

Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its process it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual sight. On the one hand it needs to be recognised as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete. There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history. Origin is not, therefore, discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their history and their subsequent development¹⁰.

The question therefore becomes, can we apprehend rage as something imperfect and incomplete - as all affects are from the point of view of Reason, appearing and disappearing in the margins of words - that could enhance a process of restoration of the meaning of revolution itself?

Let us consider what Guattari imagines as a molecular revolution. We have to go back to the molecular order of the desire, beyond the group and the individual, in order to disarticulate the massive institutional structures. We have to give to the marginal positions of desire the possibility to disengage from their neurotic impasses¹¹. Psychoanalysis can be a liberating tool in this process, as it can shed some light into the paradox of desiring one's own oppression.

The way to understanding this amalgam of pain and pleasure that points to the origin of the desire can be found in what psychoanalysts call, the Death drive. The Death drive can be manifest as blind fury: it is among other things what motivates and unifies a nation in war. It can manifest itself as a tendency to destructiveness without limit. But it can also manifest itself as a tendency towards self-annihilation, a tendency to return from the vibrancy of life to the peace of the inorganic matter. It is clear that the destructive component and the self-annihilating one are but two faces of the same thing. Rage is loud, catatonia is silent, but they both point to the same vanishing point, to a unique dark matrix. If we are to understand these vicissitudes of the negative on a political level, we need to reflect on the possibilities of transmutation of rage, as well as on the phenomena of identification with the sadist and masochism.

The Death drive is connected with the Pleasure principle in complex ways. Let's insist on the dimension of internalisation: Freud, in the economic problem of masochism, talks about how

moral masochism becomes a classical piece of evidence for the existence of fusion of instinct. Its danger lies in the fact that it originates from the death instinct and corresponds to the part of that instinct which has escaped being turned outwards as an instinct of destruction. But since, on the other hand, it has the significance of an erotic component, even the subject's destruction of himself cannot take place without libidinal satisfaction.¹²

We can think of rage as a point that ignites a process. The question is, can it continue in a meaningful way? It is an irrational feeling, it is a negative feeling, but it is close to our survival instinct; it can be felt as the affirmation of one's identity and celebrated as such and, most importantly, it can ignite a process of liberation.

How does it feel to be inside the spiral?

When reflecting on our experience one central component that we need to account for is the tension of time. And, to put it simply, the tension is the present. Whoever is alive has to tolerate a certain amount of tension, of pain, of meaning.

A beautiful image of temporal tension is found in Heraclitus' fragment 48: 'The name of the bow is life, but its work is death.' (*τόξω ὄνομα μὲν βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος*)

This is the mortality of the linear dimension of the human life. Epic poets call the bow (*toxon*) by a second name, (*bios*) which by homonymie can be confused with the name of life¹³. The bow is a powerful image of time, and exemplifies the primal quality of the temporal reality: tension.

Tension is a universal aspect of individual time. It speaks of how the human being extends themselves inside their personal spiral. Bearing in mind our previous analysis we can sense how rage is a subjective feeling of the tension of time, and understand how tension can propel us to action. But what about reflexivity? However manic and fulfilling this action may feel, it need not be blind. In trying to

acknowledge the depth as well as the morality of our praxis, we need to keep asking how to connect the social with the psychological. How to keep our action meaningful and political?

Psychoanalysis is one way to do it, as it can offer our consciousness a space where it is possible to synthesise a meaningful narrative of our experience at an existential level. Art is another way. It can give voice and meaning to the ineffable by surpassing the intellectual defensive level of the concept, and it can let us deepen and experience our emotions while sharing them socially, in order to not only reflect but also live our collective present in a meaningful way.

Hélène Cixous uses the metaphor of the bow to convey a feeling of revolution:

It is time to liberate the New Woman from the Old by coming to know her-by loving her for getting by, for getting beyond the Old without delay, by going out ahead of what the New Woman will be, as an arrow quits the bow with a movement that gathers and separates the vibrations musically, in order to be more than her self⁴.

And also:

Because the "economy" of her drives is prodigious, she cannot fail, in seizing the occasion to speak, to transform directly and indirectly all systems of exchange based on masculine thrift. Her libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think. Because she arrives, vibrant, over and again, we are at the beginning of a new history, or rather of a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another.¹⁵

Psychoanalysis speaks of a primal trauma, of the fact that the meaning of our life eludes us. We are being traversed by forces that we do not understand. The pattern of our time is being woven around our personal trauma and this is not a smooth spiral pattern. It is fragmented, it is unpredictable, and contains a core that is beyond our intellectual grasp, but we need not to be afraid.

Fear of change is precisely what art should be dissipating, if it is to have any social impact. This is why it is urgent today more than ever to work on producing new images, ways and possibilities of orchestrating rage in a politically significant way. Female voices need to be empowered and synthesised into a revolutionary signal that is emitted from a place of radical otherness. In order to do that, we need to recognise that rage and desire unfurl from the same matrix and work on installing a new relationship between them.

As a musician, I have often felt grateful for sound and even more, grateful for loudness, grateful for noise. It is of course a different process to make music and to reflect on your practice using words, but the feeling I want to convey is this absolute elation of being suspended on the sea of possibilities, this constant openness to whatever may come next, this liberating dissolution of the ego amongst the sound waves that can transport you safely to the next moment in time, whatever that may be. In this process, one needs to trust the affect in an absolute way and music can indeed include everything, be it joy, sorrow, nostalgia, happiness, rage, anger, melancholy,

awkwardness, peace, or any other micro variation of affect that can be perceived or experienced in the body and the mind. I have always found rage to be one of the most thrilling dimensions of my musical journeys, and one that I've often shared with my fellow artists. I've seen more than once how our voices can be united in a way that effectively destabilises the social order while letting us sense the sacred balance of an ever-receding boundary of meaning.

Rage can indeed become the point of ignition of our story, it can function as the grain of madness that makes a story begin. Before letting ourselves be carried away inside the spiral, we may experience a brief moment of consciousness in sensing the tension between the circle and the line, and we may allow ourselves to hold and express this tension for as long as it is possible; this is how we may feel in a deep and non-conceptual way how the Death drive has not only darkness, but it also carries the possibility of freedom.¹⁶

Rage can ignite socially significant action, and it is not doomed to degenerate into violence.

Nonviolence does not imply the absence of force or of aggression. It is, as it were, an ethical stylization of embodiment, replete with gestures and moves of non-action, ways of becoming an obstacle, of using the solidity of the body and its proprioceptive object field to block or derail a further exercise of violence¹⁷ writes Judith Butler.

We can begin to explore these possibilities by engaging in a spiralling type of action, not a linear one. An action that would not attempt to cut through time vertically, as in a mechanistic time conception, but would rather acknowledge the indeterminacy of causation and rely on an element of faith or ritual in its process.

Notes

1. Arendt, 1958: 19
2. Freud, 1922: 3943
3. Freud, o.p.
4. Freud, o.p.
5. Cixous, 1976: 884-885
6. Deleuze, 1968: 27 "Les déguisements et les variantes, les masques ou les travestis, ne viennent pas "par dessus", mais sont au contraire les éléments génétiques internes de la répétition même, ses parties intégrantes et constituantes".
7. Butler, 1990: 117
8. Deleuze, o.p.: 55 : "la limite, peras, ne désigne plus ce qui maintient la chose sous une loi, ni ce qui la termine ou la sépare, mais au contraire ce à partir de quoi elle se déploie et déploie toute sa puissance."
9. Deleuze, o.p.: 62: "Hegel et Leibniz attachent "de l'importance au mouvement infini de l'évanouissement comme tel, c'est-à-dire au moment où la différence s'évanouit qui est aussi celui où elle se produit. "C'est la notion même de limite qui change complètement de signification: elle ne désigne plus les bornes de la représentation finie, mais au contraire la matrice où la détermination finie ne cesse pas de disparaître et de naître, de s'envelopper et de se déployer dans la représentation organique."
10. Benjamin, 1988: 45-46

11. Guattari, 2012: 459. The original text reads: "ce n'est qu'à condition de remonter jusqu'à l'ordre moléculaire des machines désirantes, c'est-à-dire bien en deçà du groupe et de l'individu (du côté de ce que Lacan a appelé l'objet "a") que l'on parviendra à désarticuler les structures institutionnelles massifiées, sérialisées et à donner aux positions marginales de désir la possibilité de se dégager des impasses névrotiques. La pente de l'individuation du désir va toujours dans le sens de la paranoïa et du particularisme. Le problème est donc de trouver des voies collectives pour sortir de la tyrannie des systèmes basés sur l'identification et l'individuation".
12. Freud, p.4083
13. Bollack and Wismann, p.169
14. Cixous, p.878
15. Cixous, p.878
16. Green, 1992
17. Butler, 2020: 22

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A woman's spiral in cityscape

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The spiral is the path that resolves conflict, allowing for balanced movement and natural unfolding; thus, harmonious transformation can proceed.

(The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism 718)

Spirals (2013-ongoing) is a multidisciplinary project by the artist collective PartSuspended¹ that embraces a variety of art forms (poetry, video, sound, walking, performance interventions, live art, collage, workshops), and has been filmed and performed in a variety of settings and cities in Europe, engaging female artists and poets. Our intention is to unite women's voices beyond geographical borders and generate a space for creative dialogue and artistic interventions from a female perspective. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, its engagement with different European cities, its diverse ways of processing the material generated and its various ways of sharing the outcome with an audience, the different aspects of the project can be analysed and discussed in diverse ways. However, in this contribution to the Open Forum *On Spirals* I focus on the gendered ways in which space is conceptualised and practised, and I discuss how creative interventions and performances, such as *Spirals*, invite us to re-think and re-imagine our engagement with urban spaces in different European contexts.

Built space is gendered and connected with power and embedded ideologies, however, opportunities for new possibilities of thought and action can be discovered through poetry, writing and performative interventions. How can we view space as a tool for creative action? How may poetic interventions such as *Spirals* disclose something from the female experience of contemporary city-spaces? In what way can female practices and feminist theoretical approaches to urban space make us re-think the way that space is produced?

The article follows a spiralling route folding inward, from the wide space of cities to streets to home. First, I discuss how city-space is produced and gendered, and how considering space as unfinished and under constant change opens up possibilities. I move to a brief reflection on our *Spirals* project. Then, I look at the ways that streets are contested places and the importance of acknowledging the experience of female walkers. In conclusion, I briefly discuss the meaning of home for our collective creative work in the *Spirals* project during Covid-19 lockdowns.





City

Be it acknowledged

The man-made environments which surround us reinforce conventional patriarchal definitions of women's role in society and spatially imprint those sexist messages on our daughter and sons.

[...]

If the future vision for the built and planned environment is to be one in which the totality of women's needs is environmentally supported, then each woman must become her own architect, that is, she must become aware of her ability to exercise environmental judgement and make decisions about the nature of the spaces in which she lives and works.

[...]

Be it affirmed

The built environment is largely the creation of white, masculine subjectivity. It is neither value-free nor exclusively human. Feminism implies that we fully recognize this environmental inadequacy and proceed to think and act out of that recognition.

One of the most important tasks of the women's movement is to make visible the full meaning of our experiences and to reinterpret and restructure the built environment in those terms.

(Weisman, 1981: 6–8)

Cities can be seen as spaces in which diversity, tolerance, progressiveness and inventiveness are welcomed. They carry within them associations with democracy and people's empowerment; as Loretta Lees observes: '[t]he city has long been celebrated as an emancipatory space/place in the social imaginary of the West' (Lees, 2004: 5). However, city-spaces are neither produced nor used through gender neutral practices; they can be spaces of control, alienation, inequalities, rigidity, discrimination and fear. In 1981, in her manifesto, 'Women's Environmental Rights: A Manifesto' (see the epigram above), the feminist architect Leslie Kanes Weisman proclaims that '[t]he built environment is largely the creation of white, masculine subjectivity. It is neither value-free nor exclusively human' (Weisman, 1981: 8). Weisman's view takes into account gender and racial inequalities emerging from the process of producing built spaces, and urges each woman to 'become her own architect, that is, she must become aware of her ability to exercise environmental judgement and make decisions about the nature of the spaces in which she lives and works' (Weisman: 8).

The way that gender roles function within urban spaces becomes a significant parameter of the way that space is understood, conceptualised and (re)produced. Judith Butler has argued that gender is socially and culturally constructed and constantly performed (see Butler, 1990); therefore, given that space is a cultural and social product, it affects the way that gender is constructed. As the feminist geographer Doreen Massey puts it, spaces and places 'are gendered in a myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time. And this gendering of space and place both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live' (Massey, 1994: 186).

The dominant narrative of pioneer male architects in western societies and the practice of underrepresenting female spatial professionals within the spatial discourse have been challenged by feminist professionals and academics, who have exemplified, on one hand, the ways in which gender affects the organisation, management, design and use of built space, and on the other hand, how ideologies governing space affect gender (see Colomina, 1992; Rendell et al., 2000). Lynne Walker in 'Women and Architecture' examining women's role within the male-dominated architectural profession from the emergence of Women's Movement in the 19th century to the early 20th century in Britain, demonstrates 'the role and

position of women who, as architects and designers of buildings, were active agents in challenging patriarchy' (Walker, 2000: 245). Walker explains how women's participation in architectural practices have become entangled with patriarchal conventions governing political, social and economic structures, and a significant parameter is that 'architecture physically defines the public and private spheres' (Walker, 2000: 254). Thus, 'to allow women access to the design of architecture [...] threatens patriarchal control of spatial definitions, which are essential to maintain the social, economic and cultural *status quo*' (Walker, 2000: 254, italics in the original).

A way of challenging demarcations and definitions of built space and the prevailing narratives of architecture is to think of space as always unfinished; to detach space from concepts of stasis and closure, and embrace notions of heterogeneity and liveliness. Massey's proposition to consider space as 'always being made and always therefore, in a sense, unfinished' (Massey, 2005: 107) offers us a way of imagining and acting in space differently. It offers a great potential for action; it re-introduces the space not as a container of predetermined actions and relations, but as a sphere that includes 'a heterogeneity of practices and *processes*' (Massey, 2005: 107, italics in the original).

Feminist performance that relates to space, bodies, practices, and processes acts as a way of challenging gendered narratives of spaces and patriarchal canons of architecture. It calls us to rethink space as a sphere of possibility for female bodies, contemplations, needs and actions. As Kim Solga suggests: 'feminist performance can operate as a lens through which we may understand how architecture shapes its corporeal objects and how they might be reshaped through the interactive work of bodies in performance' (Solga, 2008: 5). Bodies are the common ground between performance and architecture. Looking through the 'cracks' of architecture and the possibilities that lie between the gaps of ordered architectural formations, Solga asserts that 'architecture is always already about bodies. Not body, but *bodies*: not a body in isolation, but bodies in messy, intimate, historical relation with one another' (Solga, 2008: 3, italics in the original).

At the same time, she specifies performance's fundamental link to bodies: '[t]he question of *bodies*, plural, lies at the heart of performance theory and practice' and she continues by affirming the power of performance in the process of revealing the multiplicity of bodies that lie beneath architecture: 'performance thus holds the power to break the skin of architecture's figural fantasy and to excavate the bodies that lie buried beneath' (Solga, 2008: 5 italics in the original). Solga's analysis through a figure that she calls 'guerrilla actress/architect' (Solga, 2008: 9) emphasises the ability of the female performing body to reshape living spaces, as she explains:

The guerilla actress/architect disrupts the stifling structures that support our containment and separation from our others with a performance that privileges instead an architecture of intracorporeally, an assemblage made from the space between bodies that honours the differences moving in the air between them' (Solga, 2008: 10).

Solga's discussion about bodies, performance and architecture can help us extend Weisman's view and rethink what kind of bodies create built environments, and what bodies might be excluded from this process. Aging bodies, Black women's bodies, disabled bodies, bodies adorned with religious symbols, the bodies of transgender and gender non-conforming people often lie hidden, voiceless, buried beneath built

spaces.² Solga also helps us to think about how performance can make such bodies visible, whilst revealing that space is produced by diverse bodies and practices.

Spirals

The spaces employed for improvising, performing and filming *Spirals* were located in cities where the female poets of the project lived (temporarily or permanently) at the period of filming. The spaces used were often ruined buildings, backyards, wastelands, the derelict state of which has given them an ‘unfinished’ quality. Can Batlló in Barcelona, a former industrial complex textile factory; the ruins of the old Coventry Cathedral (UK); a ruined open-air theatre in Strefi located in the centre of Athens (Greece); the back yard of the Kulturni Centar in Belgrade (Serbia); the seashore alongside the load-bearing wall in Broadstairs (UK). Walking, making, performing, filming in these spaces has allowed the collective to experience the porosity of the cities, whilst it made participants and audiences aware of the possibilities of experiencing city-spaces through performative interventions.

The spiralling walk adopted in the project acts as a sign of becoming, transforming and awareness; a reminder of ephemerality, fluidity and multiplicity. By walking and creating spirals, the space is transformed into a personal space, even temporarily, inhabited by female bodies who challenge the rigidity of space and its order. It contested concepts entwined with straight and the right angle.³ Through transient actions, poetry and imagination female bodies leave their imprint making their passage visible.

A range of female artists have contributed to the project throughout the years; artists from a different cultural and ethnic origins, different age groups, queer artists and disabled artists. They have created their own writing, their own routes, their own ways of navigating built spaces, their own ways of experiencing the city-spaces. They became ‘guerrilla actresses/architects’ by making spiralling paths and walking along them responding to issues emerging from the symbol of spirals such memory, migration, love, belonging. They ‘became their own architects’ by transforming spaces within cities through poetic texts and gestures. The performers’ gesture as well the female poets’ voice have created a poetic version of pathways within the cityscapes. Pathways that are transient and personal.

Streets

The very word street has a rough, dirty magic to it, summoning up the low, the common, the erotic, the dangerous, the revolutionary.

(Solnit, 2001: 176)

The interests and priorities of city planning in the formation and regulation of the streets often restrict and regulate walkers’ movement. Concepts and practices of urban planning predominately support the organisation of a city that prioritises spatial order; a city that seeks to build boundaries that clearly demarcate the private and the public, the rich and the poor, the racialised and non-racialised, the citizen and non-citizen or migrant; and a city that promotes a commodified exchange, rather than a social or even a playful exchange. Deprived of the unexpected and also of the improvisatory qualities of

movement,⁴ streets become merely functional elements, or means of controlling movement. They can become places of exclusion and fear.

However, streets can also be spaces that offer an intrinsically valuable experience; places of wandering and exploration; places for sharing, for resistance, for celebration of public territory, visibility, protest, subversive actions, marches and gatherings. Places that call for 'the low, the common, the erotic, the dangerous, the revolutionary' (Solnit, 2001: 176), as Rebecca Solnit puts it (see epigram above). Millions of women worldwide have taken to the streets in the last decade to fight for their rights. In January 2017 women in the UK, USA, Australia and elsewhere protested against the offensive rhetoric of Donald Trump. In October 2017, women in the USA and the UK were mobilised after revelations about Harvey Weinstein (the expansion of the #MeToo movement across borders). Whilst, during 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, millions of people took the streets all over Europe, the UK, the USA and elsewhere to protest against police brutality and institutional and systemic racism and to insist on the assertion that #BlackLivesMatter. An assertion initially made by African-American women in 2013.⁵ The mobilisation of women worldwide confirms the continuing injustice and discrimination and the need for further feminist actions. As Sarah Gorman, Geraldine Harris and Jen Harvie's assert: '[f]eminism remains persistently necessary because what also endures are inequalities which are gendered, but also related to race, age, class, geopolitical situation, and so much more' (Gorman et al., 2018: 283).

Walking is a way of experiencing streets and public space; a way of knowing, protesting, discovering, experiencing and (re)claiming the cityscape. The freedom of movement and access to public space has often been 'limited for women by their fear of violence and harassment', given that 'women are the primary targets of sexualized violence' as Solnit points out (Solnit: 240). However, translational movements such as Slut Walks have called for 'protesting sexual violence and celebrating sexual empowerment' (Reger, 2015: 85). Walking appropriates space. Female walks can be an act of resisting temporal and spatial practices that promote privatisation and regulation of public space, and which often contribute to maintaining gender norms.

Performance walks suggest a way of experiencing the city's streets, of listening to their hidden stories along the route. An early kind of performance walk was employed by Situationists International (SI), who sought, through their playful interventions and manifestos to resist the new urbanism and a society in which consumption and alienation were evident. The political and social dimensions were evident in the SI radical practices, which aimed to transform the urban space and 'to reinstate lived experience as the true map of the city' (Hussey, 2002: 218); to discover and define the meaning of the city's labyrinth; to reveal 'the collision between poetry and its opposite' (Hussey, 2002: 219). However, here it is important to point out that these practices and texts were mainly produced by male writers, drifters, thinkers.

A leading practice that members of SI employed in order to contest the conventional geographies of city-spaces and the city's function was the *dérive*. The *dérive*, which in literal terms means 'drifting', was a way to experience the city differently. Through the course of a *dérive* the walker was aware of the psychic impact of the structural elements of the city on the undertaken journey. The *dérive* is a successor to *flânerie*, the

practice of the *flâneur*, a figure – predominantly male – that wanders the streets of Paris. The *flâneur* was introduced in Charles Baudelaire’s writing in the 19th century and developed by Walter Benjamin’s writing – and specifically in his renowned and unfinished study of modern Paris *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin, 1999). Baudelaire’s *flâneur* observes the emerging consumerism as *he* (as it is mostly male) strolls through the city, and *he* is exposed to the strangeness and unfamiliarity of the modern city. The discourse on *flâneur* and the practice of *dérive* has habitually ignored female walkers. As Lauren Elkin points out: ‘[o]ur most ready-to-hand sources for what the streetscape looked like in the nineteenth century are male, and they see the city in their own eyes’ (Elkin, 2016: 9). The masculine voices represented a male dominated urban landscape where women did not share the privilege of drifting.

There might be arguments supporting that historically female drifting in the city was less common, because of the social conditions – women had been often bound up with domestic life, or the cityscape was less accessible to women for safety reasons (see Elkin, 2016; Solnit, 2001). However, in her book *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, Elkin argues that the *flâneuse* (female walker) existed and has been an important figure in urban streets. Her analysis contests prevailing ideas – mainly narrated by masculine voices – about walking in cities. Elkin offers a great account of the way that women artists and writers wander in the cityscape. Elkin’s work, among others, demonstrates that female wanderers should be acknowledged, and their walking practices should be a significant part of the discourse. Given the lack of freedom that women still experience in streetscapes and the attempt to disregard female walkers, the discussion about female walking practices remains crucial. As Elkin claims: ‘[t]he *flâneuse* is still fighting to be seen, even now, when, as we’d like to think, she more or less has the run of the city’ (Elkin, 2016: 18).

Home

Home is where the heart is, where you put your heavy little pieces of stuff. There’s no place like home.

(Bloomer, 2007: 294)

In this final section of the article, I would like to bring us to an end of this spiralling walk and return home. Home is a personal space, a space of privacy, safety and recovery; a space that allow us to take a pause from activities of the outside world; to re-connect with ourselves and needs; it is the base from which our everyday itineraries start. ‘The primary meaning of home is nurturing shelter. It is the one place in which we can openly and comfortable admit our frailty and our bodily needs’ (Tuan, 1975: 154), as Yi-Fu Tuan observes.

However, home is also a place where stereotypes and gender norms are reinforced; a place where the patriarchal mechanisms have been operated through design, architectural choices, representational material and use (see Colomina, 1992). It is a place where unpaid domestic labour, sex-roles stereotypes, and violence have been perpetuating. Especially, in the current global Covid-19 situation, women and children are ‘more than ever exposed to domestic violence and abuse’ (Zarkov, 2020: 215), as Dubravka

Zarkov observes. The increased domestic violence is alarming, whilst women, children and people in abusive relationships have often been left without support:

Women have been impacted by lockdowns and stay at home orders. In the UK, phone calls to domestic abuse helplines have jumped 700%; in Spain, domestic abuse reports went up 18% in the first two weeks of COVID-19 lockdown; with similar patterns seen in Italy, France, China, Mexico, and the United States [...] Women and others in abusive relationships are forced to spend time with their abusers, unable to take refuge in community spaces. (Honey-Roses et al., 2020: 14)

Within this rather dystopic landscape, we, the core members of the PartSuspended collective, found ourselves isolated in our homes during the latest phase of the *Spirals* project. Although, the first experiments of the project started in rehearsal spaces and city-spaces in 2013, since March 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the team had to work from home and whilst restricted by Covid-19 regulations to geographies of their neighbourhoods. Our homes and neighbourhoods became the centre of our creative process from where we attempted to understand and contest the new reality.

We held weekly online meetings as a way not only to develop the project, but also as a way of supporting one another, sharing our worries, anxieties, fear, anger, as well as joy and hope, and also celebrating new creative ideas and sharing the joy of being together. We found ourselves between the 'virtual' and the 'real' world. We are still in the process of untangling what might be at stake in this suspension between the two worlds. Definitely, the inability to find ourselves in 'real' places, meet and work in person have affected the work processes and had left us without the embodied knowledge of city-spaces where we intended to work. However, at least one important thing that this situation confirmed is the value to work collaboratively to resist fear and to negotiate forced isolation.

For members of the collective, home became a zone of protection and disclosure; an office space, a rehearsal space, a space of dreaming, a space of containment, an island in the middle of the city's silent streets. Often, a place where technology has taken over; a place where isolation felt stronger after our virtual meetings. A place where work had to be accomplished in between the housekeeping work and daily routines.

It is worth noting here that during quarantine periods, we were unable to secure financial support to develop the next phase of our project. Our artist collective collaborated with Tuna Erdem and Seda Ergul, founders of Queer Art Projects,⁶ and previously worked with Alessandra Cianetti, founder of performingborders,⁷ on an Arts Council England (ACE) application. This was submitted at the beginning of February 2020. Our application went through the first stage of funding and was progressing towards the next and final stage when ACE suspended all pending applications.⁸ Hope turned to frustration. Physical distance and lack of financial support not only jeopardised the progress of our work on *Spirals*, but also raised questions about the tactics that institutional structures have in place to support artistic activities in times of crisis.

However, we agreed to continue working together on the project and self-support our next steps, as we all felt that in these dark times feminist work is needed more than ever. madeleine Kennedy-Macfoy addresses this effectively:

We have always needed deeply feminist work in all of its forms – academic, activist, creative – that is emancipatory, political and rooted in the differentiated realities of people of all genders and none. This need persists, and fulfilling it is critical as the mammoth tasks of building a ‘new normal’ of justice and freedom gets underway.

The impact of living in times of uncertainty on our lives was even evident in our dreams of the night. The video-work *Spirals: Turning Points*,⁹ created during the first lockdown, included the compilation of texts, images, videos, music that we have collectively recorded in our ‘diary of quarantine dreams’. The world of dreams became the place where pilgrimages happened, where the dead were honoured, where touching was possible, where hope could rise. I would like to conclude this article with a collage from our collective diary:

...It's late afternoon. We walked around looking for somewhere to eat | We were on top of a mountain near the sea | We combine food that we have and eat all together | I feel vulnerable like my little angel | Touching her | She had lovely hands | I decide to make something. I'm not sure what to make. It's not real | Stitching patches of skin on my leg. I was bleeding a bit but I wasn't in pain. A necessary transformation | I was hoping to find some inspiration there. Share 'what do you see?' | Don't stop now is time to sing for the dead. We were trusting her to lead us through this pain. | I pick up my phone it falls apart. I try to put the two halves of the phone back together | The dispossessed are on the road. While towers and doors are killing. And only the woman reads | Then everyone realised that the birthday girl is missing. Somehow I've lost the key...

Spirals: A Diary of Quarantine Dreams by PartSuspended (April 2020)¹⁰

Notes

1. For further information about PartSuspended's *Spirals* project, images, video-poems please visit: <<https://www.partsuspended.com/productions/current/spirals/>> (accessed 27 November 2021).
2. I would like to thank madeleine Kennedy-Macfoy for her invaluable feedback on this paper, and also for pointing me in the direction of thinking about bodies and their engagement with cityscapes.
3. I've discussed the way that spiralling lines created within the project have challenged concepts entwined with straight lines and the right angle of modernist architecture in the chapter: 'The Curve is Ruinous: Architecture and the Performative Intervention *Spirals*' in *Dramatic Architectures: Theatre and Performing Arts in Motion*. Eds. Jorge Palinhos, Josefina González Cubero, Luísa Pinto, Porto, CEEA (forthcoming, 2022), pp. 215-230.
4. Edensor considers 'movement as a species of performance' (Edensor, 2000: 121) and he argues that because of the reinforced meanings and practices that appeared in the organisation of the city, movement becomes inevitably constrained, thus 'most performances are "regulated" improvisations' (Edensor, 2000: 124).
5. Black Lives Matter <<https://blacklivesmatter.com/>> (accessed 27 November 2021).
6. Queer Art Projects <https://www.queerartprojects.co.uk/> (accessed 27 November 2021).
7. The ACE suspended all applications to redirect funds to form part of their emergency funding package in response to Covid-19. Covid-19 Update, 'Our open funding programmes' Arts Council England <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid-19/covid-19-more-information#section-1> (accessed 27 November 2021).

8. The platform performingborders hosted a Guest Post, 'Spirals (2013-ongoing) by Hari Marini and PartSuspended collective' in October 2019 <https://performingborders.live/interviews/guest-post-spirals-by-hari-marini-partsuspended/> (accessed 27 November 2021).
9. The video-work *Spirals: Turning Points* can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/Vcp4Dt4_e_Y> (accessed 27 November 2021).
10. Barbara Bridger, Noèlia Díaz-Vicedo, Tuna Erdem, Seda Ergul, Georgia Kalogeropoulou, Hari Marini, Nisha Ramayya.

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The Female Poet Creates Spirals: A Question of Nomadism?

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*Could it be in those circumstances
could it be for a moment in that moment
believing that experience could precede
believing somehow not defined against?*

Barbara Bridger

The question I address in this paper refers to the following: can the woman poet who creates be considered a nomad? What are the epistemological, consequently political, implications of such a statement? In light of these questions, this article explores the project 'Spirals' developed by the group PartSuspended. It focuses upon constructions of spirals at the intersection of body and language, through writing, reading and performing. Taking the theoretical understanding of the concept 'nomadic subject' developed by philosopher Rosi Braidotti, it considers the extent to which the ongoing movement of the spiral contributes to, expands and destabilizes the gap between the particular embodied experiences and the existing symbolic spaces. It also accounts for the availability of alternative forms of signification for the female subject in the current dynamic world. Following Braidotti: 'nomadic thought amounts to a politically invested cartography of the present condition of mobility in a globalised world' (2011: 4).

The notion of the female self as a fragmented subject is the central point that sustains my understanding of the consideration of the female poet as a 'nomadic subject'. When the female poet writes, how does she do it? How can she do it? The kernels of her existence as a woman who writes become a constant motion, a restless movement from two spaces: body and language. The linguistic aspect contains an essential part of the question on nomadism based on the understanding of 'difference'. Not only from the feminist point of view but also from the need to rethink the cultural European identities based on a multiplicity and diversity of voices. This polyphony also transgresses into another form of writing, which was long obviated from the female subject: academic writing. The female subject in Europe was neither traditionally expected in academic research nor in artistic practice. As French philosopher Luce Irigaray

(1985) has already explored, there are always two subjectivities inside of her: the woman and the writer. She digs the land of poetry with words; she excavates tunnels, constructs bridges between her position as a writer and her position as a woman. If her position is given since birth as a woman identified and self-identifying as woman and she appropriates language, how does she expand the dimension of culture? Is this a straight line? How does she move, then? She moves in circles, and consequently, she creates spirals.



The circularity of the spiral connects with the basic engagement that foregrounds the concept of 'nomadic subject', which is the process of becoming. Rosi Braidotti first published on the subject of 'nomadic subject' in 1996, later expanded and revised in a new edition published in 2011. Her main philosophical concern lies in attempting to bridge the gap between the particular experiences of the subject in life and the way in which this subject is represented. Basing her theoretical exploration on her own biographical events as a polyglot and a migrant, Braidotti attempts to destabilise the unitary monolithic aspect of the subject conceptualised as male from a European and feminist perspective. Her interdisciplinary approach along with a creative perspective to theoretical writing provides to our project of spirals with the necessary theoretical connection on the vicissitudes of the becoming of the female poet.

Writing as an act of return

The only thing I know is that I walk...I make chunks of time on foot. Small steps, fast, sweated. Steps one after the other. Dubious quality. With the right heel broken.

(Eirini Margariti Spirals: Flamingo, Athens 2018)

The project 'Spirals', developed by the group PartSuspended led by Dr Hari Marini, started in 2013 and is still in progress. It is a multidisciplinary project that aims to use creation and creativity as a form of research. The group's website provides full details of the project:

Spirals is a poetic journey that crosses geographical borders and unites European female voices in an exchange of languages, cultures, personal narratives and modes of expression. Through the symbol of the spiral, the project explores thresholds, migration, path, nature, home and sense of belonging; the spiral acts as a sign of becoming, transforming and awareness. Poems written by contemporary female poets, recorded material, music and movement are part of a series of performances, photography and video-work. Women create and walk on spirals in a variety of places, such as London, Broadstairs, Coventry, Barcelona, Athens and Belgrade. Traces of care, joy, pain, friendship, womanhood, decay, imaginings, betrayal, frustration, time and love are left behind.

Folding and Unfolding.

Spiralling and waxing. Spiralling and waning.

Spiralling and resolving. Spiralling and transforming.

The image of the spiral can be found easily and repeatedly in nature and also becomes an essential part of certain mythological cultures such as the Celtic, which left numerous geographic and architectural forms. Thus, the triskelion, the Celtic image of Ireland, consists of three spirals intertwined in a central point that it is also shaped as a circle. Whether as part of the mythological chain that comprise the symbols of a specific culture or as part of the geographical landscape embedded in nature, PartSuspended reflects on the shape it creates and the movement the spiral implies in their project. Both – cultural symbols and nature - can be seen as a creative mimesis of reproducing the form of the spiral.

The image of the circle has already been used by theorists of sexual difference, particularly by Hélène Cixous in her seminal text 'The laugh of Medusa' (1976), to determine the ways in which women have been moving throughout time and space before taking on the agency of language. As she noted: 'they have wandered around in circles, confined to the narrow room in which they've been given a deadly brainwashing' (Cixous, 1976: 877). Even though this circle that Cixous mentions in her text does seem to reflect a sense of imprisonment, a movement with no way out, in fact, it reveals a specific form of action that challenges patriarchal perspectives on action. In this sense, writing for female poet is always an act of return: 'now women return from afar, from always: from "without", from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond "culture" from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget, condemning it to "eternal rest" (Cixous, 1976: 877).

Creativity as praxis of thought

The amount of you would be quite proportional to
the needs of the amount of all my potentials.

If I were to deal with amount at all,

as term.

Because I don't trust in measures at all.

Because I believe that the space and I
are still one
and the same.

(Ana Rodic 'Spirals: Autoportret', Belgrade 2019)

We began thinking about the project 'Spirals' as a more creative form of researching academic figurations of agency, epistemological action and transgression from a feminist perspective. Artists who participate and collaborate in PartSuspended are also related in one way or another to academia and/or research. In this sense, we have experienced writing as a polarised form of action. Constrained by the phallogentric system of thought where academic writing is immersed, we seem to have fallen into some kind of intellectual inertia that academic language and its environment contain, consequently failing to offer an alternative space for symbolic renegotiation and the possibilities to move beyond pre-existing parameters of action. The space available is limited, we felt constrained, and to some extent betrayed, by a system that we were paradoxically supporting ourselves through our academic work. In this sense, we envisioned the project 'spirals' as a form of thinking creatively. Not only were we determined to create through words, images or embodied movements, but we were also engaged in thinking about the possibilities that such creativity would offer to us in epistemological enquiry. Barbara Bridger, Georgia Kalegeropoulou, Hari Marini and I are not only artists and creators, but also academics. We have been trained to think exclusively in academic terms and to some extent this form of understanding was not enough for us. The action of thinking and writing about universal concepts such as space, time, the human condition, poetry, love, death, etc. left an intrinsic part of such perspectives behind the scenes: how were we related to this tradition of thought and art from our own positions as women?

One of the key actions that the nomadic subject encompasses is to challenge the duality between creativity and critique derived from the traditional convention of establishing imagination in opposition to reason. In this sense Braidotti bestows the possibilities of imagination as transformative. Similarly, she considers it as an intervention into the perception of philosophy and theoretical frameworks as patriarchal discourses on subjectivity. She states that nomadism 'is about critical relocation, it is about becoming situated, speaking from somewhere specific and hence well aware of and accountable for particular locations' (2011: 15). The question for us was to invert the process and use creativity as an intrinsic part of our form of thinking about the interaction between our own selves as women, and our agency as artist and/or creators. The existing tensions between the limited and restrictive aspects of our own sense of belonging as women and researchers, and our own desire to move forward and to expand the available space and transcend linguistic and spatial barriers triggered the motion into spirals. Inspired by Braidotti's theoretical work, we saw ourselves creating spirals and wandering around different spaces, languages and times. We took the notion of nomadism developed by Braidotti as a concept that is not only of theoretical in nature, but also as 'an existential condition' (2011: 22). This existential condition became the substratum of our work.

Embodied Motions on *Europeanness*

A minute more
 a second less
 and I am not here
 and there is only
 this space.

(Barbara Bridger 'Spirals: As If')

The female poet walks, her road is shaped as a spiral. While she is moving her body draws a spiral. The project 'spirals' accounts for a very specific form of motion. Not only through the shape it draws with the spiral but also through the specific cultural location that ensures multi-layered, diverse and plural European identities. Words, images, music are engaged together in a fragmented multiplicity of voices displayed through different European languages that aim to displace, transfer and challenge unitary visions of identity tainted by political purposes. The female poets and artists who participate in the 'spirals' project and the group PartSuspended (Barbara Bridger, Hari Marini, Ana Rodric, Eirini Margariti, Nisha Ramaya, Georgia Kalegoropoulou and Beatriz Viol) come from different countries and speak several languages. We already move synchronously in oscillating interludes between different linguistic centres: English and our own mother tongue (Spanish, Catalan, Serbian, Greek). And so, we write in order to destabilise the harmony of the prescriptive order that has kept us, as women in different European contexts, out of the main centre of action, out of language, out of the cities, out of thought. We have written our poetry, created our art based on a repetitive fluctuation between body and language. We move constantly all together in different tongues in different locations but always within the multiplicity of our voices. In this sense, the shape of the spiral might seem to be contradictory to our purposes, since the spiral's motion is inwards and outwards, but always towards or backwards a centre. What can the particularity of 'the spiral' offer to us?

'Spirals' accounts for our own cultural, linguistic and geographical locations as a starting point of exploration. In this sense, the 'politics of location' coined by Adrienne Rich becomes in Braidotti's redefinition of the term not an individual and particular experience of space but a collective construction of a territory both in terms of space and time (Braidotti, 2011: 16). The power of such contingency relates space with the body in a polyphonic spectrum of languages that in Braidotti's words 'are cartographies of power that rest on a form of self-criticism, a critical, genealogical self-narrative; they are relational and outside directed. This means that "embodied" accounts illuminate and transform our knowledge of ourselves and of the world' (16). This spatiality in 'spirals' is accounted for two in different segments. Firstly, through the use of our native languages, and secondly through filming/ performing/ creating in different places across Europe. The poetic journey in the project started in London with 'Spirals: Eternity' (2013), 'Spirals: Galaxies of Women' (2013) and 'Spirals: Genesis' (2018). Later in the year, it moved to Barcelona (Spain) with 'Spirals: Track for Finding Home', and then to Athens (Greece) with 'Spirals: Flamingo'. After this motion around the Mediterranean, 'Spirals' returned to the United Kingdom, specifically

to Broadstairs with 'Spirals: 28 paths of Her'. In 2019 it travelled to Coventry with 'Spirals: As If', and it resumed the motion to Europe, to Belgrade (Serbia) with 'Spirals: Autoportret'. The motion, although still in transit, is currently taking place in 'Spirals: Turning Points' in four different places Agost (Spain), Dorset (United Kingdom), Athens (Greece) and London.

Having no geographical boundaries within Europe, we could move freely across the continent. Our sense of 'difference' was only determined by the specificity of cultural identity mainly displayed through the use of different languages. Not only do we speak and write in languages other than English such as Serbian, Catalan, Spanish and Greek; we are also immediately identified 'as other' when we speak English with our different accents. Consequently, as European subjects we are nomads, we move across Europe and inhabit different landscapes, walk around cities and listen to a whole spectrum of languages. We have challenged the imaginary line that divides Northern Europe from Southern and Eastern Europe, and the line that divides the so-called 'continent' from the United Kingdom. This line became more accentuated after the results of the Brexit referendum. What are the consequences of such new 'differences' for us as European nationals? How do these new geopolitical boundaries affect our subjectivities as feminists? Spirals become our mapping existence and lead the direction we aim to follow. As women who create our own itinerary, the consideration of our subjectivity needs to be understood as a nomad. As Braidotti states: 'she has a clear destination and set paths; she goes from one point in space to another for a very clear purpose' (57).

A Feminist Spiral?

There is an important element in the understanding of the female poet as a nomad, which participants in the 'spirals' projects also engage with: it is the idea of motion, of movement. Motion sets up the basis that confronts the patriarchal historical contingencies of the term 'woman' as essentially unique, static and immanently natural, configuring her subjectivity as a biological creature with little capability for action. In the spirals project, we challenge these precepts; we have created new figurations which, even though locally situated, intend to intervene into the spatial expressions of phallogentrism. This can be seen in the poetic performance of 'Spirals: As If' with the poetry of Barbara Bridger. Filmed in the iconic ruins of Coventry Cathedral, which was bombed during the 1940–41 Blitz. Coventry Cathedral used to be an indoor space, a sacred place that provided spiritual help and guidance to those in need. In the video, two female subjects construct their spirals around the site, and a third plays the violin. The space, destroyed by men during the war, is now re-inhabited, for a different purpose, engaged with by these women who use modern materials such as plastic balls and aluminium paper to move around the site. The voice of the poet, invisible like a Muse, whispers the words: "Always this sense of holding on to let go, let go, let go, let go..."

As we have mentioned before, participant artists of PartSuspended identify as women, and the project is thus bound to the concept of sexual difference in terms of ethical and epistemological practice. The question we attempt to address through our project is intrinsically linked to our sexed subjectivity. We ask ourselves as female

artists: how do we intersect with space and time in art, particularly in poetry and performance? Inevitably, the body becomes the central parameter in the project either in language or in the visual material. Taking into account the tension and conflict that surrounds the theoretical implications of sexual difference, our work in *PartSuspended* does not stand as an essentialist vision of the female subject, but as a potentiality of her agency in artistic action. Spirals constitute an embodied journey with ethical and conceptual implications. This is particularly important for our project and for us. Each of the different spiral steps we have taken has been determined for the purpose of reshaping and renegotiating different alternative forms of signification. We position ourselves synchronistically against the immanent biological essentialism allocated to the identity of woman by phallocentrism throughout European cultural tradition. As a matter of fact, such synchrony sustains our position diachronically against historical figurations in a continuous fluidity that Braidotti has identified as ‘becoming-subject’. In this sense, the feminine and consequently feminist subject is in her words: ‘nomadic because it is intensive, multiple, embodied and therefore perfectly cultural; it is a technological compound of human and machine endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness in the impersonal mode. I think that this new figuration can be taken as an attempt to come to terms with what I have chosen to call the new nomadism of our historic condition’ (2011: 162).

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