

The Role of Darwin in Elizabeth Grosz's Deleuzian Feminist Theory: Sexual Difference, Ontology, and Intervention

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In this article on Elizabeth Grosz's philosophy and its implications for discussions about feminist theory, I first suggest that Charles Darwin plays a particular role in Grosz's recent ontological thought. This role is to provide help in joining together two incompatible sources in her work: Gilles Deleuze's monistic ontology of a constant flow of new differentiations, on the one hand, and Luce Irigaray's thought of sexual difference as the primary ontological difference, on the other. I argue that Grosz's intellectual project has developed into a grand general theory of change in which both Darwin and Irigaray are turned into ontologists in a Deleuzian vein. I then point out that Grosz's ontology also includes a political aspect, which manifests in the fact that Grosz redescribes Darwin through interpreting him primarily as a theorist of "event" and the unexpected. However, through an analysis of the discussion on Grosz between Luciana Parisi and Jami Weinstein, I speculate whether Grosz's ambition to provide a total and complete explanation of change encourages the tone of feminist discussion toward one of explanation rather than intervention.

Elizabeth Grosz, one of the leading thinkers in contemporary feminist philosophy, has included Charles Darwin as a major figure in her work for more than a decade now. In *Time Travels*, Grosz expressed the view that Darwin may prove to be as "complex, ambivalent and rewarding" to read as Freud has been for feminist theory (Grosz 2005, 17), and she has since done her best to demonstrate this. The most interesting characteristic of Grosz's reading of Darwin is that she uses him to highlight the unpredictable character of the future. This argumentation runs directly counter to the one used by most Darwinists, who tend to close political space by drawing on Darwin to assert that nature and inheritance limit the possibilities of social change. Beginning from this fresh use of Darwin in Grosz's work during the 2000s, I approach Darwin's role in Grosz's evolving thought from the perspective of its philosophical stakes.

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I argue that Grosz is drawing upon evolutionary theory to smooth over the difficult combination of, and tension between, the two different philosophical frames with which she has long been preoccupied: the Deleuzian ontology of becoming, on the one hand, and the Irigarayan idea of sexual difference as ontological, on the other hand. More precisely, I argue that Darwin gives Grosz a means of shedding light on the difficult and crucial Deleuzian ontological idea of pure difference through linking it with sexual difference.

Grosz's work in the area of ontology amounts to a complete theory of change, involving the issue of substance and individuation, as well as the issue of time. Instead of an overarching concept of matter, she more significantly philosophizes with the concept of life, and ultimately, with the concept of "forces." She sums up her approach in the introduction to her latest collection, *Becoming Undone*: "Matter and life become, and become undone. They transform and are transformed. This is less a new kind of materialism than it is a new understanding of the forces, both material and immaterial, that direct us to the future" (Grosz 2011, 5). Her contribution to ontological thought, whether phrased in terms of "matter," "life," or "forces," is unique in feminist philosophy. The role of Darwin in this ontology is worth looking at more closely, not least because Darwin himself did not develop his thesis in relation to such philosophical terms as *ontology*, but instead with respect to the science of biological species.

Grosz's reading of Darwin is an intervention both in interpretations of evolutionary theory and in its role in feminist discussion, but it also raises questions from the point of view of feminist theorizing. I will end by asking: in which direction is Grosz's intervention likely to lead feminist discussion? Most important, I raise critical questions concerning Grosz's ambition to provide a total philosophical ontology and a complete explanation of change. I argue that as feminist theory, Grosz's contribution consists of a shift in tone from intervention to explanation, and therefore, although emphasizing change, Grosz simultaneously jeopardizes the political opening toward the future that she achieves through her innovative redescription of Darwin.

GROSZ'S ONTOLOGICAL LIAISONS

Grosz takes intellectual cues from many thinkers, including Lacan in her earlier work, and notably Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche (Grosz 2000), but she draws her strongest inspiration from her two masters: Gilles Deleuze and Luce Irigaray.¹ This creates an immediate query: how is it possible to combine two such different philosophies? This is particularly puzzling from the point of view of ontology, as I will try to elaborate in what follows. Here, my main point is that within his generation, Deleuze is unique in proposing a monistic ontology beyond the mediation of representation, consciousness, and the subject, whereas Irigaray poses her fundamental feminist challenges in the context of modern phenomenology, which is a philosophy of subject and consciousness. Joining Deleuze and Irigaray together is difficult to achieve because Deleuze's approach assumes a direct access to ontology, a "God's-eye point of

view” in a way, that is shared by much of modern science. In contrast, Irigaray’s ideas about sexual difference as ontological difference are posed in the realm of consciousness philosophy where the human subject provides access to being. I argue that in Grosz’s thought, Irigaray’s sexual difference is transformed into a principle of ontological change in the Deleuzian scheme, and Darwin provides the means to combine them. In the following I explicate this ontological construction in more detail.

The philosophical issue of ontology concerns the primary being, “the thing in itself,” as Kant phrased it. Most modern continental philosophy since Descartes, particularly Kant and Husserl, does not believe in direct access to reality itself, but focuses on the structure of consciousness as a condition of access to the world outside of consciousness. Yet Deleuze, exceptionally for his generation of philosophers (and inspired by Bergson), builds a connection to Spinoza’s monistic ontology,² which was not concerned with the modern consciousness philosophy of Husserl, Kant, and Descartes. In *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari call Spinoza “the prince of philosophers” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 48), adding that Spinoza’s level of thought on immanence, in their view, was achieved again only once, by Bergson. They describe Bergson’s work, arguing that it “marks out a plane that slices through the chaos—both the infinite movement of a substance that continually propagates itself, and the image of thought that everywhere continually spreads a pure consciousness by right (*immanence is not immanent ‘to’ consciousness but the other way around*)” (49; emphasis added).

Within a monistic ontology of one substance, a crucial issue is individuation of separate things within the substance. The ontological problem of individuation concerns how the original “one” divides into those individual “things” that we normally deal with instead of the substance itself. Deleuze’s thought is characterized by being strongly against the idea that what is (the substance) would originally be individuated into individuals or kinds, or any other identities as such; reality does not consist of individual things, but is rather a chaos, matter, a totality. However, it is also a constant process of individuating and de-individuating. Crucially, individuation does not derive from consciousness, and consciousness does not constitute the division of chaos into individual things. Instead, matter/world/substance is conceived of as a field of forces that continuously becomes identities that dissolve into yet other ones in complicated ways that Deleuze and Guattari explore through their rich conceptual apparatus of planes, intensities, flows, and molar and molecular assemblages. In short, Deleuzian ontology is an ontology of substance that self-differentiates in its eternal becoming. This total and general level of continuous flow of becoming of one into different ones has become Grosz’s most important topic, directly deriving inspiration from Deleuze, who in *Difference and Repetition* writes:

The primacy of identity, however conceived, defines the world of representation. But modern thought is born of the failure of representation, of the loss of identities, and of the discovery of all the forces that act under the representation of the identical. . . . All identities are only simulated, produced as optical “effect” by the more profound game of difference and repetition. (Deleuze 1994, xix)

When Grosz reads Deleuze, as she does in most of her writing, she is interested in the “more profound” level, as Deleuze puts it, which does not consider “just effects.” The more profound level of substance does not consist of separate (individual/individuated) identities but instead a “more profound game of difference and repetition.”

Grosz uses many words when referring to the “more profound” level, such as “chaos itself,” “matter,” or “the real.” She writes, for example, “The concept of chaos is also known or invoked through the concepts of: the outside, the real, the virtual, the world, materiality, nature, totality, the cosmos, each of which is a narrowing and specification of chaos from a particular point of view” (Grosz 2008, 27). The first term in her list, “the outside,” implies that there is also an inside, which is a reference to the remainder of the stage of consciousness in pursuit of accessing what is outside of it. The pattern of outside and inside is, however, crucially abandoned by Deleuze, and Grosz is in pursuit of similar thought.

Grosz’s Deleuzian interest does not, therefore, concern conceptualizations or representations of matter/world/the real, but rather concerns matter/world/the real *itself*: as Deleuze puts it, “the forces that act under the representation of the identical” and “the more profound game of difference and repetition”; the thought, that

is born of the failure of representation, of the loss of identities, and of the discovery of all the forces that act under the representation of the identical. . . . All identities are only simulated, produced as optical “effect” by the more profound game of difference and repetition. We propose to think difference in itself, independently of the forms of representation. (Deleuze 1994, ixx)

As a philosophical premise, a declaration of a more profound view, which bypasses the merely human and everyday view, can be criticized as being a “God’s-eye point of view,” but it also easily converges with the point of view of modern science. Philosophically, the main point of Deleuzianism that Grosz has adopted is that access to the real, or to the world outside of consciousness, is not limited merely to the conditions provided by the structure of human or transcendental consciousness as the only passage to reality.

Deleuze and ontology is a major concern in Grosz’s work, but she is equally inspired by Irigaray’s idea of sexual difference, which has been stimulating her intellectually even longer than Deleuze has. However, philosophically, Irigaray’s premise of sexual difference can best be understood as concerning the subject, the philosophical consciousness of the phenomenological tradition. It involves an ontology that begins with phenomenological-existential concerns of human or transcendental consciousness and experience, combined with psychoanalysis.³ The philosophical subject and the psychoanalytical subject merge in this work. Irigaray’s fundamental intervention is to assert that the feminine and the masculine are two different relations to the world.

Irigaray’s thought targets the most central element of the modern phenomenological and existential tradition, whether that is understood as consciousness, as the abstracted generalized human, as *Dasein*, or as transcendental subjectivity as providing

the passageway to the world, and whether this abstraction is understood as the structural condition of experience and knowledge, or as grasping in terms of a more practical/hands-on relation to the world. In the understanding of this ontologically relevant structure, Irigaray sees a key error: what has been occluded, veiled in the West from the beginning, is that it needs to be acknowledged as not one, but as “at least” two.

In *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, Irigaray writes: “Should Being divide in two, what happens to presence? If this obscure key that opens man’s world is broken into at least two parts, what then becomes of man’s time, of man in his space-time?” (Irigaray 1999, 123), and in *To be Two*: “Sexual difference is a part of human identity in so far as it is a privileged dimension of the human being and of his or her fulfilment. To conceive the subject as one, as singular, as one and many, as one and as an ensemble of ones is tantamount to misunderstanding an essential property of human existence and essence” (Irigaray 2001, 33).

Instead of one, the subject/human/man/consciousness should be conceived of as two, or as at least two. The doctrine of sexual difference in Irigaray’s thought, therefore, does not simply state that women and men are different. Sexual difference is the claim that the (transcendental) subject is not one but two: in this context, the masculine and the feminine become an ontological claim. For Irigaray, sexual difference is linked to the fact that being appears, and is grasped, in a different way by the masculine and the feminine as different morphologies.⁴ In psychoanalytical terms this is a difference that is related to both the ability to give birth, and to different positions in birth. Irigaray argues that Western culture is dominated by the masculine, in other words that Western culture is dominated by the world lived through the masculine body and senses, and a masculine relation to the mother.

In Grosz’s texts sexual difference is often named as an “irreducible” difference, as Irigaray also calls it. The vocabulary of “irreducibility” draws attention to Husserl’s reduction, and to operations of consciousness (reduced experience of consciousness as the experience that is left when you have bracketed what is inessential). Simultaneously, “irreducibility” provides a sense of a ground and a foundation, which also corresponds to the status that sexual difference receives in Grosz’s texts: it appears as a postulate/axiom, as something that is not to be questioned, and as such, it competes with the Deleuzian ontology of nonindividuated matter.

These two cornerstones of Grosz’s thought do not match, creating an ongoing tension in her thinking, in my view: if sexual difference is a difference that is irreducible, precisely on an ontological level, then the Deleuzian ontology of constant flow of differences and identities into others seems to meet a limit, a point where the foundational, irreducible difference of masculinity and femininity does not flow. Irigaray’s (human/consciousness-based) ontology of two clashes with Deleuze’s (substance-based) ontology of one.

The tension between Deleuzian and Irigarayan aspirations in Grosz’s thought has already been recognized within discussions in feminist theory. For example, in an exchange between Luciana Parisi and Jami Weinstein (Parisi 2010; Weinstein 2010), the tension between Deleuze’s and Irigaray’s elements of Grosz’s work is clearly

presented, even though the debate is staged in slightly different terms than it is here. According to Weinstein, Parisi underscores the paradox of Grosz holding the two views, a “neomaterialist study of Darwinian evolution” and a “staunch support of sexual difference” simultaneously; whereas Weinstein’s own reading of Grosz seeks to “wrest her from the perceived paradox” (Weinstein 2010, 165). I will return to this debate later when discussing the effects of Grosz’s theorizing for feminist discussion.

In these discussions of Grosz’s thinking, evolutionary theory is often understood to be coextensive with Deleuze’s ontology of becoming. Yet this leaves unasked the question of how and why Darwin came to be associated with Deleuzian ontology in Grosz’s thought in the first place. Even more interesting is how Grosz proceeds to develop Darwin’s theory of life into a total ontology, toward which she moves even more strongly in her more recent work. In her latest work, ontology is less developed as matter that becomes, since Grosz emphasizes that it is not matter as a substance she is interested in, but rather forces and life (Grosz 2011, 32). The real, the becoming of differences, duration, and becoming itself are even more strongly connected to the theory of evolution in the life sciences now than they were before (43). The grand project of building Deleuze’s ontology into the notion of life instead of that of matter is not independent of Grosz’s second ontological cornerstone, the idea of sexual difference.⁵

DARWIN IN GROSZ’S TEXTS

Darwin first appeared in Grosz’s publications in her 1999 collection *Becomings* (Grosz 1999), and he has since stayed prominently in her significant body of work through the first decade of the 2000s, including: *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (2004); *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (2005); *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (2008). Darwin has also occupied an increasingly bigger role in her writing, so that Grosz’s latest collection, *Becoming Undone* (2011) is subtitled *Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*. Whereas in the earlier volumes, Grosz presents Darwin as someone who helps in understanding Deleuze, in the later works, the roles have been reversed: Deleuze is now presented as a developer of Darwin’s thought (Grosz 2011, 4). However, Deleuze has been present in Grosz’s work longer than Darwin, and at least since *Volatile Bodies* (1994). Since that time Grosz, has also connected Deleuze’s thought primarily with Spinoza’s ontological concerns (Grosz 1994, 160–83). It is fair to say that Grosz had established herself by the beginning of the third millennium as a Deleuzian thinker, along with a few other feminist thinkers, most notably Rosi Braidotti. In my view, Grosz’s move toward Darwin seems to be conditioned primarily by Deleuzian ontological questions.

Among the growing number of contemporary Deleuzian thinkers, Grosz is rare in developing Darwin into a major figure for interpreting Deleuze’s thought. Many writers on Deleuze (Bogue 1989; Massumi 1992; Hardt 1993; Boundas and Olkowski 1994; Patton 1996; Marks 1998; May 2005) do not mention Darwin at all. This is probably related to the fact that Deleuze himself mentions Darwin only briefly, once

in *Difference and Repetition*, in connection to Bergson (Deleuze 1994, 248–49); and again in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 52–54, 258, 263) where Deleuze and Guattari briefly pay attention to Darwin, evolutionism, and neo-evolutionism, critically discussing the role of the stable concept of species and filiation in evolutionary theory,⁶ and concluding: “Finally, becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance” (263). Accordingly, although there is currently considerable multidisciplinary interest in developing Deleuzian thought in work on biological themes, connecting the content of Darwin’s own work on species with Deleuzian becoming as strongly as Grosz does is an original move and deserves attention as such.

Considered in the context of the renewed interest in evolutionary theory in the humanities and social sciences since the 1990s, Grosz’s reading of Darwin is also original in terms of being against Darwinists. Her reading varies significantly from the standard neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, which at its barest presumes that variation happens in order to enable the survival of the fittest and for life to maximally continue. Against the neo-Darwinians, Grosz emphasizes that Darwin himself did not seek out causes of individual variation, but only their effects (Grosz 2004, 40). The most interesting effect of variation, for Grosz, is proliferation: Darwin’s finding that there is constant variation, which happens just for its own sake, is particularly fascinating to Grosz. In Darwin’s view, constant random variation is much more crucial than selection, which anyway builds on variation; variation is the foundation for constant evolution: “I have spoken of selection as the paramount power, yet its action absolutely depends on what we in our ignorance call spontaneous accidental variability” (Darwin 1885, I:236; quoted in Grosz 2004, 41).

In addition to her emphasis on variation as the background for any selection, the other exciting element in Darwin’s work, according to Grosz, is the different modes of selection. Grosz underlines the fact that there are two different mechanisms of selection in Darwin’s approach: natural selection and sexual selection (Grosz 2004, 65–79). As she herself phrases it, she further develops Darwin’s “radical distinction between natural and sexual selection—that is, between skills and qualities that enable survival and those that enable courtship and pleasure” (Grosz 2008, 33). The distinction between natural and sexual selection is crucial to how Grosz understands sexuality, and this again contrasts with most Darwinists. For Grosz, the most interesting point is that sexual selection produces excessiveness in the development and transformation of species, and that this excessiveness further enhances proliferation (33). In other words, she intimately relates sexual selection to the production of the new.

When Grosz brought Darwin into her thought, she had already been working on Deleuze and Irigaray for some time. I suggest that Darwin’s evolutionary theory does not bring something new to, or divergent from, Deleuze and Irigaray in Grosz’s thought, but rather helps Grosz to solve some crucial problems in bringing these two thinkers together. I argue that Grosz has appointed Darwin in order to reinforce the Deleuzian doctrine of pure difference, on the one hand, which is a crucial element in

her ontology of becoming, and to be able to simultaneously support the Irigarayan doctrine of sexual difference, on the other. Her reading of Darwin allows Grosz to fit the two together less incongruously. Two concepts that look at the outset alike but convey enormously different traces within the tradition of philosophy—that is, Deleuze’s “pure difference” and Irigaray’s “sexual difference”—are at stake here.

PURE DIFFERENCE AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

In Deleuze’s ultimately monistic ontology, there is only one matter/world/real/chaos (in Grosz’s terms), yet there is also constant becoming of this one into individuated differing ones. The differentiation concerned is an ontological level of differentiation, the matter/chaos/world differentiates itself, and this process of differentiation is what Deleuze calls the pure difference or difference in itself. Pure difference is the crux of ontological “becoming,” with which Grosz has been occupied for more than a decade, and she discusses it again further in her latest collection, now using the term “pre-individual individuation” as well (Grosz 2011, 35–39). She also specifies that: “Becoming is a perpetual change in substance, but it cannot be identified with substance—or subject—that changes” (51). Rather, she phrases becoming in terms of “force” and “duration.” There are many attempts to express pure difference, that is, difference in itself, both in words and in metaphorical descriptions. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze writes on pure difference as that “which differs with itself,” comparing it, for example, to a process of lightning separating from its background (Deleuze 1994, 28). Deleuze’s pure difference is most often talked about in terms of folding, unfolding, and refolding, or as actualizing of virtuality, but also as palpation,⁷ as identity in nonidentity, and as pre-individual individuation.⁸

However pure difference is conceptualized—as lightning, as folding, or as pre-individual individuation—the problem posed by the idea of pure difference is how to understand the constant becoming of the one into individuated differing ones, and most important, why this would happen. The Deleuzian ontology that is resolutely against identities on the ontological level, and instead insists on constant becoming, raises the question of the origin of that motion: why, one can ask, why this movement of folding, individuation, becoming? It is not consciousness/the subject that drives the movement of differentiation—the matter differentiates itself. But why? Why does the matter move rather than stay still? Grosz seems to have been posing this question ever since her deep involvement with Deleuzian thought.

An answer to the problem of change that Grosz first proposes in *The Nick of Time* is to make the Deleuzian thought of pure difference more intelligible through the existence of a force called “time.” She poses time, against any Kantian approach, as “not merely the attribute of a subject, imposed by us on the world” (Grosz 2004, 4), but instead as a force in reality.⁹ Time becomes in her philosophical exploration a force, and as such, it is an aspect of matter, a force within the matter, a force that makes matter move, fold, and unfold and produce difference. Time is something that always moves forward and generates “more rather than less complexity.” Time is a

force that “produces divergences rather than convergences, variations rather than resemblances” (7). The constant differentiation of matter as a result of time happens continuously, and just for its own sake, not for the sake of anything else. Leaving aside the merits and demerits of this theory of time as a force¹⁰ (which Grosz seems to leave aside in her most recent publications), the most interesting aspect of *Nick of Time* is that she then applauds Darwin as the greatest theoretician of time, who also makes Deleuze’s becoming intelligible (7–10, 17–62). Darwin’s theory, for her, is precisely a description of the generation of pure differences, differences for their own sake. In other words, Grosz reads Darwin in order to explicate Deleuze’s becoming and difference in itself.

If Darwin’s work is offered as something that makes Deleuze’s thought understandable in *The Nick of Time* and in *Time Travels*, in the articles of the latest collection, *Becoming Undone*, Grosz makes a further leap into developing life into a general ontology attributed more directly originally to Darwin, as she unfolds how, through Bergson’s thought, Deleuze is directed to a concept of inorganic life (Grosz 2011, 26–38). Darwin provides a new ontology, which Bergson and Deleuze have developed further.¹¹ “Darwin, Bergson, and Deleuze between them produce an account of the real as impinging force, the real as difference in itself” (43). “Difference is the methodology of life and indeed, of the universe itself” (45). What I find remarkable is that Darwin becomes here, in the end, effectively portrayed as an ontologist rather than as a life scientist.

How do sexual difference and identities of gender and sexuality, such as female and male, feminine and masculine, relate to the idea of a constant ontological level of becoming in Grosz’s thought? On the basis of the general theory of constant differentiation, one should assume that sexual differences and identities are also to be theorized as constantly evolving and changing. Indeed, there are theorists, such as Parisi, who elaborate on Deleuze and the idea of thousands of sexes (Parisi 2009, 74–75; 2010, 155). But this cannot be so for Grosz, who subscribes to Irigaray’s notion of sexual difference as the ontologically foundational one and as unchanging.

Darwin proves to be rewarding company here. Grosz asserts with delight in *Nick of Time* “the irreducibility of sexual difference, [is] a claim that finds startling confirmation in the writings of Darwin” (Grosz 2004, 14). In evolutionary theory, “sexual difference is the strategy life has developed to ensure its maximum variation and proliferation. It is the very motor of life’s self-variation.” It is “the most successful and the least variable element in the descent of life” (10).

In relation to Irigaray, Grosz frequently returns to the thought of “the irreducibility of sexual difference” which is “the very engine of life on earth” (Grosz 2008, ix)—with (interestingly) recurring metaphors of motor and engine. The idea here is that when there are two individuals who give their genes to a new individual, this multiplies the chances of variation in comparison to a continuation of life through non-sexed systems of reproduction.

In an uncanny way, a biological “fact” is offered by Grosz here as confirmation of the philosophically reached “irreducibility” of sexual difference in Luce Irigaray’s

philosophy. This is a mix of genres that one could expect to raise the eyebrows of a more philosophically purist follower of Irigaray, but for Grosz, it produces the desired result of combining the two philosophers. Interpreting the two-sex system of procreation as the engine, which effectively takes the role of the force and transposes the pure difference of ontological becoming onto the two-sex system, is even more evident in the most recent articles included in Grosz's *Becoming Undone* collection. Grosz presents Irigaray increasingly as a thinker of life and nature. Sexual difference is a "mysterious force of creativity" (Grosz 2011, 101), and sexual selection is another way of understanding sexual difference (117). She writes:

Without sexual difference, there could be no life as we know it, no living bodies, no terrestrial movement, no differentiation of species, no differentiation of humans from each other into races and classes—only sameness, monosexuality, hermaphroditism, the endless structured (bacterial or microbial) reproduction of the same. Sexual difference is the very machinery, the engine, of living difference, the mechanism of variation, the generator of the new. (101)

Darwin therefore ends up being ideal company for Grosz's project of bringing together Deleuze and Irigaray. Evolutionary theory both confirms the Deleuzian ontology of matter that proliferates only for its own sake, and authorizes Irigaray's postulate of sexual difference, which is a difference more basic than any other difference.

As already mentioned, it is notable that in Grosz's reading Darwin becomes an ontologist. He undergoes a transformation from being an empirical life scientist who asked questions about species, to a philosophical ontologist whose thought is assumed to cover simultaneously the being of stones, societies, languages, and everything possible. Through redescribing Darwin as an ontologist, Grosz makes him appear as an inventor of a general theory of change and becoming, instead of being merely a scientist who studied the evolution of species.

Equally, a transformation of Irigaray occurs: she is included as a co-author in the monistic ontological project, whereby the psychoanalytical and phenomenological context of her texts is eclipsed. It is true that Irigaray cherishes the human couple and the distinction of two principles, the feminine and the masculine. Grosz, however, combines Darwin and Irigaray through the more precise phenomenon of two-sex reproduction. In my view she does this at the cost of two significant risks. First, she makes Irigaray's sexual difference, which is a psychoanalytical and philosophical *a priori*, dependent upon facts of bio-science, which seriously undermines the genre of theorizing for many philosophers in the Husserlian tradition as well as for Lacanian psychoanalysts. Second, Grosz's joining of Deleuze and Irigaray through Darwin also comes at the cost of rendering two-sex reproduction as the general and privileged way of reproducing.

Most interestingly, Grosz not only produces a theory of life, but a general theory of change, wherein life becomes a model or metaphor of change in general, change of any kind, be it change of the weather, or change of literary genres, or concepts used. The totalizing character of this theory is simultaneously impressive and

worrying, and it opens up questions of its politics as a theory and its relation to politics as intervention.

POLITICS, CHANCE, AND OPENNESS—OR EXPLAINING CHANGE?

A key aspect in Grosz's grand project of ontology is that the entire construction seems to be strongly motivated by Grosz's fascination with open futures and the possibilities of indeterminate change itself. Constant variation makes it intelligible that things do not remain the same, that anything may happen in the future, and that completely new things appear. All this relates to politics: change, particularly the possibility of feminist and queer change, motivates feminist and queer theory, and it motivates Grosz as well.

Politics and the political crucially include an emphasis on contingency, possibilities, chance, and space for action, and are therefore in strong opposition to the notions of the necessary and the inevitable.¹² Grosz's strongly nonteleological reading of Darwin (Grosz 2004, 40; 2005, 25) already politicizes him; the accent is on the open future, on variation, and not on an attempt to have knowledge and control over the future, which is usually created through the notion of survival. In a parallel vein, Grosz underlines the fact that for Darwin it is clear that although all inherited material comes from one's parents, much more significantly, it remains unpredictable which genetic characters of both parents will be selected and combined (Grosz 2004, 41). It is precisely this unpredictability that causes the variation and the new.

Since the very beginning of Grosz's preoccupation with Darwin, "chance" has been her key term in evolutionary theory (Grosz 2005, 17, 25–26). In her reading, Darwinian evolution is an open-ended system above anything else, and it is both random and motiveless; evolution has no direction (26). Grosz redescribes Darwin with the terminology of "temporality" and "event," and the "eruption of [the] unexpected." She argues that whereas other sciences, such as physics and chemistry, seek regularity, in evolutionary theory, the present and future diverge from the past (Grosz 2004, 8).

Through her reading, Grosz makes Darwin appear to be a political thinker.¹³ However, what is interesting, and in my view runs exactly contrary to this approach of politicizing, is that Grosz wishes to secure her view through a general theory of evolution, making Darwin a scientific and ontological guarantor of the possibility of nondetermined change.

In other words, Grosz's means of opening out the future to unpredictable change appears paradoxically to close the space for argumentation through the authority of science. The guaranteeing and closing gesture is further magnified through the giant leap from a study of life to a general theory of ontology, in which the patterns of life are pinned onto any other object of study. In my view, the two explanatory models of science and ontology, presented as the means of rendering the universe as a constantly changing entity, unfortunately hand authority over to accounts of a totalizing kind. My doubts about these totalizing explanatory accounts are further raised by considering that the breadth of the explanatory power is extended so far beyond original

biological life that it is also intended to include those cultural changes that are at the heart of feminist and queer struggles.

Grosz does not seem to have any hesitations in applying Darwin's evolutionary theory to cultural phenomena. Various cultural phenomena are explicable in evolutionary terms, according to her, and the biological system of life is easily applied to the organization of emergence in general: in Grosz's view, it explains how languages evolve, and how cultures and social practices constantly differentiate (Grosz 2004, 26–27). With great ambition, she develops evolutionary theory toward a general, all encompassing theory of becoming and variation grounded in the ontology of becoming.¹⁴

This raises a question about feminist and queer political intervention: how does a total theory in ontological terms help feminist argumentation for change? More precisely: what are the effects of this mode of theorizing for feminist and queer discussion and writing? Some potentially negative effects become evident in the exchange between Parisi and Weinstein on Grosz's work, particularly in their mode of argumentation.

The main issue in Parisi's and Weinstein's exchange is a tension in Grosz's work between the two views discussed above: Deleuze's ontology, which basically would imply a constant variation of sexual differences; and Irigaray's idea of sexual difference. Both Parisi and Weinstein recognize that Grosz uses Darwin to understand change, variation, chance, and the new—the event—in Deleuzian ontology, and that she suggests sexual difference as the source of variation. Both also recognize the contradiction between Deleuze's monism and Irigaray's metaphysics of sex.

More precisely, Parisi's critical examination of Grosz points out that when Grosz identifies the role of sexual difference as the source of the new, she overlooks "the reality of bacterial, viral, informational, nano, and thought sexes sprawling beneath the law of the two" (Parisi 2010, 153). Parisi refers to the evolutionary theorist Stephen J. Gould, who points out that the evolution of two-sexed organisms is but an accident in the evolutionary forms of bacterial sexes, and may cease to be dominant (153). For Parisi, Grosz's insistence on Irigaray produces a contradiction and holds her back from the implications of an open future concerning sexual difference, which Deleuzian ontology would imply.

In this part of the discussion Parisi backs her criticism of Grosz with a claim of having more accurate scientific knowledge than Grosz has, which seems to convince Weinstein. This already raises an issue. If Parisi is able to question Grosz's ontological claims with new knowledge of scientific facts, does this not imply a certain hierarchy of disciplines? If it is science that is needed to dispute the idea of sexual difference, instead of philosophical argumentation, psychoanalytic theory, literary theory, or political thought, the result for future modes of feminist discussion is serious. Grosz's philosophical theorizing invites a mode of discussion for feminist theory that downplays the humanities and confirms a hierarchy of knowledge between the disciplinary traditions in placing science above the humanities.

By privileging scientific evidence, this mode of discussion also introduces a sense of single and evident truth that is traditionally foreign to feminist debates and gender

studies as a discipline (Pulkkinen 2015; 2016). Although Grosz's work is clearly philosophical in its stakes, its potential effects on feminist discussion are similar to those pointed out by those who criticize the "new materialism" of privileging natural sciences and "bringing in the voice of authority in guise of science" (Sullivan 2012, 307; Irni 2013).

A related problematic matter is the totalizing fashion of the explanatory enterprise that a grand theory of change brings with it. In my view, this aspect is also brought up in the second part of the discussion between Parisi and Weinstein, which consists of Weinstein's response and defense of Grosz. Although Weinstein agrees with Parisi's critique, and also finds the idea that evolution is based on sexual difference to be weak, she still defends Grosz's thought, and through a peculiar twist: it would be wrong, she writes, to condemn Grosz's project for its irresolvable internal contradiction. Grosz's paradoxical thought, Weinstein maintains, is intentional: it is meant to be productive in the course of "conceptual evolution," as Weinstein puts it (Weinstein 2010, 175).

The use of the phrase "conceptual evolution" suggests that in defending Grosz, Weinstein adopts Grosz's idea of a general theory of change, and applies it to feminist theory and its concepts. For Weinstein, concepts evolve; she writes of "conceptual evolution," and more precisely of conceptual evolution in feminist theory. She also writes of "stages of conceptual evolution," the "current stage of conceptual and philosophical evolution," and even of "our conceptual genetics" (178).

There are many problems in this reasoning, but most important in my view is that if changes in concepts and thought are considered as stages in evolution, something quite dangerous happens: the rhetoric deems philosophy to be one-dimensional. It renders change of thought in feminist theory to be a one-way street with one past and one future analyzable, in the same way as natural phenomena, by methods of science. Plurality, which is crucial to thought, is displaced by univocality that is ultimately foreign to the practice of critical theorizing. Although quite often present in the narratives of the history of philosophy, and as Clare Hemmings has shown, also in narratives of feminist thought (Hemmings 2011), I think it should be resisted. The popular contemporary rhetoric of "turns" has a similar effect on univocality: it is as if "we" were all taking various "turns" together in our thought, simultaneously. The plurality of feminist theorizing is downplayed, as well as the political within thought in itself.

Grosz's explicit intentions must be given credit for being in favor of politicizing and for an open future. But, it must be asked whether a general theory of change explains change rather than keeps change open, and whether such a general theory closes thought down to one option, rather than enhancing intellectual experimentation. The stakes here are crucial: as I have recently argued elsewhere, feminist theory is and should be theorizing and research that challenges explanations and politicizes truths, rather than "knowledge-production" (Pulkkinen 2015; 2016). In feminist scholarship the primary stakes are in intervention rather than in explanation—or at least, I think they should be.

As philosophically ambitious as Grosz's project is, and as ingenious as her way of weaving Darwin into a major role in her construction is, my biggest worry about it

concerns exactly the aspect of her work that in its ambition as an intellectual endeavor tends toward the task of explanation. Darwin may not be the cause of the inclination, but he has clearly been turned into an instrument for achieving it. As Grosz's project has been evolving (or rather changing) throughout her career, it will be interesting to see whether she will still find ways to challenge her own intellectual engagement in this respect in future work. Another new exciting turn would be welcome in her fascinating intellectual trajectory, this time with an accent on contingency always present in her work.

NOTES

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1. Grosz herself often confirms a grand debt to Irigaray and Deleuze. An enthusiastic example can be found in the acknowledgments in Grosz 2008, ix–x.

2. Grosz already recognizes the connection of Deleuze to Spinoza and monism when she first starts to positively integrate Deleuze into her own thought (Grosz 1994, 10–13, 168–69).

3. Irigaray is most often read as a psychoanalytic thinker, but she also regularly refers to Husserl and Heidegger, as well as to Hegel, read in the phenomenological tradition. The Lacanian symbolic and the metaphysical subject seem to merge in her work. Christine Battersby writes: "Although Irigaray does not view the symbolic as fixed into a necessary metaphysics of presence, she does treat western metaphysics as homogeneous, and also as concealing a 'forgotten' mode of being (that is related to birthing). As such her position is closer to that of Heidegger than to that of Derrida himself" (Battersby 1998, 101). Many others, first among them Tina Chanter, have acknowledged and emphasized Irigaray's debt to the phenomenological tradition (Chanter 1995, 9–11, 230).

4. In *I Love to You*, for example, this view is very clearly expressed: "Between man and woman, there really is otherness: biological, morphological, relational" (Irigaray 1996, 61–62).

5. Bergson's thought plays a significant role in Grosz's development of the ontology of life. With no mention of Grosz, Rebecca Hill provides an interesting critical point; she argues that Bergson's "celebrated monistic integration of the divergent tendencies of life and matter" maintains "a sexed hierarchy at the very heart of this open system" (Hill 2008, 123–24).

6. Keith Ansell-Pearson concludes that Deleuze and Guattari try to molecularize the molar Darwin, who concentrates on species (Ansell-Pearson 1999).

7. Todd May first provides the metaphor of "palpation" when discussing difference in Deleuze: "When doctors seek to understand a lesion they cannot see, they palpate the body. They create a zone of touch where the sense of the lesion can emerge without its being directly experienced. . . . Concepts palpate difference" (May 2005, 20).

8. See May 2005, 53–62, 82 on difference in Deleuze.

9. Grosz does not always keep strictly to this characterization of time as a force, but in later texts she also speaks of time as if it were a container “in” which things happen.

10. Within both philosophy and physics, time is most often thought of either as Newtonian time, that is, as a kind of container in which things happen; or as Kantian time, that is, as a structure of consciousness. In philosophy, time can also be approached nominalistically as a word with a use, and in physics, time is used as a standard measure.

11. “Darwin has, in effect, produced a new ontology, an ontology of the relentless operations of difference, whose implications we are still unravelling... Here I explore the ways in which Bergson and Deleuze elaborate and develop, each in his own ways, Darwin’s concept of life, so that it comes to include the material universe in its undivided complexity (for Bergson), or so that it can be extended into inorganic forms, into the life of events (for Deleuze). How does the concept of emergent life transform how we understand materiality? Is life a continuation of the forces of matter or their transformation?” (Grosz 2011, 4).

12. Contingency, space for action, and chance are essential for thinking politically, and for politics understood as action for such thinkers of the political as Hannah Arendt (1958), Chantal Mouffe (2013), and Quentin Skinner. See Palonen 2003, 29–38.

13. Grosz sometimes says this explicitly: “Darwin politicizes the material world itself” (Grosz 2005, 41).

14. In *Chaos, Territory, Art*, Grosz also repeats the idea, which she had already proposed in *Time Travels*, that culture continues the variation as a response to challenges it meets from nature. “Art and science, but equally philosophy, are those products of evolution that have hijacked the intimately adapted nature of individual variation (tested in terms of its survival capacities by natural selection) through the excessive or nonadaptive detours of sexual selection, sexual taste, and erotic pleasure” (Grosz 2008, 26).

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