

Narrating the Exclusion: Woman on the Edge of Time

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ABSTRACT

The construction and definition of the excluded or marginalized individual was one of the main concerns of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. His theories on the «technologies of the self» have proved to be an interesting tool of analysis for feminists. The aim of this paper is to use them to analyze Marge Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* and relate the Foucauldian theorization on the excluded subject to both the gendered individual and her literary representation.

What I wanted to know was how the subject constituted himself, in such and such a determined form as a mad subject or as a normal subject, through a certain number of practices which were games of truth, applications of power.

Michel Foucault

To be different, or alien, is a significant if familiar cultural metaphor which marks the boundaries and limits of social identity. It allows difference to be marginalised and any dissonance to be smoothed away, thus confirming the dominance of the centre over the margins.

Jenny Wolmark

1. THEORISING THE EXCLUDED SUBJECT

From the very start of his intellectual career, Michel Foucault devoted himself to studying, from an historical point of view, the technologies of the self and what he called «dividing practices»: that is to say, the practices that divide the individuals, among other categories, between sane and insane.¹ He was particularly concerned with the analysis of Western culture and the historical and ontological categories and discourses that define what we have come to know as Western normative identity because, as Jana Sawicki reminds us: «These discourses located identity within the psyche or body of the individual, conceiving of the latter as a fixed and unified entity» (Sawicki, 1992: 41). On the contrary, according to Foucault, identity is the result of a multitude of historically constituted social relationships and, for this reason, he denies the existence of a static and essentialist idea of subjectivity. He was particularly interested in a type of power that tied the subject and situated his or her individuality in their sexuality; in this sense, this is what Foucault declared to Rabinow and Dreyfuss: «This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects» (1983: 212). We can then affirm that his works and his declaration that: «... man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end» (Foucault 1973: 387) obliged the Western intellectual community to move away from ontological theories such as Phenomenology or Essentialism and to take a critical interest in all the opposites that constitute our cultural heritage.

Foucault, in an interview of January 1984, reminds us that: «My problem has always been, as I said in the beginning, the problem of the relationship between subject and truth» (Foucault 1988a: 9). The interest that the French philosopher felt for the practices which construct subjectivity awakened his desire of knowledge for the formation of the marginal subject and led him to declare that: «We have yet to write the history of that other form of madness, by which men, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbours, and communicate and recognise each other through the merciless language of non-madness» (Foucault, 1967: ix). For Foucault, the codes that constitute the base of the dominant epistemology act from within the individualities in order to define and assign them a determined place within the order of things. So, if we give close thought to his words and use them as a starting point, it is possible to affirm that the figure of the exiled subject² —its absence or lack— becomes

of basic importance when we must question, for example, the marginal position that Western ontology assigns to some groups of individuals or, to use Sarah Cornell's words: «The male-defined world puts difference on the scale of hierarchy [...] We are not speaking about opposition, not about the war of the sexes. We are talking about equal and different. If 'equal' becomes an equivalent to 'the same', then those who are different are excluded» (1990: 37). For the same reason, we also have to stress Foucault's intuition of the existence of a group of practices that have represented the essential condition to let the mad subject³ fully enter the games of Truth. This is what Michel Foucault argues in one of the first pages of *Madness and Civilization*:

What doubtless remained longer than leprosy, and would persist when the lazar houses had been empty for years, were the values and images attached to the figure of the leper as well as the meaning of his exclusion, the social importance of that insistent and fearful figure which was not driven off without first being inscribed within a sacred circle. (Foucault, 1967: 6)

By writing this paper I want to stress two things. The first is to give an example of how the construction of the insane subject is carried out by society by convincing, among other practices, the excluded subject of her difference from the rest of individuals.⁴ It is through the manipulation and application of the «technologies of the self» that the mad subject is brought to accept the individuality she is given by society; she believes what she is told and accepts her difference and situates herself within 'the circle', that is to say within the border that limits her freedom and condemns her to marginality and exclusion. The second is to show how all this materializes in the literary representation of madness and exclusion and their relation to the gendered subject, because as Elspeth Probyn argues: «... the self operates ontologically as an instance of being brought forth in certain locations: among friends, in certain gendered spaces, in some writing practices, and in theoretical contexts» (1993: 88).

Exclusion seems to have been a common experience which women and insane persons have suffered, and in most cultures we can say that they still do. Western culture is not obviously different and, as we have stressed above, Foucault's thought evidentiates the idea that the normative Western identity is based on the definition of the Other, that is to say of the marginalized or excluded subject.⁵ It is in this sense that I am going to carry out a Foucauldian reading of Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. I think that in this novel the author evidentiates the ideas that promote the formation of the socially and ontologically excluded subject in Western culture and, apparently, proposes a solution by depicting a utopian world in which the rules that help to create the concept of exclusion are banned. Piercy uses the revolutionary potential of fantasy to give

Consuelo, her protagonist, the chance to fight against the psychiatric apparatus. As Franzyska Gyga points out:

Woman on the Edge of Time is a valuable attempt to describe a world in which the normal woman is often defined by psychologists as the housewife, content with passivity and limited authenticity. The novel also depicts a social system —partly by means of the contrast of the utopian world— in which madness is connected to the female social condition (Gyga, 1991: 57).

Piercy's literary work can be defined as political and character-centred. It is through the description of her characters and their social background, usually poor and marginal, that she tries to depict the condition of a subject who is marginalized not only for her race or for belonging to a lower social class, but also because of her sex. Her critique of the dominant structures of power materializes in her narrative and in her poetry. She is able to relate the position that the subject holds within reality and whether such reality is contemporary or belongs to possible future worlds is not important. What is really important is her commitment to a narrative which is used by the author to attack the power/knowledge relation and to deconstruct the net in which the subject, who is the result of this relation, is trapped. In *Body of Glass* (1992), one of Piercy's last novels, the concern the author feels for the position of the gendered subject in society is developed in a future world of cyberpunk marked by the Outside/City (Inside) dichotomy. I have taken this novel as a quick example because, as Jenny Wolmark stresses: «Piercy uses the problematic nature of the cyborg to provide a generalised critique of dominant cultural notions of human identity which, when they are embedded in cybernetic systems, reproduce existing structures of power» (1994: 134).

2. WRITING DIFFERENCE

Consuelo, Connie, is the main character of Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* and her experience takes place in and out of the psychiatric institution. Connie's story starts when she hurts her niece's pimp in order to defend her. He manages to have Connie put into a mental institution and labelled as a violent patient and the whole story moves around her experience in the mental hospital. As we read the novel we discover that it is not the first time Connie has been put into a public psychiatric institution but we understand that this time it will be the last, as Connie will not come out of the madhouse. While in hospital Connie realizes for sure she is a 'catcher' (she had had the first

experience in her kitchen but could not believe it), that is to say a person who is able to connect with a woman from a utopian future called Luciente. This way, from the beginning of the text, Connie's story shifts between the two dimensions of inside and outside. In Connie's case the outside is not represented by the outer world, that is to say by a world that physically exists, but it is represented by Matapoissett, a utopian and future world where she travels and that she reaches through her mind with Luciente's help.⁶ The inside is represented by both the institution and its social and ontological meaning. The anger and the desperation through which Consuelo tries to overcome her fear are reflected not only in the way she describes her arrival at the hospital, but also in the Dantesque representation she makes of the world of the institution:

Then the gates swallowed the ambulance-bus and swallowed her as she left the world and entered the underland where all who were not desired, who caught like rough teeth in the cogwheels, who had no place or fit crosswise the one they were hammered into, were carted to repent of their contrariness or to pursue their mad vision down to the pit of terror. Into the asylum that offered none, the broken-sprunged buses roughly galloped (31).

Connie is desperate and frightened: she is locked in and her only daughter has been given in adoption to a white Anglo-Saxon couple.⁷ The real world, the social workers and the social apparatus have failed her; she is permitted to move only between the in/out, outside/inside and sanity/insanity dichotomies. But the inside is represented by the mental institution and the outside by society. The only chance she has to run away is to look for a different outside, something that does not exist yet. The structure of the novel reflects Connie's fear and her quest for a different solution as Gygax claims:

The passages of the utopian future are intertwined with the events at the mental hospital. In this respect the novel is not traditional science-fiction. Percy's science-fiction utopia is set as an escape vision from the real world in which concrete options for a break-out are no longer available (Gygax, 1991: 54).

The inside/outside opposition directly refers to the Foucauldian idea of inclusion/exclusion which is present in Consuelo's story. As the novel progresses, it becomes a double opposition that continuously relates the concepts of interiority, exteriority and viceversa: these dichotomies interweave until they form the net in which Consuelo gets trapped. In fact, as we have stressed above, she is not crazy. It is the structure of society, the Manichean division between evil and good, true and false, sanity and insanity, which are the cause of her imprisonment inside the institution and what decide her destiny. She is not kept inside the hospital by her fear of the outside world but by a system of thought

that needs to define and assign an identity to every individual so that it can go on controlling what is considered to be the Truth:

When what she said didn't fit their fixed ideas, they went on as if it did. Resistance, they called that, when you didn't agree, but this bunch didn't seem that interested in whether she had or not a good therapeutic attitude [...] How that Dr. Redding stared at her, not like she'd look at a person, but the way she might look at a tree, a painting, a tiger in the zoo (92).

For Foucault, the idea of the exclusion and its materialization—that is to say the physical confinement that the mad subject suffers when she is excluded from the interiority of the dominant Discourse—represents the limits of humanist philosophy and particularly of philosophy understood as a whole because, as he points out: «Humanism guarantees the maintenance of the social organization, technique allows the development of this society but from society's own perspective ...» (1978: 34, my translation. My emphasis). The escape towards the outside that Connie longs for is what brings her to know or to imagine—it is not clear in the text—an alternative to the humanist idea of the centrality of thought. It is her quest for a different ontology that brings Connie to be receptive to a society which is structured according to *other* rules, a community where as Billie Maciunas underlines «... gender socialization and the concurrent division of labor along gender and/or class lines is abolished» (Maciunas, 1992: 252). In Matapoissett, Consuelo discovers a culture in which the existence of different truths and multiple discourses is both recognized and accepted, as she is told by Luciente:

«We enjoy no one culture, but many. Many arts. All with own inknowing, seeing, intents, beauties. Fasure [sic] some of what we inherit feels ... closed, trivial, bloated with ego, posturings of lugs who had to attract rich patrons or corporate approval to survive ... but much of it we have to love, Connie» (178).

In *Woman on the Edge of Time* Piercy questions the technologies that define the individual both from the ontological and social points of view. She questions a whole series of values which are not only the base of the humanist tradition but that also pertains to the capitalistic system dominated by men.⁸ The result of this situation is the victimization of a weaker—socially, economically, mentally—category of women. In her utopian future, the author can alter radically the situation and create, in Matapoissett, characters that can be interpreted as the *alter ego* of some of the women locked in the mental hospital (Maciunas, 1992: 257; Dunker, 1992: 101). For example Sybil, who is in hospital for being a witch, is paralleled in the future by Erzulia, a respected black woman who is both a witch and a surgeon. Piercy's characters then become a way of exploring

and subverting those structures and epistemological relations which define the gendered self; this is what she declared on the origin and the meaning of her characters: «The people I love and thus the characters I can make out of my life and those around me are mixtures, products of a society that socializes through guilt and competition and fear and repression» (quoted in Kessler: 312). As we have already stressed above, in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the author examines some concepts of the dominant epistemology and their relationship to the Western ontology and it is in this sense that we understand the critique that Bolivar, one of Connie's new friends, makes of a totalizing vision of history and of a society which is based on class, gender and race exploitation:

«Our history isn't a set of axioms.» Bolivar spoke slowly, firmly. «I guess I see the original division of labor, that first dichotomy, as enabling later divvies into haves and haves-not, powerful and powerless, enjoyers and workers, rapists and victims. The patriarchal mind/body split turned the body to machine and the rest of the universe into booty on which the will could run rampant, using, discarding, destroying» (210).

In this world—which for Connie represents the only chance she has to escape from both her physical confinement and from all that contributes to defining her as a marginal subject—the overcoming of the dichotomic discourse is being carried on. Her exclusion and confinement are related to the interiority of thought and to the idea of an individuality that is ahistorical, defined by nature and not subject to change.⁹ For Foucault, the tricotomy Truth / power / knowledge represents this idea and traps the subject within the limits imposed by the dichotomy subject/object; according to the French philosopher and to his archaeological project, the mad subject becomes, if not the first «victim» of this dichotomy, one of them. As we have already suggested, Piercy's writing analyses the construction of individuality and its relation to gender, race and social class to suggest possibilities for a more plural theory of the self while entailing a strong social critique.¹⁰ This is what Piercy has said on the function of her writing:

My [...] writing is intended to be useful: I live in a situation of feedback. I articulate what I perceive needs to be articulated out of me, out of those around me, out of those I work with, out of those who push on me, out of those who are trying to kill me (quoted in Kessler: 312).

Writing thus becomes a way of stating your own identity against the one that society imposes on you. The following lines, for example, are taken from a poem written by a mental patient (a woman) during a psychotic episode and are based on the exploration of the process of loss and recovery of reason. Her words underline how the excluded subject, the mentally ill person in our case,

is not only defined by others, but how she feels obliged to define herself as a subject within the limits of the institution:

GOOD SCHIZOPHRENIC

Pays in advance
Keeps appointments and is never tardy
Responds to treatment
Takes medication regularly
Dresses in good taste ...

BAD SCHIZOPHRENIC

Doesn't pay her bills
Misses appointments and is often late
Is surly
Is slipshod about taking his (her) medicine or never takes it
Contradicts the doctor's opinions, diagnosis, etc.
Is overweight and unattractive in other ways ...
(Blank, 1991: 53).

This is exactly what happens to Consuelo when she talks of herself. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Consuelo describes and defines her Chicana identity using the parameters of the culture that marginalizes her for belonging to a determined minority and, as Blau du Plessis argues: «Connie Ramos is a typical Chicana, indeed somewhat overloaded with typicality by Piercy. She is a primer of the brutality of poverty, of a social psychology caused by oppression» (1985: 184). Her condition of subject constructed according to accepted and dominant cultural norms is implied in each one of her words and it breaks the weak barrier of resistance that in her life, at times, she had tried to build between herself and her difference. And this difference is understood as blameworthy, because she speaks from the perspective of dominant Western thought:

I've always had three names inside me. Consuelo, my given name. Consuelo a Mexican woman, a servant of servants, silent as clay. The woman who suffers, who bears and endures. Then I'm Connie, who managed to get two years of college—till Consuelo got pregnant. Connie got decent jobs from time to time and fought welfare for a little extra money for Angie. She got me on a bus when I had to leave Chicago. But it was her who married Eddie, she thought it was smart. Then I'm Conchita, the low-down drunken mean part of me who gets by in jail, in the bughouse, who loves no good men, who hurt my daughter (122).

The definition of Consuelo's identity—and above all her self-defining her self according to a given set of norms which belong to a culture she does not belong to—brings into play once more the construction of what is considered

true and what is considered false. And it is a confused and frightened Consuelo who asks herself, during an interview with a group of psychiatrists, what is happening and what the rules of the game are:

She could not guess which way to cue her answers. What were they looking for? Would it be better to fall into their net or through it? If only she knew. If only she knew what the net consisted of. She was taking a test in a subject, and she didn't even know what courses it was (28-29).

The questioning that Piercy carries out of the humanist subject and of its place in contemporary Western society also materializes in the use she makes of time. Connie's character belongs to the 1970s States (and the medical institution she is locked in has got a real name, it is Rockover State Psychiatric Hospital in the State of New York) (p. 379). This frees the subject from the dimension of ahistoricity and grounds her into the real world. In other words, Connie is the fictional representation of a real woman that possibly exists (or has existed) somewhere, but, at the same time, Piercy gives her the chance to travel through time and meet other people and other women (the subversive potential of fantasy). The author gives her character the chance to find a different ontology of the self, that is to say, a possible solution to Connie's desperate quest that the present organization of Western capitalistic society cannot give her. As Erzulia is the future specular representation of Sybil, Luciente can be interpreted as Connie's future representation because, as Gygas suggests:

Luciente is an alternate self, a female who is not torn between motherhood and self-realization—a kind of 'animus' that contrasts with and complements the 'anima'. It is through the 'animus', the principle of logos or reason, that Connie finally realizes that she must fight back, that it is possible to oppose an adjustment to the oppressive society (Gygas 1991: 56).

Nonetheless, Piercy's approach to the problem of the subject is not as simple as that. She does not locate the answer in one utopic world because, as we go on reading the text, we discover the existence of more than one future at a time. Luciente and her friends' society is just one of the possibilities. The other is represented by a highly polluted world in which conservative ideologies have won and in which the barrier between the haves and haves-not is much higher than the one which exists in contemporary society ('Gildina, the richies—who are they, really?' 'The same as in your time—the Rockemellons, the Morganfords, the Duke-Ponts. They are ancient. I mean some of them were alive in your time, I suppose, if you are for real' p. 297). In this dystopic future world, poor people provide organs for the rich and are obliged to live underground, as the little pure air left is for the small wealthy community. The key character of this *other* future is represented by Gildina, a girl «cosmetically fixed for sex use» (p. 299) who

clearly mirrors Dolly, Connie's niece. When Connie realises that Matapoissett is at war with the other world and that her friends' society is threatened by a world which is the result of the one she lives in, she decides that Luciente's war is her war and decides to fight back the order of things —which in her case is represented by the mental institution— which allows the subject only the assigned individuality: «So that was the other world that might come to be. That was Luciente's war, and she [Connie] was enlisted in it» (301). The last part of the narrative depicts Connie's struggle to avoid the lobotomy she has been put down for by the doctors. Under the influence of what she has seen in the dystopic future world —where everybody has electronic implants and is controlled through them— and the discovery that it could become *the* only future she decides to poison the medical staff and manages to kill four doctors:

I murdered them dead. Because they are the violence prone. Theirs is the money and the power, theirs the poison that slows the mind and dulls the heart. Theirs are the powers of life and death. I killed them because it is war [...] *For Skip, for Alice, for Tina, for Captain Cream, for you who will be born from my best hopes, to you I dedicate my act of war. At least once I fought and won* (375).

In spite of what Connie thinks she does not win and in the end she is lobotomized, as we discover from the medical excerpts from 'the Official History of Consuelo Camacho Ramos'.¹¹ Her war, the war against the psychiatric apparatus, and society in general, has been apparently lost and utopia and Matapoissett have not been enough to free her from the power that dividing practices and power relations exercise on individuals. In her medical case histories she has been assigned an identity from the beginning and the whole medical staff has behaved in consequence with it. Consuelo Ramos is described as a 'socially disorganized individual' (377), 'incoherent' (378), 'hostile, uncooperative, and threatening' (379) and in the last of her case histories: «... Remained acutely psychotic [...] She has been uncooperative, attempting to refuse medication, and has no insight of her illness [...] The patient has no consistent notions of right or wrong» (380).

3. RESISTING THE EXCLUSION

This violent end of Connie's story, which apparently seems to give a paradoxical solution to the rest of the novel, is, in a sense, a logical solution for a text in which the helpless position of the marginalized subject in society is criticised. Consuelo demonstrated she was receptive but in spite of her efforts

and her capacity of resistance and finally her choice to fight back, she has not been able to overcome the epistemological and ontological limits imposed on her subjectivity «by the dominant white male culture» (Maciunas, 1991: 257). So I think that Piercy does not attempt to give a solution, what she does is to suggest how a subject who is willing to change and who rejects the ahistorical essentialist view of the construction of subjectivity can be an active agent in the formation of a different and maybe fairer society and, as Patricia Dunker underlines, one of the main themes of the novel is the freedom that the subject maintains to resist dominant ideologies: «We can choose, even the most apparently powerless woman can; and that is the most subversively radical truth in *Woman on the Edge of Time*» (1992: 103). In short, what seems to be important in the novel is the attitude that Consuelo develops of the necessity not only of resisting but of a different way of understanding the ontological position of the individual within the limits of social structures. According to Cranny Francis: «Connie's story reveals the violence endemic to the ideologies of gender, race and class dominant in her society; those ideologies must be revealed, analysed, and eradicated so that their violence is also removed.» (1990: 131)

It is from this perspective that Piercy's writing can be defined as political writing, as it questions established social and ontological categories. Julia Kristeva, in her essay «A New Type of Intellectual: the Dissident»¹² declared that there are three kinds of dissidents —and as we understand from the title of her essay, the dissident is understood as an intellectual—, the rebel, the psychoanalyst and the writer: «Thirdly, there is the writer who experiments with the limits of identity, producing texts where the law does not exist outside language» (Kristeva 1986: 295). So the writer represents the intellectual who through his or her narrative can question the normative identity and subvert it, at least in her writing. What Piercy does in her novel is to write under the sign of gender while attempting to subvert and neutralise that sign as it is understood within the ontological categories which define the Cartesian subject. By relating Connie's story, she opens the way to the possibility of thinking of the self differently and of accepting this difference as a valuable element in our culture and society.

NOTES

¹ «But at the moment of the textual production of *Madness and Civilization* as well as that of *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault inaugurates a mode of investigation, and a type of concern, which does not cease to appear and re-appear throughout the enormously labyrinthine and sometimes fissured mosaic of his works», Michael Clark, *Foucault and Adorno: Two Forms of Critique of the Modern Subject*, Ann Arbor, U.M.I., 1990, p. 2.

² «The whole *History of Madness* is evidence of the operation performed on the mad individual, from Renaissance humanism to modern times: excommunicated from society, he [sic] is restricted to the silence of the asylum (part I); labelled immoral by Descartes' *cogito*, classed among animals because of his wondering mind, he is restored to his condition of *nothingness* by internment (part II); relieved of his shackles by bourgeois philanthropy, he is at the same time chained to his situation as an «insane», mentally ill person, carefully watched over by medical perception (part III)», Antonio Serrano, «Posfacio», in Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin llamada Alexina B.*, Madrid, Editorial Revolución, 1985, p. 165 (my translation).

³ In Foucault's thought, the insane person has to be understood as a subject who is excluded from the interiority of thought and who is considered different because of his or her exclusion. The mad subject is never considered as such from a pathological perspective. «We must describe, from the start of its trajectory, that 'other form' which relegates Reason and Madness to one side or the other of its action as things henceforth external, deaf to all exchange, and as though dead to one another. This is doubtless an uncomfortable region. To explore it we must renounce the convenience of terminal truths, and never let ourselves be guided by what we may know of madness. None of the concepts of psychopathology, even and especially in the implicit process of retrospections, can play an organizing role. What is originaive is the caesura that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason», Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, p. ix, my emphasis.

⁴ See on this topic: Michael Clark, *Foucault and Adorno: Two Forms of Critique of the Modern Subject*, Ann Arbor, U.M.I., 1990 (especially pp.: 1-142). Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, London, Tavistock Publications, 1967. Antonio Serrano, «Posfacio», en Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin llamada Alexina B.*, Madrid, Editorial Revolución, 1985 (especially pp. 163 and 165).

⁵ «Introducing complexity, describing deviances, considering differences, dissolving that which identifies us, denouncing, finally, the aims of humanism, showing how the West has found it necessary to constitute an Other—the madman, the deviant, the criminal—in order to reaffirm the truth of the Self, of Man who is born already trained by the discourses of knowledge ...», Antonio Serrano, *op. cit.*, p. 163, my translation and emphasis. See also Robert Young, *White Mythologies. Writing History and the West*, London, Routledge, 1990, especially pp. vi-viii and the first chapter.

⁶ As Carol Farley Kessler explains: «Piercy sets this eutopia [sic], Mouth-of-Matapoisset, Massachusetts in 2137, five generations into the future. She then juxtaposes Matapoisset with a 1970s New York City mental hospital, repressive dystopias». *Extrapolation: a Journal of Science-Fiction and Fantasy*, vol. 28, n. 4, 1987, p. 311.

⁷ For the analysis of the treatment of motherhood in *Woman on the Edge of Time* see Elaine Orr «Mothering as Good Fiction: Instances from Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*», *Journal of Narrative Technique*, Spring 1993, vol. 23, n. 2, pp. 61-79. A critique of the treatment of motherhood in *Woman on the Edge of Time* can be found in Patricia Dunker, 1992: 101.

⁸ On the relation between gender, capitalism and social critique from a Marxist point of view see Jeff Hearn, «Gender: Biology, Nature and Capitalism», in Terrell Carver, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 222-245.

⁹ See on this topic, 'Essentially Speaking': Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence, de Diana Fuss (*Hypatia* 3, vol. 3, Winter 1990, pp. 62-80): «Perhaps more than any other notion in the vocabulary of recent feminist poststructuralist theory, 'essentialism' has come to represent both our greatest fear and our greatest temptation [...] And yet, one can hear echoing from the corners of the debates on essentialism renewed interest in its possibilities and potential usages, sounds which articulate themselves in the form of calls to 'risk' or to 'date' essentialism. Essentialism has been given new life by these invitations to consider a possible strategic deployment of essence; *we could even say that, in feminist theory, essentialism is the issue which simply refuses to die*», (p. 62, my emphasis). See also, amongst others: Cadava-Connor-Nancy, *Who Comes after the*

Subject?, New York, Routledge, 1991; Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*, London, MacMillan, 1989; Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde. Freud to Foucault*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991; Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*, London, Routledge, 1989; Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self. Gendered Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, London, Routledge, 1993; Caroline Ramazanoglu, ed., *Up Against Foucault. Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, London, Routledge, 1993; Victor J. Seidler, *Recovering the Self. Morality and Social Theory*, London, Routledge, 1994; Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York, Methuen, 1987.

¹⁰ In any case, it is important to stress how this position entails a paradoxical stance because, as Jonathan Dollimore stresses, we have to think that: «... while some literary theorists deplore essentialism in all its forms, there is ample evidence of its historically progressive function for subordinate cultures». And a bit further down: « These very differences underscore the diverse histories which the concept of essentialism often elides. In a recent study Diana Fuss suggests that essentialism and the theory of identity deriving from it must be neither sanctified nor vilified but simultaneously assumed and questioned (*Essentially Speaking*, 104) [...] There is also a history which suggests that the essentialist/anti-essentialist opposition is rather less stable than is often supposed in theoretical discourse», J. Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde. Freud to Foucault*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 26.

¹¹ See pags. 377-381.

¹² I have chosen this essay as it was written in 1977 (*Tel Quel*, Winter 1977, n. 74, pp. 3-8; the edition I use is the one published in *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi, ed., Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, pp. 292-300) and Picrey's *Woman on the Edge of Time* was written in 1976. They both belong to the same historical, social and cultural period.

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