Things 'Could' or 'Should' be Otherwise? Reflections on How Not to Black–Box an Identity

Monica Obreja

Abstract

In this article, I focus on a series of ANT analyses made by Vicky Singleton (1993; 1995; 1996) of the Cervical Screening Programme in the UK and discuss how 'sex' and 'gender' are positioned as objects of methodological relativism. I argue that the author's refusal to make any statements about whether or not women should take the smear test, due to her identity position as an ANT researcher is, paradoxically, in contradiction to certain ANT principles and also insensitive to women's own agency.

It is not easy to give a consistent descriptive account of the scholarship of feminist constructivist studies of technology in terms of themes of research or genealogies of researchers, but one common issue within this large and heterogeneous body of feminist work is a specific understanding of the concepts of sex and gender. In many of these texts, the concept of gender is negatively defined as everything that would not possibly reinforce stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, or that would not contend the existence of only two genders. It is also argued that sex is 'something to go out and *investigate*, not something on which to found an epistemology, especially not a feminist one' (Hirschauer & Mol 1995, 376 emphasis in original). This means that 'sex' cannot function as a foundational category which should influence how the hypotheses are constructed or research directed. The underlying assumption is that 'sex' does not really have any predetermined meaning, but one (or more) that can only descriptively come from research results. It should be an unpredicted result not a tested hypothesis. To make prior epistemological claims on the basis of a groundless category like 'sex' is to make groundless claims indeed, since the content and relevance of 'sex' can be grounded only empirically. This guarantees 'the recognition of the

multiple meanings of gender and technology relations without assuming *a priori* relations of gender and technology which might black-box and foreclose the analysis' (Ormrod 1995, 41). Ormrod places this approach under the label of 'methodological relativism'. This methodology is useful, as Maria Lohan argues, 'not only in opening up variation and contingency in gender and technological relations, but also in theorizing complexity' (2000, 906). She further argues that this allowed her to understand, for instance, the changing patterns in the gendered usage of the domestic telephone in Ireland (1997). A conventional understanding of how women and men use the telephone, i.e. women maintain social networks by spending a lot of time on the phone, whereas men only use the phone for conveying more or less formal information, would not have allowed her to be receptive to the changing expression of masculinities conveyed in the ways the men in her study were using the phone, which were similar to that of the women. Ultimately, methodological relativism is about temporarily suspending judgment about the world, in order to arrive at another description of the world. The extent to which this deferral of judgment is possible and what is to be done with the new description of the world varies among constructivist researchers.

Vicky Singleton's article 'Feminism, Sociology of Scientific Knowledge and Postmodernism: Politics, Theory and Me' (1996) offers a way out of black-boxing gender when doing research on women and technology. The article is written as an attempt to answer a question posed to the author when presenting a conference paper about the construction of the UK Cervical Screening Programme (CSP). The Question, as the author capitalizes, is whether or not women *should* go and have the cervical screening or the smear test, given the results of her research about the often-disempowering way the identities of women were constructed in the programme.[1] The author acknowledges the difficulty of answering the Question as a result of her refusal to make what she sees as normative claims that would universalize and thus black-box the identity of women. She attempts to imagine, however, how various answers to the Question might like. The 'women must go for a cervical smear test' answer, or the 'feminist empiricist response' (451),[2] might support women's participation in the programme, but would not question the very sexist claims of the CSP among which we find the de-

ductive reasoning that since cervical cancer is related to sexual promiscuity, then women who have cervical cancer must be sexually promiscuous. Moreover, this type of answer would not acknowledge that women do not have access in terms of information to the practices and knowledge deployed by the programme about their own bodies.

The 'yes, they should: but it is important that they are informed by the experiences of other women' (452) answer would be an instantiation, in the author's view, of the feminist standpoint epistemology. In other words, a beneficial participation for women would necessarily require that they are able to influence the way the programme constructs ideas about women's bodies and identities. A necessary condition for achieving this is that they speak from their own experiences and share them with other women. 'This response can be conceptualized as a feminist construction of an alternative CSP within which the identity of woman is redefined as an active informed participant responsible for her own health' (453). But neither the empiricist nor the standpoint answer is satisfactory for the author, because both convey a universal, unproblematic women's identity. The empiricist response does not attempt to criticize the CSP's constructed *woman*, as the standpoint approach does, but simply replaces it with another category of 'woman', one who has to take the cervical smear test once she is fully informed about what the programme is all about, once she understands how important the test is for her health and once the practices themselves are altered in order to respond to women's real experiences. So Vicky Singleton opts out of the former responses and turns instead to the 'I do, but …' (454) position that recognizes the impossibility of speaking for other women, since she herself has a heterogeneous identity – as nurse, social researcher, women's health activist – and she would answer differently in accordance with each of her identities. The 'I do, but …' response would be coherent with a post-modern feminist take on identity, she claims. However, as she concedes, this more reasonable response might make it seem as if she is avoiding a firm position vis-à-vis the issue.

Finally, she decides to talk in her 'actor-network theory' voice: 'Should we be asking this question, let alone trying to answer it?' (456). She continues that '[t]he response from an actor-network perspective may be to deny the importance or relevance for the analyst of The Question I have

been posed, because it assumes certain categories and dualisms (…)' (457). According to this position, the question whether or not women should take the cervical smear test presupposes certain content to the categories of 'women' and 'cervical smear test'. Attempting to answer such a question would perpetuate such categories and would not ask the question of how these categories happen to be defined in such highly precise ways. The role of the analyst would be then to remain in the mode of questioning the very meaning of womanhood, just as it is done by a series of actors in the CSP, and also the significance of the test itself. More than that, the power that some actors in the network have in defining the identity of women is not to be used by the analyst as an explanation for the stabilization of the network, and should not be removed from the context that is being analyzed. Vicky Singleton draws on Bruno Latour's distinction between *explanation* and *description* (1991). According to ANT, explanation cannot surpass the description of a network in both methodological and epistemological importance, because, in a sense, explanation is description itself done in a different mode. This kind of description contains an explanation, which thus cannot precede the description. It is not the explanation that makes possible the description, but the other way around. In the particular context of the CSP, to claim that patriarchy or the power that men have over women in society is the reason why this medical practice is so hostile to many women, and also the reason why women are defined as sexually promiscuous, is to place the explanation before the description, and, in so doing, to leave the category of women black-boxed. It is the attribute of *predictability*, which this kind of *explanation* entails, that *forecloses* the possible and actual negotiation of meanings in a network. The domination and marginalization of women is the effect of the discourses produced in the CSP; it is an explanation that is inherent to the construction of the network, but it cannot alone explain all the mechanisms that stabilized the network. Ultimately, as the author continues, what an ANT informed approach could offer as an answer to the Question 'Should women have a cervical smear test or not' is a 'No women *should* but all women *could*' (459, emphasis in the original). The core issue of the '*should* vs. *could*' impasse is related to the risk of operating exclusionary prescriptions regarding women's choices. Vicky Singleton considers that any *should* answer would again universalize women's experiences. In this

case, the prescription that women should take the test would immediately deem the reasons some women have for not taking the test as unimportant, naïve and perhaps even exhibiting a lack of a feminist awareness. Obviously, according to Singleton, that would amount to an exclusionary practice. Beyond the ethical reasons for not making prescriptions, Vicky Singleton has also a very empirically based argument for the inadvertence of opting for the *should* answer. Her actor-network approach to the CSP showed how unstable the identities of the actors forming the network really are. She gives the example of General Practitioners who would quite readily shift their definition of women from passive, uninformed to very knowledge-able participants (461). Since actors define their own and others' identities continuously, it is relatively hard to prescribe, and so to stabilize one actor's identity (in this case, women's), when in practice this does not happen. For the researcher Vicky Singleton, to engage in *should* discourses would be to work against the very principle that sets her research in motion: 'The aim of the analyst is not to contribute to the continued stabilization of such constructions, but to describe how they are made. Consequently, the analyst is talking about how things *could have been* otherwise rather than assuming the ahistorical existence of such categories' (457). To go back to her preferred answer, 'No women *should* [take the test], but all women *could*' given that the category of 'women' only 'could have been otherwise', as the actor-network analysis holds. In other words, the CSP offers all women the opportunity to take the test, but whether this test is something that all women should take is not a concern that an actor-network analyst should even consider.

I chose to discuss Vicky Singleton's article in detail because it approaches directly and indirectly important claims of feminist constructivism vis-à-vis gender and technology. Surely the idea of un-black-boxing 'woman' is as old as any women's and feminist movement. Among the propelling forces of feminism (perhaps *the* force of feminism) has been the explicit aim to de-naturalize gender norms by exposing their historically and culturally specific constitution in order to show that gender norms are contingent, not necessary, since they do not originate in whatever biological differences that might or might not constitute the basis for dividing the human spectrum into men and women. Perhaps the term 'black-boxing' and the phrase

'could have been otherwise' are specific to feminist constructivist analyses of technology, inherited from constructivist studies of technology without a gender component,[3] but these epistemic claims are no stranger to other feminist analyses. In fact, in my opinion, the kind of thinking in the mode of 'could have been otherwise' is common to all feminist analyses.

My points of disagreement with Vicky Singleton's refusal to make any allegedly normative statements about women's potential benefiting from their enrolment into the CSP due to a probable exclusionary effect of such statements are three-fold. Firstly, I question the definition of 'identity' that Singleton uses as the ideal behaviour or role that women are assigned within the context of the CSP. I suggest that 'identity' is taken to mean in other contexts something else and much more than what is expressed by a social role. It has rather more to do with the failed and/or successful introjection of such roles, thus with exercising agency in terms of either (conscious or unconscious) psychological acceptance or rejection of such roles. Secondly, I argue that it is exactly the definition of 'identity' as a role that sustains Vicky Singleton's belief that her answer that women *should* go and take the test black-boxes the identity of 'women'. In this sense, Singleton's argument is grounded in a circularity – if a mere statement black-boxes an identity, then identity must be no more than a – result of a – mere statement, which is simultaneously an argumentative fallacy simply because she herself is not involved in any kind of network with the women whose identity she fears will be black-boxed, or she lacks, in my opinion, any *interessement devices* for achieving such an enrolment. Lastly, I will claim that even if indeed a high dose of hermeneutics of suspicion is necessary vis-à-vis all statements about what a woman is, this must not necessarily obstruct the possibility of making contextual claims, since the meaning of a word, I maintain, is given precisely by and in its contextual use. The latter claim is in fact consistent with ANT methodological agnosticism and I will show how it is really Singleton's argument that presupposes an effect of power before the actual emergence of such an effect, thus an *explanation* before the *description*.

In the 1993 article that Vicky Singleton wrote with Mike Michael, the focus falls on the identity or identities of the General Practitioners involved in the CSP. The authors reach the conclusion, based on a series of

interviews with different GPs enrolled in the programme, that the identity of the GPs is ambivalent, uncertain and multiple. This conclusion is supported by the GPs' expressed resistance to their clearly defined, black-boxed identity in the CSP. At the same time they construct their own networks by enrolling various other actors not part of the straightforward scheme of the CSP.

Within the CSP, the GP has a clearly defined role. She is expected to take the smears – a procedure defined as 'straightforward', 'painless' and 'simple' –, decide which women are to be considered at risk on the basis of previous tests, which women should come for a test, what course of action should be taken after the test results become available etc. Over time, the GP's role underwent some redefinition. At the time when the article was written, for instance, the eligibility of women who are to be invited to the test became part of the attributions of a governmental body – the Family Health Service Authority.

The article shows how the GPs problematize their identity in the CSP in connection to other actors' identities. They contest that the test procedure is 'straightforward', 'painless' and 'simple' and that the detection, diagnosis and treatment of abnormalities are unproblematic, by referring to the complexities of actors involved in the CSP, complexities ignored by the simplified definition of these actors to be found in the official documents that organize the functioning of the CSP. For instance, the GPs refer to the different types of cervices with regard to their position and cellular composition, which can influence the quality of the test sample and whether this sample can be considered as a good specimen for producing accurate results. An adequate sample and a painless procedure is, in the GPs' view, a result of a good technique, and so the authors of the article conclude that the GPs are simultaneously re-black-boxing the definition of the procedure as 'painless' but also complicating their own identities as defined within the CSP by adding up 'technical skill' as an important characteristic of their identity within the CSP.

Regarding the GPs' relation to the issue of women's eligibility for the CSP, the authors conclude that GPs problematize this aspect of the CSP selectively and partially, in accordance with other commitments they have vis-à-vis certain issues. Singleton and Michael use the example of one GP

to point to the ambiguities of defining the identity of both the 'woman' and the GP in the CSP. For this GP, women's non-participation in the CSP is explained at different times either as a consequence of their social class and ignorance (as pointing to the low level of education of women from lower classes) or as a result of rational choice. The latter explanation, the authors remark, is made available in the context of the quotas of women that GPs have to enrol for the test in order to get financial benefits. When confronted with the pressure of enrolling a certain percentage of eligible women into the CSP in order to receive financial benefits, the GPs explain the absence of women as a result of an informed rational choice, rather than as a result of their ignorance.

The issue of 'women's' identity is thus recurrently taken up in Vicky Singleton's ANT analyses of the CSP. Her conclusion is that 'woman' in the CSP is defined in contradictory ways, and if 'women' are so diverse in reality, how could she make any normative claims about women's future enrolment into the CSP? That is to say, since this is obviously not how the world functions, how *could* and why *should* it function otherwise? The congealed definition of *'woman' within the CSP* as 'symptomless, aged between 20 and 64 years and at risk of death from cervical cancer' (Singleton & Michael, 236) is augmented and problematized by both the GPs and the women who participated or consider participating in the CSP. Both women and the GPs express and engage in either partial resistance or conformity with the way 'woman' is defined. Both Singleton and Michael suggest that this proves that the actors' identities are multiple and fluid, thus *decentred*.

But what if these *decentred identities* are a result of precisely the actors' introjection of their role/part assigned within the CSP? It is not only in one place that the authors use 'identity' and ' role' interchangeably. It seems that what is going on is a negotiation and transformation of 'woman in the CSP' rather than, as the authors claim, a negotiation and transformation of 'woman' in the CSP.[4] In this sense, the effects of black-boxing 'woman in the CSP' are not identical to the effects of black-boxing 'woman' in the CSP. Whereas the former refers to certain characteristics (a role) that women are assigned as prospective patients of the CSP, the latter assumes that all that 'woman' is has been defined in the CSP. But, on the other hand, how can we talk about women other than by referring to the way

they are being defined within the CSP and also by considering how they negotiate this definition, given that according to ANT, no explanation can be accepted other than what emerges out of the network itself? Perhaps 'woman in the CSP' is identical to the *'woman' in the CSP* after all.

Making 'role' and 'identity' indistinguishable is in fact one of the methodological features of ANT analyses. Who the actors *are* in the network is a result of what they (are said and/or expected to) *do* in the network. As one of the key phases in the constitution of a network, enrolment 'designates the device by which a set of interrelated *roles* is defined and attributed to actors who accept them' (Callon 1986, 211). It is only through a successful enrolment that the *interessement* as 'the group of actions by which an entity (…) attempts to impose and stabilize the *identity* of the other actors it defines through its problematization' (idem 207) results in a stable alliance between actors.[5] The actors' identities are often defined in contradictory and competitive ways. 'To interest other actors', writes Callon, 'is to build devices which can be placed between them and all other entities who want to define their identities otherwise. A interests B by cutting or weakening all the links between B and the invisible (or at times quite visible) group of other entities C, D, E, etc. who may want to link themselves to B' (idem 208). The way an identity is defined in the ANT network has consequences on the role of the analyst and the purpose of the research. What the analyst has access to is nothing but the self/representation of actors, so what the researcher can provide us with is only a description of *roles* from the viewpoint of actors and *interessement* devices. To claim that there is something more to 'identity' than being a role assigned and performed in a network is to confuse social theory with conspiracy theory (Latour 2005, 150). What would be the use of adding invisible entities that act without leaving any trace and make no difference to any state of affairs? What purpose would it serve to presuppose an identity if this is not expressed as a role which can be described, to presuppose the existence of identities and structures before describing a network in which these identities and structures might not even be apparent? If identity is nothing but what is assigned to an entity in a network, then one cannot presuppose an identity before it is being assigned. What's the point of taking something for granted before being able to describe it? There is no point, but there is a danger. And it is exactly

this danger, of solidifying, of black-boxing categories, that Vicky Singleton wants to avoid. As I will argue, the paradox inherent in this latter argument is that one can only black-box an identity at a declarative level, with predictably few effects on the people who might or might not assume this identity.

In the light of ANT processes of enrolment, I ask whether Vicky Singleton fears she would create a network with the 'women' who would enrol in the CSP as a consequence of her stating that women *should* enrol in the CSP. What sort of instruments of *interessement* does she have at her disposal? Or is one specific answer a good enough instrument? Would the *should* answer indeed manage to sever or weaken all the other links between the *women* Vicky Singleton believes she would black-box and other entities that define their identities? On the basis of what does she fear the enrolment would be successful?

On the other hand, the *Questioner* seems to be attempting to enrol *Vicky* – as the researcher with enough epistemic authority – in an alliance that would respond to the problematization of whether or not the CSP is any good for women. Given her time spent researching the 'ins' and 'outs' of the CSP, *Vicky* 'should' be able to issue an 'opinion' on whether the *Questioner should* go for the test or not. The *Questioner* is immersed, at least declaratively, in a particular context from which the Question emerges. In this context, she is a woman who is getting older, had her kids, and is just too busy to pay close attention to the construction of the CSP in order to decide on informed grounds whether she should have the smear test or not. But whether a rhetorical artifice, an 'as if' life situation or not, this individual context applies perhaps to many other women and it is perhaps its very incidence, the existence of such a group of women, ultimately the *generality* and *banality* of this individual context that the Questioner uses as a means to persuade Vicky to issue knowledge claims for (at least one particular group of) women in consequence of her knowledge about the programme. The Questioner attempts to weaken *Vicky's* commitment to her identity as a sophisticated ANT researcher by interpellating her into a position of adviser for a very specific but large group of women. 'We don't have and can't care to gather much information on the CSP, so could you tell us whether you think we should go for the test or not?'

The Questioner is apparently simply asking for an 'opinion', whereas Vicky interprets this demand as one of having to make a 'decision' on her part regarding what all women should and probably will do. Emma Whelan, for instance, considers that the Question posed to Vicky Singleton 'Should women have the cervical test' was actually a question addressing the issue of evaluation, and could have been very well rephrased as 'Might women benefit from participating in the CSP?' (2001, 564). She goes on to point out (and I will quote at length because I believe her point could address in general the fear feminists have of engaging in essentializing practices) that

> [i]n worrying that their analyses might compel women to do anything, feminist academics both overestimate their impact on women's lives and underestimate women's ability to make their own judgments. I doubt that many women read feminist analyses as injunction (that is, if they read them); they may view them as resources. Singleton's response to The Question provides no resources to women negotiating with science in their daily lives. (Whelan, 2001, 54)

So Singleton refuses to be enrolled as an adviser on matters related to the CSP, since this role/identity conflicts with that of an ANT analyst who cannot but state the obvious – of course, a woman *could* take part in the CSP. However, to repeat, her claim that a *should* answer would have a normative effect is unfounded since in the ANT framework an identity becomes normative once an actor disengages from any other identities. And this is a process which Singleton already presupposes will happen, before actually taking place. For on what basis can anyone tell whether the *should* answer will produce the effect of women taking up such an identity?

Leaving aside for the time being what might appear as an obvious scepticism that all feminist work functions as a code of conduct for women readers (despite the fact that perhaps quite a few feminists write specifically with that scenario in mind), I want to take a short detour and focus now on the procedures of naming and categorizing and their consequences. Vicky Singleton sees a compatibility between ANT methodology of description, of not presupposing ready-made explanation, with Alice Jardine's process of *gynesis* or a *woman-in-effect* (1985), that is

> the putting into discourse of 'woman' as that *process* diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity; indeed, the valorisation of the feminine, woman, and her obligatory, that is, historical connotations, as somehow intrinsic to the new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, speaking. The object produced by this process is neither a person nor a thing, but a horizon, that toward which the process is tending: *gynema*. This *gynema* is a reading effect, a woman-in-effect that is never stable and has no identity. (Jardine 1985, 25; emphasis in original)

The appeal to or the valorisation of (characteristics associated with) woman or the feminine is the manner in which quite a few writers – Derrida, Lacan, Deleuze, among those Jardine refers to in her study – approach the crisis of reason, representation, self, man. Woman becomes the subversive locus and figuration par excellence, given its status as unrepresentable, unconscious, as that which is not coherent, present, visible. It is perhaps the manner in which ANT questions a series of dichotomies (nature/society, society/science, subject/object) and also the relevance of established theories for future research that determines Vicky Singleton to see a woman-in-effect in ANT. Methodologically, Singleton concedes, ANT could provide us with a 'woman as an "effect"' (1995, 155), with the understanding of woman as an actor with no stable identity, as a response to theories which have a predetermined explanation for women's oppression and identity. However, gynesis remains at times a problematic process for Jardine, precisely because it is not necessarily about women. There is a constant reminder in her text to consider what it might mean for women when *woman* becomes essential to whole new conceptual systems without really being about them. Not only that, if *woman* as unrepresentable, as unnameable, becomes the new strategy for dismantling the metaphysics or representation, what then of women whose historical condition is one which denies them positive representations?

Alice Jardine asks 'But then (and here is perhaps the place for our difficult feminist questions), for the woman reader, and if naming is always violence, is the process of being un-named through a re-naming-in-parts any less violent? – even when born within a non-violent, even at times feminist gesture?' (1985, 183). Jardine is here first referring to Derrida's assessment of the activity of name giving. For Derrida, the name is not something one stumbles upon in nature, nor is it obtained in an act of exchange.

The name appropriates violently that which it concomitantly produces. To name is, as in the case of a birth certificate, 'to sublimate singularity and to inform against it, to hand it over to the police' (1986, 7), in an act of *arraignment*. To *arraign* is to already ask for and so to instantiate the proper history, the genesis and *telos* of a thing. Naming is instrumental and symptomatic for appropriation, domination and mastery. Derrida believes that feminists might or have already inherited these same-old dreams, just as they engage in a 'specular feminism reversal of masculine "subjectivity"' (1982, 67) and just as Women Studies become 'just another cell in the university beehive' still guarding the Law (1987, 191). A necessary gesture for feminists, he believes, perhaps both inside and outside Women's Studies, is to actively seek the deconstruction of the framework on which knowledge is built: the subject, ego, consciousness, soul, body (idem 193). Otherwise, any claim which seeks to establish woman as subject with equal rights, remains caught in the logic of phallogocentrism. That is possibly even ironic since it is from the side of the woman, or the feminine, that *woman* can be set free from her 'metaphysical bondage' (Jardine), and the entire phallogocentrism of Western thought can be turned upside down. Women's bodies are exploded in parts, processes, texts that do the 'feminine operation' of disturbing subjects, truths and dialectics: hymens, vaginas, invaginations (e.g. for Derrida). In any case, if *women* have not already become something else, they must do so.

The becoming of woman, *becoming-woman*, is, for Deleuze and Guattari, a becoming-minoritarian, and, like all other becomings, is a movement towards the deterritorialization of identity; an identity caught in a rigid binary which privileges men over women. Deleuze and Guattari insist that being a minority is not sufficient for becoming minoritarian, because whereas minority is a state, an aggregate, becoming minoritarian is a process (2004, 321). That is why even women, a minority not by quantity but by being in relation to the man-standard, have to also become minoritarian. Until then, woman remains a *molar entity* – 'the woman as *defined* by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject' (idem 304; my emphasis). And it is this molar woman that has to be destabilized in the process of becoming-woman, which is not an imitation of woman, but a passing through, a production of atoms of womanhood that would

permeate the whole social field, that would pollute men and would pull them out from the majority. The becoming-woman is then, for Deleuze and Guattari, a double movement, one in which the subject leaves the majority-standard and the medium ascends from minority (idem 321). This being said, the question arises: is all identity similarly molar, or are there degrees of molarity? Is the molar woman as defined and represented in a polarized system of women and men as molar as the *female feminist* who perhaps does not want to enunciate a particular something, but still wants to enunciate?

> The notion of desire in this configuration is not a prescriptive one: the desire to be-come and to speak as female feminist subjects does not entail the specific content of women's speech. What is being empowered is women's entitlement to speak, not the propositional content of their utterances. What I want to emphasize is women's desire to become, not a specific model for their becoming.
> (Braidotti 1994, 160)

Braidotti emphasizes the kind of desire inherent in thinking the project of female subjectivity in a sexual difference mode. For Deleuze and Guattari though, a sexuality organized by two is only what remains after sexuality has dried up. Deleuze and Guattari think it is necessary that women should have a molar politics, in order to claim what they never had – a body, a history, a subjectivity. This should not be the end however, since this end can never happen 'without drying up a spring or stopping a flow' (idem 304). Whereas at least some feminists agree with the warning signalled by Deleuze and Guattari not to stop at 'we as women ...', they remain sceptical about whether women have ever been molar entities; whether there has ever been anything to deterritorialize in the first place in the case of women; whether this sort of becoming does not amount to the disappearance of *real* women as political and epistemic forces; but also how ultimately this fear is being legitimated. Returning now to Alice Jardine's question referred to previously, if naming is a metaphysical appropriation and thus counts as violence, is being un-named, de-territorialized, split into particles, un-represented, not as violent a gesture?

Luce Irigaray (1985b, 140–141) finds it at least suspicious that women might rediscover their pleasure in this dissipation of bodies into organs and

particles, in those thousand sexes that Deleuze and Guattari (2004, 307) believe actually produce sexuality. In fact, Irigaray says, this 'becoming-woman', which constitutes a discovery for men (philosophers), an excessive pleasure, something that they believe can ensure a movement over dried up forms of sexuality, has long been familiar to women. But if this 'becoming-woman' is the historical condition of women, it is simultaneously obvious that this condition is not one which yet expresses a positive relation that women have with language and sex. And if this is so, '[..]don't we run the risk once more of taking back from woman those as yet unterritorialized spaces where her desire might come into being?' (ibid.). There is an important aspect here related to the intersection of the 'becoming-woman' of male philosophers with the 'becoming-woman' of women. There seems to be a disrespectful confusion between the two, made obvious by a seemingly historical coincidence of the sudden availability of 'becoming-woman' as a philosophical tool and the rise of women's efforts to inaugurate freedom movements.[6] Frankly put, why is it that at the time when objects start to speak (Irigaray 1985a, 135), the subjects also start using the condition of the objects as a method for destabilizing binary systems? These subjects, the Cartesian orphans as Rosi Braidotti calls them (1991), seem to be looking at *woman*, the *feminine* in instrumental ways, as to the solution for the void that modernity experiences in the absence of the knowing subject, monolithic identities, and the certainty of reason. The *feminine* is then still used in the old habitual way as an empty signifier filled with whatever disturbs or whatever diseases the male of the species encounters (Braidotti 1987). The *feminine* is the name, more – the symptom of the sickly body of philosophy which lacks the 'self', but the 'she' even more (Braidotti 1991, 138). In any case, '[t]he truth of the matter' is obvious: 'one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted control over' (Braidotti 1987, 237).

So where does all of this leave us with respect to Vicky Singleton's ANT analysis of the CSP programme? If the woman-in-effect that Singleton *perhaps* (1995, 154) notices in ANT amounts merely to destabilizing categories, to the refusal of black-boxed identities, then one can ask in this situation what is left of woman/women in Singleton's analyses. There is, as I have already argued, a danger in associating and even naming the operation of

destabilizing binaries by a name which refers immediately to the category of woman, while simultaneously avoiding any direct reference to this category. Can these two operations be concurrently upheld: 1. the association of a woman-in-effect with ANT methodological relativism and agnosticism; and 2. the refusal to make any statements about what women should do regarding their participation in the CSP? They probably *could*, but then *woman* would cease to refer to actual embodied subjects. A conclusion which is consistent with Singleton's belief that her statements would immediately have normative consequences, conceptual and empirical. The final point that all my previous arguments converge towards is that Vicky Singleton is justified in fearing she would black-box the identity of women who consider going for a test only by ignoring the agency of the same women, and, ironically, their commitment to multiple identities, a reality often emphasized by Singleton for supporting her very refusal to answer the Questioner.

Notes

1   '*Questioner*: […] While this is all very interesting [Singleton's ANT analysis of the CSP], I have a question for you. Let me put it this way. I'm a woman, I'm getting older, I've had my kids, I'm very busy and I don't want to, nor have I the time to, think about all the ins and outs of the screening programme. That's your job. That's what you have been paid to do. So you tell me, should I have a cervical smear test or not?
Vicky: Well, to answer you in the way you have posed the question, I think that is your decision. I can give you access to the information that I have but it is your decision. There are numerous uncertainties inherent in the programme and I can discuss with you how they are constructed and negotiated, along with how the identity of woman in the CSP is many and changing things.
Questioner: Yes, but as I said I accept that you have had far more time to consider this and to find information about this than I have got or am likely to have, so I am asking for your opinion.
Vicky: Well I think the answer will be different for different women and depending upon which of my many different identities I am assuming – that is, depending upon the context, I would have to give you different answers' (1996, 449).
   Vicky Singleton's 1995 article explores extensively the issue of how the identity of woman was constructed in the programme.

2   The reference is made to Sandra Harding's terminology in the 'Science Question in Feminism' (1986). I believe this is a rather erroneous interpretation of Sandra Harding's understanding of feminist empiricism. Feminist empiricism, according to Harding, argues not only for the importance of women's presence in scientific practices, but also primarily for revising the way scientific hypotheses are formulated and tested (thus both the context of discovery and the context of justification), in order to eliminate the biases that shape the research process. In the context of the CSP, a feminist empiricist approach would consider precisely how the claims about the eligibility of women in the CSP are made, what exactly are considered to be the causes of cervical cancer and why etc.

3   Susan Leigh Star (1988, 198) points as the source of the phrase 'it could have been otherwise' to Everett Hughes. The exact citation from Hughes states that 'Our very study implies always the attitude [...]: It could have been otherwise' (Hughes 1984, 552). In the context of his article Hughes refers to the 'peculiarity' of the social scientists among academics to be able to look with open-mindedness at 'social arrangements and sentiments' (ibid.), at the 'rightness' of social hierarchies, to even be able to imagine an inferior group as superior in other circumstances.

4   This is also obvious in the case of the GPs whose *identities* in the CSP are redefined as a result of their membership in other networks. One GP declares that the number of deaths from cervical cancer is small compared to the total number of deaths every year in the UK, in order to stress that the cervical screening is not the most pressing activity that the GPs should deal with (Singleton & Michael 1993, 256).

5   Singleton and Michael's article shows that actually the identity of actors need not be stable in order for the actors to stay enrolled and for the network to remain stable. In this way, the actors' betrayal of their roles as defined in the network is not as 'dramatic and mysterious' (idem 259) anymore, claim the authors, referencing Michel Callon's understanding of science and technology stories as dramatic betrayals (idem 199).

6   A point made by both Jardine (1985), Braidotti (1991 etc.) and Irigaray (2008, 79).

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