

This Wonder Which is Not One:

*A Cartography of Potentials*

Amarantha Groen (3914364)

RMA Gender & Ethnicity  
Graduate School of Humanities  
Utrecht University

Supervisor: dr. Kathrin Thiele  
Second Reader: dr. Iris van der Tuin

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If there was ever a man  
 Who was generous, gracious and good  
 That was my dad, the man  
 A human being so true  
 He could live like a king  
 'Cause he knew  
 The real pleasure in life  
 To be devoted to  
 And always stand by me  
 So I'd be unafraid and free

– Leon Thomas, *Song for my Father*

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Rudy Michel Groen, who passed away during the writing process. I am grateful to him for instilling in me a relentless sense of wonder, for challenging me intellectually by arguing with me as long as I can remember and for showing me what it means to be generous, gracious and good.

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## Introduction

### Personal Attachments, Feminist Epistemology and Methodology

When looking back on my formative engagement with feminism, it is striking to me that my initial connection has never been reducible to an experience characterized by anger, rage and pain. While these passions have certainly been part of the equation, I am led, first and foremost, back to wonder and back to my early teens when I first picked up Dutch feminist magazines at the local convenience store. It is there that I can first identify a sense of wonder, a wonder steeped in desire, surprise, curiosity and most of all, pleasure: a pleasurable wonder in discovering that there were words for the previously unidentifiable discomfort within me; a pleasurable wonder in realizing that I was not alone in this discomfort; and a pleasurable wonder in becoming aware that the fixed-ness of the relations of difference could be un-fixed and could be transformed. As a teenage girl reading about concepts<sup>1</sup> such as sexual difference, gender construction, essentialism and gender performativity, it dawned on me that I could be more than what society had insidiously instructed me to be and that I could push back against this direction that had been foisted upon me. Certain aspects of my life (and subsequently the lives of those around me) gradually began to make sense and I began to carefully dissect them with my newly acquired instruments of words, names, ideas and explanations. This process made me conscious of the way I inhabited the world and I came to the empowering realization that nothing was inevitable and that everything had a history.

I began to locate certain moments in my childhood upbringing where I had subconsciously adjusted the way in which I inhabited the world in accordance with the subject positions that were available for me, positions that only someone socialized as a woman could occupy. I remembered the moment when the answer to “What do you want to be when you grow up?” changed from the childhood dream of “scientist and discoverer” to the early adolescent response of “hairdresser,” settling on a path that I had internalized as a suitable one for a young girl, regardless of the fact that I had never had any affinity for hair. I remembered the moments when I started to raise the pitch of my voice, when I attempted to

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<sup>1</sup> Concepts, as Elizabeth Grosz has shown in arguing for new concepts draws upon Deleuze and Guattari in *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life* (2011), are not to be taken lightly. She insists that “concepts are ways in which the living add reality to the world, transforming the givenness of chaos, the pressing problem, into various forms of order, into possibilities for being otherwise.” Rather than solve problems, they are “modes of address, modes of connection [...] between those forces which relentlessly impinge on us from the outside to form a problem and those forces we can muster within ourselves, harnessed and transformed from outside, by which to address problems” (Grosz 2011, 78). This enabling sense of the concept is what turned the concepts I encountered in my early teens into feminist tools of sense-making, address, and transformation.

take up less space in public spaces and when I began to mold my body and movements into what I felt was expected of me. As a teenage girl in the wondrous thrills of feminist ‘initiation,’ these seemingly unimportant unconscious processes were brought to the fore and I became aware of the ways in which I automatically took on the roles that were ‘appropriate’ to my gender, such as doing more emotional and domestic labor, and of the ways in which I had internalized heteronormativity, a system so insidious that even now, after roughly 15 years of feminist engagement, I am still stumbling over its stubborn remnants lingering inside of me. Words like ‘patriarchy,’ ‘sexism,’ ‘heteronormativity,’ ‘intersectionality,’ ‘queer,’ ‘benevolent sexism’ and ‘misogyny’ echoed in my mind and became part of my lexicon, opening up new ways of making sense and giving meaning to lived experience. Haraway writes that “[o]nce we know, we cannot not know” (Haraway 2008, 287). And as I came to know, my relationship to myself and to the world I lived in changed drastically and irreversibly.

This is just one personal story. However, one of the lessons I took from very early on in my feminist explorations and introduction to ‘second wave feminism,’<sup>2</sup> is that the personal *is* political, and conversely the political always has personal repercussions. Wonder helped me embark on the ever continuing quest of expanding my mind and reclaiming it from patriarchy’s grip; of freeing my body from the bounds and alienation of the ‘male gaze’ (Mulvey 1999) and of transforming my bodily and practical relation to my environment from a relation of a self-imposed “I cannot,” to one of “I can.”<sup>3</sup> Learning experiences such as these sprang from a deep sense of wonder, and brought with them joy, pleasure, desire and a feeling that the world was opening up to me – and I to the world. By locating the intersections at which I had changed or submitted to the norm, I could see how these adjustments could be un-made. A long process of studying every aspect of my life and how it was influenced by normative sexual difference and other relations of difference along the axes of race and class was set in motion and still continues today.

While wonder has played a crucial role in my continuing process of ‘becoming

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<sup>2</sup> On feminist generationality and thinking about feminist ‘waves,’ see Iris van der Tuin’s ‘Jumping Generations’ (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Iris Marion Young, in her well-known essay ‘On Throwing Like a Girl’ explores the manifold ways in which women tend to be cautious and self-conscious about their bodies. As their body is continually made into an object, she observes, this often results in the objectification of one’s own body as well, engendering a bodily alienation specific to those socialized as women (from the perspective and location of a Western, white woman). Key is a feeling of incapacity in respect to the body. Taking the way in which girls and boys throw a ball differently as her starting point, Young’s essay is a phenomenological investigation of embodiment. Here, she explores Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s assertion of “I can, therefore I am” as a correction of the Cartesian aphorism “I think, therefore I am” and argues that women are often socialized to have a stifling relation of “I cannot” to their own bodies. See: (2005).

feminist,’ it has not enjoyed the greatest reputation within feminist circles. At its best, it is associated with traditional philosophy – which brings with it an air of unengaged, secluded ivory-towerism – and at its worst it is reminiscent of New Age movements associated with subjects alienated from the ‘real world,’ fully occupied with the quest of discovering their ‘inner child.’ Feminist theory only sporadically engages with the concept and rarely is it mentioned in the same sentence with notions such as ‘change,’ ‘activism,’ or ‘political engagement.’ However, this thesis argues for their commensurability and for the potential and urgency of wonder.

These two associations with wonder, ivory-towerism and woolly spirituality, could be attributed to its role in the two ‘religions’ of the pre- and post-Enlightenment world. In a pre-Enlightenment Western world in which God took center stage, the rules and guidelines were laid out by a transcendent, omnipotent, all-knowing power. God invoked fear, but also provided order and purpose in an otherwise aimlessly chaotic, vast and arbitrary world. Wonder within this context, discussed with Spinoza in chapter 2, was predominately restricted to its *miraculous* potential and served to inspire religion as a tool for demonstrative ‘wonders,’ miracles that could back up God’s divine powers. Arguably, wonder’s spiritual, albeit ‘paganized’ associations developed from this pre-Enlightenment link.

With the rise of modern science and technology, God gradually retreated behind the theater curtains to make way for the human subject in charge of himself and in control of his environment. A ‘new religion’ of clean scientific methods was developed, with logic at its core and aimed at knowledge that could help manipulate and control the world. Rationality and objectivity came to define, and to a large extent still do, our relations to and within the world; our approach is one of conceptualization, categorization, scientific taxonomy and an instrumental attitude towards objects, others and, inescapably – ourselves.<sup>4</sup> As chapter 1 argues, wonder within this scientific and philosophical discourse mediates between not-knowing and knowing, functioning merely as a tool to arrive at a specific kind of knowledge, hence the association with the ivory-tower.

In attempts to draw ‘An Atlas of the Difficult World’,<sup>5</sup> the post-Enlightenment world is still continuously contorted to fit into theories, systems and constructs built from facts and statistics. Our thinking draws hierarchical binary distinctions and fixes them, such as the

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<sup>4</sup> I find Martin Heidegger’s broadly interpretable notion of *Gestell*, an orientation to the world he calls *enframing*, particularly helpful to understand this instrumental attitude and tendency of human thought to ‘put everything in boxes’. See his essay ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ in *Basic Writings* ([1954] 2008).

<sup>5</sup> This is a reference to the title of Adrienne Rich’s collection of poems which combine the political and the poetical, see: (1991).

distinction between male/female, subject/object, culture/nature, self/other and reason/emotion. We can take any of these dualisms and think of the anxiety and distress that is unleashed when the boundaries between a pair of mutually exclusive poles are challenged and start to blur.<sup>6</sup> While this research is not concerned with the question of which foundational hierarchal distinction is primary, or from which binary all other distinctions flow, it is significant that in this scheme of hierarchical binaries in which we are raised, superior reason is associated and symbolically aligned with masculinity and excludes emotionality, which is marked as feminine (Lloyd 1993). In this ethically-charged, what bell hooks calls ‘competitive either/or dualistic thinking’ (2015, 31), it is hard for those socialized as women, or those deriving from the straight, white, male norm, to ‘access’ those qualities that are valued most in society.

Where can we find wonder in this contemporary way of making sense of the world, one that is based around ‘cold’ facts, control and neatly fenced-off concepts that symbolically and concretely structure the world in mutually exclusive binary pairs? Can we find wonder outside of its apparent role as a tool to arrive from not-knowing to a specific kind of knowledge? For although wonder has been aligned with reason and knowledge from early philosophy onwards, it has the potential to threaten and undermine attitudes of control, appropriation and fenced-off oppositional thinking and relating. Wonder may help us think about difference differently, outside the framework of a ‘competitive either/or.’ The potentials of wonder, which are be mapped out throughout this thesis, call for openness and brittle boundaries, and can provide the antibody to closure and separatism. It thus forecloses closure and resists any all-compassing system of sense-making: wonder can be the principle of opening-up and breaking open the very systems that have used it in the service to bind and define.

This thesis, rather than being interested in defining wonder, brings together some of the potentials of wonder and focuses not on what it *is*, but on what it can or could, or is allowed to *do* in the thought on wonder, with a special focus on what wonder does to the body. By tracing the concept of wonder through the philosophical canon and to feminist philosophy, this thesis shows that besides being a mere epistemological tool, wonder as the ‘affect of difference’ has the potential to let us wander through the complexity of the world, to relate to difference in a way that refuses binary thinking and appropriative relating, and thus to shake the foundations of man-made sense and order. Constructively, it can open up

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<sup>6</sup> Most notably, the anxiety that arises when the boundaries between genders and their appropriate behaviors are challenged, see for instance (Butler 1999) and (Schilt and Westbrook 2009).

one's relation to oneself, to others and to political strategies and visions toward a more feminist future.

As becomes clear throughout the course of thesis, the potentials of wonder are not at all restricted to being either a miraculous or spiritual state, or a religious or epistemological tool. Rooted in and situated at the intersection of feminist theory, philosophy and epistemology,<sup>7</sup> this thesis argues that the passion of wonder has the potential to transform our relation to difference, to resist indifference and to break through structural reinforcement of inequality between self and other – whether it concerns sexism, racism, or any other relation that takes difference to mean hierarchy, dominion, appropriation and objectification.<sup>8</sup> To put wonder ‘on the map’ of feminist passions, which is the overarching aim of this cartographic thesis, I trace its roots in canonical philosophy as well as feminist philosophy to arrive at a potential politics of wonder, thereby reclaiming the passion for feminism. In short, this thesis draws up a roadmap of wonder's potentialities to show that it can instigate change, transformation and political action. It argues that wonder should be welcomed, sustained and cultivated if we are to find a way out of competitive either/or thinking and the effects of what Rosi Braidotti calls our “technologically driven historical phase of advanced capitalism” (Braidotti 2006, 1).

### *Feminism and Passionate Theory*

Feminism has always been passionate, and feminist philosophy, deeply concerned with feelings, affects and passions. Feelings, affects, passions or emotions have been and will always be embedded in past, present and emerging ‘feminisms.’ Understanding feminist work therefore is not complete without studying or acknowledging their role and significance.

The feelings accompanying feminist work seem to typically spread like wildfire. How can we think, for instance, of advocates of women's suffrage, *Riot Grrl* activism (cf. Darms and Fateman 2013) or feminist marches against sexual intimidation, domestic violence or racism without thinking about certain feelings such as *anger, indignation, determination* or

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<sup>7</sup> This thesis is written from the vantage point of a mostly Western, predominantly white canon. Although ‘the west,’ or ‘Western’ is an elusive term, of which the boundaries shift depending on the discursive context, here it is used to refer to a certain geopolitical formation associated with a series of interrelated phenomena including Christianity, Enlightenment, the scientific as well as industrial revolutions, colonialism, imperialism and the Cold War, with subsequent values and ideologies, as well as a discourse of binary thinking. Moreover, it is the privileged geopolitical location and situation from which I write this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance: (Irigaray 1993; Braidotti 2006; Braidotti 2011; Jones 2011). Structural relations of inequality are addressed more in-depth in chapter 4.



even a burning *rage*? And how could we even begin to think of second wave feminism and its incentive to take the personal in its political meanings, without thinking of the *boredom* of the ‘desperate housewife’ (Pease 2012 cf.) or the *joyousness* of a hard to come by feminist solidarity? Furthermore, could we consider feminist satire and parody in words as well as actions without thinking simultaneously of *laughter* and *pleasure*, of feminists joining in in any time or place with their bursting *desires* and *yearnings* (Hooks 1999) for feminist projects and change?

Certainly, feminist theory has been persistent in stressing the close alliance of feminist issues with emotional life. As a theory and scholarship rooted in the fertile and material grounds of activism, in meaningful differences and a contested collectivity, its scholars often consciously and explicitly work from the realm of the traditionally personal and private, transforming their meanings along the way.<sup>9</sup> This kind of passionate theory has worked and still works from the feelings and emotions that accompany lived experience, situated at the intersection of differences that have direct consequences in our lives. In other words: differences that matter.

In addition to using such feelings, passions and their transformative potential as their points of departure for feminist work,<sup>10</sup> feminist scholars have also reflected on these in order to analyze their roles in human life, as well as the potentialities they carry within. One can think here, for instance, of Rosi Braidotti's treatment of ‘desire’ as essential to feminist projects (Braidotti 1994), bell hook's theorizing of ‘yearning’ (Hooks 1999), or Audre Lorde's conception of ‘anger’ as enabling, translating and opening up new visions and futures (Lorde 1984;1997). These thinkers demonstrate that feminist work requires affirmative reflection on emotion and passion, making it an indispensable part of developing feminist theory and practice. What we need is a passionate and continuous reflection on the passions to unlock their potential of working for us and not against us in transformative practices.

Feminism is concerned with and bound up in feelings, emotions and passions. And yet within the vast and varied body of feminist theory, most feminist scholars have altogether

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<sup>9</sup> A pivotal feminist text on doing exactly that: taking the personal seriously, taking responsibility for one’s location and contesting a collective ‘we’ is Adrienne Rich’s ‘Notes toward a Politics of Location’: (Rich 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Under ‘feminist work’ I understand both what is commonly understood as feminist theory as well as feminist activism. I agree with Catherine Eschle and Bice Maiguashca in the belief that academia and activism constitute separate realms “driven by contrasting aims and imperatives and governed by different rules” relies on different problematic sets of dichotomies, or binary pairs, such as “mind/body, theory/practice, reason/emotion, abstract/concrete and ‘ivory tower’/‘real world’” (2006). As feminist academia and theory is and always should be entangled with social engagement and as activism is bound up with and fed by feminist theory and thought, a strict separation between the two cannot, and more importantly should not, be upheld, for too much of a disconnect between them stagnates feminist work on either ‘side.’

shunned the passion that takes center stage in this research: wonder. Throughout the course of this thesis (particularly in chapter 3 and 4) it becomes clear that such a lack of wonder is not only the case in feminist theory, but arguably also in society at large. As this thesis demonstrates, wonder has a huge (feminist) potential to change the way we live and think. But apart from a few notable exceptions extensively developed in the following chapters, wonder in feminist work is miles away from the central position it occupies as the ‘primary passion’ in traditional philosophy.

To understand and to begin to untangle *why* wonder is not at the forefront of feminist thought, a short review of feminist epistemology is necessary. As elaborated upon in chapter 1 and returned to in chapter 4, wonder in hegemonic philosophical discourse is tied up almost inseparably with the idea of true, or objective knowledge – a kind of knowledge still aspired to in contemporary discourse. While the relations between feminism and wonder have not explicitly been theorized, the relation between feminism and objective knowledge – wonder’s ‘partner by discursive association’ – is one of the recurrent themes in feminist theory and philosophy. Some introductory thoughts and recapitulations in respect to the field of feminist epistemology, then, will provide a fertile ground to delineate a likely factor in the lack of feminist engagement with wonder. Thus, before bringing wonder fully back into the picture, a short meditation upon its relative *absence* in feminist scholarship by way of a short – albeit necessary – detour through feminist approaches to knowledge production is called for.

### *Feminist Epistemologies: Rethinking Knowledge and Objectivity*

Established theories of the so-called ‘dead white males,’ a pejorative term to designate the main figures of esteemed and authoritative philosophy and science, have had the naive and often even dangerous presumption of impartiality and objectivity concerning knowledge acquisition and acquired knowledge respectively. This stands in strong contrast to feminist philosophy, methodology, and epistemology more specifically, as this field has proven to treat the questioning and criticizing of established knowledge practices and claims as one of its main objectives.<sup>11</sup> That is, feminist epistemologists effectively challenged – and still challenge – the notions of neutrality, objectivity and knowledge in their own epistemologies in which they develop different approaches to doing research and different answers to important epistemological questions (What is knowledge? How do we attain knowledge?).

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<sup>11</sup> See *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*: (Lykke 2010a).

Broadly speaking it can be said that feminist epistemologists also foregrounded, if not added, some important and valuable questions to the more traditional ones, asking questions concerning the reasons behind knowledge, the role of hierarchical power dynamics and the knower as such: *why* do we want to know *x*? *Who* is invested in knowing *x*? Which knowers produce the best knowledges of *x* and why?<sup>12</sup>

With the emergence of modern science, the rule and conviction of plain and cold facts followed swiftly. The last question – which knowers produce the best knowledge – could now best be answered with the assumption that good science required a 'dispassionate' observer. Such a “modest witness,” as Donna Haraway explains in *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan \_ Meets \_ OncoMouse* (1997) implied a new kind of modest masculinity at the dawn of the Scientific Revolution. This new form of masculinity gradually replaced traditional characteristics associated with masculinity, such as physical strength and heroism, with heroism of the masculine mind. The laboratory become an almost spiritual or religious “place of worship; the scientist, the priest; the experiment, a religious rite” (Potter cited in Haraway 1997, 31). Yet this laboratory place of worship was only accessible to male devotees, as the heroism of the dispassionate, observant mind was not something within the reach of women, a restriction buttressed by the age-old association of men with reason, and women with the irrational. Gender was thus very much at stake in the emergence of modern science (Schneider 2005, 98), and, according to Haraway and most feminist epistemologists, is still as such to date. The idea of the modest witness practically excludes all knowers who do not have the ability to become invisible in society and cannot be trusted with scientific observation: colored, sexed, labored or differently ‘marked’ persons still “have to do a lot of

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<sup>12</sup> These questions are essential to understanding certain ‘scientific’ researches of the past. Historically, science has often asked questions with a special interest in maintaining the *status quo* or confirming already widely held assumptions. As Enlightenment rationalism replaced faith and superstition as the source of authority, the pronouncements of science became the preferred method for justifying existing or desired inequality based on different factors such as sex, race and class. In the case of racial relations, we can think for instance of how systematic discrimination against specific racial groups, has been accompanied by attempts to justify such policies on scientific grounds. Obvious examples are the role of ‘scientific’ racial theory during European expansionism with the African slave trade, Apartheid or anti-Semitism in WWII. This is why the so often overlooked ‘why-questions’ are so important to examining science practices. Scientific interests have historically collided with specific social ones, without any acknowledgement of the latter. See, for instance, *Racism: a Short History*: (Fredrickson 2002). And scientific interest in upholding or validating sexist, racist or classist ideology is not something of the past. An example includes popular science platforms, where research results are summarized in headlines such as “Brain Study Confirms Gender Stereotypes,” “Why Men Are Better at Map Reading,” “Women Wired to Multitask,” “Women Crap at Parking,” whilst the discipline of neuroscience shows a renewed interest in research as to the different brain structure and function of men’s and women’s brains. See *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences* for a thorough account of how contemporary brain organization research relies on ideology and folk tales to bridge the gap between thorough research and socially interested results concerning the development of sex and gender identity, sexual orientation and behavior: (Jordan-Young 2010).

work to become similarly transparent to count as objective, modest witnesses to the world rather than to their ‘bias’ or ‘special interest.’ (Haraway 1997, 32).

Regarding this issue, feminist thinkers have brought to light in various ways the unmarked masculinity and ‘whiteness’ of science practices, and developed alternative feminist epistemologies. This was/is of critical importance, for the dispassionate investigator of modern science strengthened the authority of the already dominant groups in society, which consisted of largely white, prosperous men, who discredited “the observations and claims of currently subordinate groups” (Jaggar 1989), whose observations were deemed to be discredited as being irrational and biased the more they tried to express them. Objectivity came to be reserved for those who fit into the narrow norm.

Feminist epistemologists, then, pointed out the biasedness, exclusion and gendered nature of science practices and the imperative idea of witnessing modestly, dispassionately, and neutrally. They zoomed in more closely on a few of the underlying concepts of modern science, notably ‘objectivity.’ Within the field of Gender Studies, the critique of modern objectivity with all its undesirable implications is mainly rooted in feminist standpoint theory, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a theory that reflected upon the production of knowledge and practices of power (Harding 2004, 1). Standpoint theory radically challenged the ‘Western’ idea that scientific knowledge should transcend “the particular historical projects that produce it or, at any given moment, happen to find it useful” (4). It pointed out that the conceptual frameworks of knowledge production, while relying on concepts such as ‘social neutrality’ and ‘objectivity,’ precisely did *not* succeed in transcending social-cultural reality. Thus, the disciplines and their conceptual frameworks were themselves revealed as deeply embedded within the dominant ‘Western,’ bourgeois, white supremacist, androcentric and heteronormative culture (Harding 1991). In other words: feminist epistemologists argued that the more value-neutral the production of knowledge and the knowledge produced *appeared*, the more likely it was to favor the interests of dominant groups and not have value-neutral effects (Mackinnon 1982; Harding 1991).

When feminist theorists engage with the concept of objectivity, they have a keen eye for the damage done in the name of this concept, yet also look for the ‘treasures that prevail’ within it.<sup>13</sup> What many feminist epistemologists kept from the concept of objectivity is its

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<sup>13</sup> As Adrienne Rich formulates it in her feminist poem ‘Diving into the Wreck,’ a task for feminism and in this case feminist epistemologists, is to explore the ‘wreck’ and see what prevails: “I came to explore the wreck. / The words are purposes. / The words are maps. / I came to see the damage that was done/ and the treasures that prevail” (1994: 22-27).

opposition to *partiality*. They left unquestioned the idea that partiality and objectivity are mutually exclusive, associating partial knowledge with subjective knowledge. Nancy Hartsock, for example, speaks of the ‘partiality’ and the ‘perversity’ of abstract masculinity (Hartsock 1983, 284) and Sandra Harding, who coined the term ‘strong objectivity,’ considers this reworked notion of (feminist) objectivity as providing *less partial* accounts of the world (Harding 1986).

When it comes to her understanding of partiality, Haraway has a different approach to the question of how we could reconceptualize the concepts of objectivity and knowledge. In her ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’ ([1988] 2004), the meaning and content of *partiality* and *situatedness* is in fact radically turned upside down to become absolutely indispensable to practices of faithful knowledge production. They are transformed into essential notions when it comes to transcending the problem that Haraway defines as the question of “how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice of recognizing our own ‘semiotic technologies’ for making meanings and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world” (Haraway 2004, 85). Instead of refusing to engage with questions centered around sex, race, and other related, often oppressive taxonomies, what is needed according to Haraway is a reclaiming of the metaphor, an account of the ‘embodiedness’ of vision; a realization of the fact that there *are* no unmediated accounts of the world; an understanding of the fact that all seeing is a question of power and that *all* knowledges are situated. What is so subversive about this account of knowledges and vision is that Haraway turns partiality into a positive and necessary characteristic of knowledges and vision into something that is not only a matter of how the world impinges on us, but also a question of “our being implicated, as embodied, - located and all perspectives are views from *somewhere* – “The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision” (Haraway 2004, 87). Thus objectivity is not about transcending the particular, but about making partial connections between different positions in an ongoing conversation that does not aim for closure, but for an endless, creative and open dialogue with the world.

Conversations with the world, however, do not occur between subjects and objects in the traditional sense of the words— for how would an object, if taken as a passive given, ready to be unveiled and dissected, ever ‘talk back’? In an important footnote, which points in the direction of her later work, Haraway writes: “Objectivity in a postmodernist frame *cannot be about unproblematic objects*; it must be about specific prosthesis and translation [italics

mine]” (Haraway 2004, 98, n. 4). But this is exactly what has been going on: objects have always been taken as unproblematic resources for appropriation and the self-formation of the knowing human subject (94). Haraway proposes thinking about objects of knowledge as ‘material-semiotic actors,’ which reflect an “active, meaning-generating axis of the apparatus of bodily production, without *ever* implying immediate presence of such objects” (97).

This entails that there is never a final determination, but always certain openness concerning the object, since this very object never pre-exists the social interaction in which its boundaries are continuously materialized. Therefore, Haraway’s project of situated knowledges requires that the object of knowledge is seen as an actor or agent, not as “a screen or a ground or a resource” and particularly not as “slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge” (Haraway 2004, 95).<sup>14</sup> Whereas the sciences tend to view objects of knowledge as passive resources, as “only matter for the seminal power, the act, of the knower” (94), Haraway argues that they are instead active agents or actors. Accounts of a ‘real’ or objective reality, then, are not about the unveiling materials waiting to be mastered and exploited, but depend on a “power charged social relation of ‘conversation’ (95).”

Feminist theorist and philosopher Karen Barad reiterates and builds upon many of the above ideas and takes them a step further in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) by developing an onto-epistemology which is simultaneously an ontology, an epistemology and an ethics and stresses the entanglement of these three realms. In this onto-epistemology, Barad rejects the separation between the ‘knower’ and ‘what is known’ in science, as this would require the known thing to be passive, and the knower to be active. Instead, she thinks of ‘apparatuses’ connecting object and observer, human and nonhuman. Now it is not just the researcher responsible for the ‘differences that matter,’ but the apparatus and its boundaries. What this means is that the methodology, for Barad, becomes part of the object of investigation, and the instruments that are used in an investigation and which produce different scientific results are taken seriously (Barad 2007, 140-141).

These perspectives on knowledge and objectivity, in which the object and the observer are not clearly separable and the idea of neutral witnessing is debunked are a far cry from enlightenment epistemology and the idea of true, transcendent, discoverable, and – most

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<sup>14</sup> Haraway’s repudiation to take objects as passive, instrumental resources and instead recognize objects as resisting, active ‘actors’ is reminiscent of the Heideggerian distinction between ‘der Bestand,’ and ‘der Gegenstand,’ the latter being a way to think of objects as resistant, as more than a utilizable thing. For an explanation of Heidegger’s distinction, see: (A. Prins 2007).

of all objective – knowledge. At first, the above may seem quite far away from the subject of this thesis: wonder. Yet it functions in explaining why there is relatively little work written on the topic of wonder within the feminist body of thought. Wonder may pre-eminently be what leads us to the ‘male masters’ to which feminist epistemologists reacted so forcefully. That is, in philosophy and classical epistemology – foundational to the conceptual frameworks of science and society at large – it has been tied up strongly with a specific kind of knowledge devoid of emotionality and feelings. Wonder was linked up with the knowledge that arises out of an impossible view from *nowhere* – the view that the aforementioned feminist theorists all questioned and criticized – in a kind of wonder-knowledge-knot. Within this knot, there is no knowledge without wonder, and no wonder without knowledge. This persistent historical and philosophical background is discussed in chapter 1. As the tie between knowledge and wonder has been so strong, it is ‘no wonder’ at all that feminists have largely shunned the concept altogether (although the tides may now be changing<sup>15</sup>). For if we look at the philosophical roots of the conceptualization of wonder, it is hard to imagine any other potentials of the concept aside from being a transitive phase from point A to point B. It is hard to imagine wonder as something other than a tool to go from not-knowing to knowing – a knowing that categorizes, appropriates and dominates the known. Yet this research argues that there are plentiful potentialities that wonder carries within itself, which can and should be developed and cultivated.

### *Methodological Reflection and Outline*

In order to develop the potential of wonder as a feminist passion,<sup>16</sup> I would like to approach the theme in a cartographic manner. Inspired by Félix Guattari’s elaboration of the concept of the (schizoanalytic) cartography in his *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis* ([1979] 2011), I take this to mean a way of analyzing the potentials of wonder by “dismantling dominant realities and significations” (Guattari 2011, 174) and thus creating a feminist territory of wonder. This means that I have no pretension of offering a structural or complete historiographical overview of wonder throughout history – “[n]o universal

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<sup>15</sup> See for instance the to-be discussed recent publications on wonder by Marguarite La Caze (2013a) (See also my matching book review: (Groen 2015)) and Sara Ahmed (2004).

<sup>16</sup> As apparent in the following chapters, different scholars, depending on the historical time of the writing and thoughts about wonder, use different terms – affect, passion, emotion, to name a few. Keeping this difficulty and the differences in mind, I use these terms according to the author that is being discussed, and explain their usage and implications along the way. This stresses the focus of this thesis in which wonder’s definition is secondary to what it *does*, and what it *can* or *could do*. Defining wonder, then, will continuously stay a ‘working definition.’

cartography exists” (173) – nor am I interested in tracing the concept back to an original definition. What I am interested in is developing different potentials of wonder, and identifying what I view as the crucial points of connection in the body of philosophical thought on wonder that enable the telling of a specific story of wonder through a distinctly feminist and political lens. Geographic cartography is a political and territorial endeavor in itself (cf. Black 1997), and so is this conceptual cartography of wonder. That is, I navigate through conceptual foundations and borderlands, propose roads to take, enlarge or reduce certain elements and make ‘agential cuts’ (cf. Barad 1998) between what is included and excluded from the map. Wonder, throughout this cartography, goes in many directions. This wonder, as demonstrated through the discussion of its potentials in the following chapters, *is not one*.<sup>17</sup> In mapping out the different feminist potentials of wonder and creating a feminist territory of the concept, I moreover aim to contribute to a feminist genealogy of wonder (Lauretis 1933; Bell 1999; C. Hemmings 2005; Claire Hemmings 2011; van der Tuin 2015).

This thesis constitutes a philosophical investigation and begins by carefully extracting some of its formative philosophical roots and studying them in chapter 1 and 2.<sup>18</sup> This is done by means of a selective analysis and philosophical reading of wonder in Ancient Greek and Enlightenment discourse. This includes close readings of several philosophical texts including passages of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* ([350 B.C.E.] 1933), Plato’s *Theaetetus* ([369 B.C.E.] 2004), René Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul* ([1649] 1999) in chapter 1, as well as Baruch de Spinoza’s *Ethics* ([1677] 2002b) and several passages from his *Theological-Political Treatise* ([1670] 2002) in chapter 2. The dominant discourse on wonder (chapter 1) as well as the intervention in this discourse made by Spinoza (chapter 2), informs the feminist engagement with wonder that is investigated in chapter 3 and 4. These chapters include close readings of texts by contemporary feminist philosophers, including passages from Luce Irigaray’s *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993) and Catherine Malabou’s part of *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience* (2013) in chapter 3, as well as passages from Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet* (2008) and Sara Ahmed’s *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) in chapter 4.

The outline of the chapters is as follows: chapter 1 sets up the stage of wonder through an inquiry of its philosophical understanding as an epistemological tool. I focus on

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<sup>17</sup> The title of this thesis – ‘This Wonder Which Is Not One’ – is, of course, a reference to, and a twist on the title of Irigaray’s well-known work *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985a).

<sup>18</sup> I take philosophical discourse to lie out the groundwork for the way in which we conceptualize and assign meaning to the world as such meaning unfold concretely in society at large. This is why I believe it crucial to turn to philosophy to investigate how our thinking about the concept wonder has been shaped.



the dominant, authoritative philosophical perspectives on wonder in ancient Greece and in early Modernity. A special focus is on the ‘father of modernity’ René Descartes, who defined and confined wonder like none of his predecessors, and through whose works the wonder-knowledge-knot<sup>19</sup> sunk into the canon of western philosophy. I carefully dissect the characteristics – including the spatial and temporal dimensions of wonder – in Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul* (1649) to look at the workings of wonder: what wonder *does* and how. This fundamental theory of wonder and the passions of the soul are analyzed and framed within Descartes’ theory of the passions, wherein wonder straddles the boundary between the body and the soul. Through this analysis I work towards an understanding of the role of wonder in modern philosophy, as well as of the way in which it keeps reoccurring throughout the entire tradition: as an epistemological tool to arrive at true knowledge. The spatio-temporal restrictions as well as the strict *telos* of wonder beg the question of whether philosophy ever truly wondered, or allowed wonder, independent of knowledge, to fully develop. To consider wonder only in relation to a specific kind of knowledge, as feminist elaborations in chapter 4 and 5 show, is to dismiss many of its potentials. Chapter 1 concludes by arguing that the caution of Descartes to not wonder too much, or to dwell in wonder, fits within his philosophy framework, but also illustrates wonder’s potentially threatening consequences when fully released spatio-temporally.

My journey then leads me to Spinoza in the chapter 2, whose writings on wonder mark a crucial philosophical intervention into the wonder-knowledge-knot that finds its peak in Descartes’ thought. Whereas for Descartes, wonder is absolutely primary, Spinoza makes the bold statement that wonder should not even be counted amongst the affects. In order to understand this statement, chapter 2 grounds Spinoza’s ambivalent stance on wonder into Spinoza’s theory of the affects and the role of wonder therein as contrasted to Descartes’ framework of the passions of the soul. Elaborating on Spinoza’s theory of the affects with the help of Gilles Deleuze’s interpretation of them, I moreover read Spinoza’s suspicion of wonder alongside its historical and social context. Spinoza’s disdain for wonder, I argue together with Michael Rosenthal, can be explained by the religious and miraculous connotations of wonder at the time, and the usage of wonder to uphold political authority through the ‘miraculous.’ Yet, this chapter argues, this is not all there is to say about wonder for Spinoza, for while he intervenes in the wonder-knowledge-knot and dismisses wonder as

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<sup>19</sup> Although this is my own definition, I would like to mention that in articulating canonical philosophy’s treatment of wonder as a ‘knot,’ I have myself been inspired by the idiom of Barad’s concept of ‘entanglements’ (2007), and Haraway’s metaphor of a ‘game of cat’s cradle,’ as connected to an alternative way of seeing and studying science and knowledge (1994).

an epistemological tool, his discussion of wonder and the possibility of ‘affective layering’ do open up a path to think about the potentiality of wonder connected to the body, relationality and social change. This, I argue, mobilizes wonder to become more than an epistemological tool, informing the feminist takes on wonder discussed in chapter 3 and 4 in which the territory of wonder is extended to cross the entangled realms of ontology, ethics and epistemology.

Chapter 3 engages with Irigaray’s and Malabou’s developments of wonder. They both explore wonder through an engagement with traditional philosophy by reading texts from the ‘male masters,’ but arrive at a very different location than the ‘masters’ themselves. In the first part of chapter 3 I discuss Irigaray’s take on wonder, who reads wonder through Descartes as a mode of relating that is able to establish a different relation between the sexes. Presently, Irigaray argues, this relation is based on an exclusion, appropriation and objectification of the feminine. Wonder, when cultivated, could transform this relation and play a pivotal role in the quest for a real relation, a mutual respect and an understanding between the sexes. As the discrepancy and negative relation between the sexes for Irigaray is fundamental, I argue that changing these relations means bringing about a transformation of the world at large. Through a selective reading of *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, I take a close look at Irigarayan wonder. Moreover, through an account of Marguarite La Caze’s recent publication on wonder: *Wonder and Generosity* (2013), as well as Iris Marion Young’s critique in *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy* (1997), I further flesh out this notion of Irigarayan wonder, its eventual shortcomings, as well as its potentials when extended to relations of inequality in general.

The second part of chapter 3 engages with Malabou’s work on wonder in which she combines neurobiological findings about the human capacity for indifference with philosophical insights from Spinoza and Descartes to argue that we are on the verge of *losing* our capacity to wonder altogether – a capacity which is crucial to critical thinking, to making decisions, and to imagining and envisioning different futures. Losing our capacity to wonder, a latent potentiality in all of us according to Malabou, means becoming indifferent to being in the world and becoming unable to connect to ourselves as well as to external others. This may be the most dangerous state a person can be in: unconcerned, uncaring and lacking empathy completely. As the principle affect that makes us receptive to affection and thus able to ‘touch’ ourselves and at the same time open up to the world, wonder is at the base of all the other affects for Malabou. As the ‘affect of difference,’ it is essential in avoiding a kind of disaffection, a politics of indifference as Malabou calls it, which currently lurks around the

corner in the twenty-first century.

As this second part of chapter 3 moreover explains with Malabou, in Spinoza's theory of the affects a joyous passion increases our ability to act and a sad passion diminishes our ability to act. Therefore, power was invested in evoking sad passions in the masses according to Spinoza. But, as Malabou explains, such a sorrowful passion always has a transformative potential. What makes contemporary structures different for Malabou is that they are invested in instilling indifference instead. This is dangerous, she continues, for indifference as complete disaffection might not be transformable, by destroying our ability to be affected and thus our ability to wonder altogether.

This gives me all the more impetus to sketch a possible politics of wonder in chapter 4. With Braidotti, Haraway and Ahmed I argue that wonder, as the affect of difference, is invaluable to feminist politics and transformative action. It can disturb western neo-liberalist conceptual frameworks and their contemporary concretization in relations of inequality. To demonstrate this, chapter 4 further elaborates on the problem of difference and feminism's challenge to think difference 'differently' as opposed to the present mechanisms of difference (and its concrete societal ramifications) as 'different from, thus worth less than.' The chapter continues to develop wonder as the affect of difference through Haraway's concept of curiosity and Sara Ahmed concept of 'critical wonder' and shows how wonder has the potential to concretely resist indifference and open up a feminist future informed by the awareness of the contingency of the present in relation to the past, and has the potential to engender transformative practices in order to see and treat difference in a positive/affirmative and welcoming way. I call for a further unraveling of the potential of wonder without defining the outcome in advance and without restricting wonder's territory or duration and argue why wonder is all but antithetical to transformative action, politics, and feminist futures, and deserves to be reclaimed by feminism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the gothic narrative by Rosemarie Buikema and Lies Wesseling through the lens of wonder and our 'technological age of advanced capitalism.' Accessing wonder through the mode of wander, I argue, is subversive by virtue of being undirected in a society that is structured around an indifferent and linear following of the routes and conceptual frameworks, opening it up to change. This wandering, indirect aspect of wonder as an affect may not be concrete as directed political action but, as chapter 4 concludes, that also constitutes its strength.

So 'why wonder?' After drawing up a map of some of the many potentials of wonder, it will hopefully become clear that wonder is promising when mobilized in feminist work. It can effectively open us up to others, by challenging the way we presently think about and

treat difference and by supporting open-ended and embodied conversations with the world.

## Chapter 1

### Setting Up the Stage: Wonder in Philosophical Discourse

Isn't it splendid to think of all the things there are to find out about? It just makes me feel glad to be alive--it's such an interesting world. It wouldn't be half so interesting if we knew all about everything, would it? There'd be no scope for imagination then, would there?  
— L.M. Montgomery<sup>20</sup>

When we wander through philosophy's recorded roots, is it even possible to think about 'wonder' without thinking about 'knowledge' simultaneously? Glancing over the canonized Western philosophical tradition, it would seem that it is not. As will become clear from the proceedings of this chapter, wonder has been intrinsically tied up with knowledge in a tight and seemingly self-evident knot. This chapter will trace the philosophical roots of wonder back to some of the philosophers that most explicitly wrote about and tied the wonder-knowledge-knot in philosophical discourse. Such tying could be said to extend back to the ancient Greeks and perhaps even to the pre-Socrats who arguably began to *wonder* about what 'is.'<sup>21</sup> Analyzing this knot will be valuable for two reasons: first, it will help in reaching an understanding of why wonder has become associated so strongly with knowledge; how, when philosophy focuses on arriving at true knowledge the restriction of wonder to the confinement of the epistemological toolbox becomes understandable. And consequently, one can see how the relative absence of wonder from the feminist canon can be understood as an avoidance that has been tied to a way of knowing that goes against the modes of operation of feminist epistemologists, as touched upon in the introduction. Secondly, understanding the wonder-knowledge-knot is the first step towards transforming and eventually untangling it in subsequent chapters, to the extent that other connections as well as new potentials of wonder that do not pre-suppose a straightforward relation with a particular kind of knowledge production may become possible.

Thus, before discussing such (feminist) interventions into the knowledge-narrative about wonder, it is important to go back to some of the grand 'masters of philosophy' and see what wonder *does* in their work; to have a closer look at how wonder came to be defined as

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<sup>20</sup> From *Anne of Green Gables*: (Montgomery 1992).

<sup>21</sup> For instance, Plato's *Theaetetus* describes the pre-Socrat Thales from Miletus as someone who looked at the sky in wonder, failing to see the pit in front of him and falling into it, while being laughed at by a servant girl (2004, 174a).

vital to philosophy and, subsequently, knowledge production.<sup>22</sup> How did wonder turn into an epistemological tool? Does the progressive development narrative of wonder (culminating in adequate knowledge of the object of wonder) that can be found in their work, leave space for a wonder free from immediate reason? In order to think about these issues, and to wonder about wonder itself, I will review some notable positions on wonder in a selective reading of philosophers of particular significance: Aristotle, Plato and René Descartes. Analyzing the way in which wonder figures in their work serves to highlight the ways in which the wonder-knowledge-knot has been severely tied and developed to help establish a clean, objective new way of thinking and practicing science. With the critique of knowledge production by feminist epistemologists as discussed in the introduction in mind, the minimal attention to wonder from feminist thinkers critical of knowledge production falls into place.

### *Wonder in Plato and Aristotle: A Temporary Location*

Upon examining some of the ‘classics’ of philosophy, one can trace a common thread running from introductory courses in philosophy at high school and university back through philosophy’s canonized history, that posits wonder at the forefront of its tradition as a crucial partner to the intellectual activity of philosophizing. This narrative of wonder as a defining emotion for the field of philosophy in its quest for true knowledge returns in the average guide to philosophy,<sup>23</sup> as well as in the recorded thought of most authoritative past philosophers themselves.<sup>24</sup> It works as a powerful story of origin in which philosophy is

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<sup>22</sup> Turning towards canonical male thinkers who dominate the field of authoritative philosophy entails taking a specific stance on feminist genealogies and the question of whether to engage with the master discourses at all. By ‘masters’ I mean those canonical, male theorists and philosophers that have shaped much of our thinking and get the credit for it. Although a debate exists within feminist thought as to whether feminism should engage with such thinkers at all, and if so, how and whether their ideas are of any value to feminism (cf. Freeland 2000), I write from the standpoint that every feminist position is necessarily involved in patriarchal power relations. This means that all options are bound by constraints of patriarchal power and, siding with Elizabeth Grosz, I believe this is the “very condition of feminism’s effectivity in countering and displacing the effects of patriarchy, its *immersion* in patriarchal practices (including those surrounding the production of theory) is the condition of its effective critique of and movement beyond them” (1995, 57). This is relevant to the way in which I use the philosophers in this chapter: not in order to police and critique, but in order to look at how the discourse on wonder in ancient and enlightenment philosophy, problematic as it may be, can be used to gain an understanding of the connection between wonder and knowledge production as well as shed a light on discourses on wonder that have been developed in feminist philosophy. My chapters on feminist philosophy and wonder will in turn focus more on carving out and affirming a feminist genealogy of wonder.

<sup>23</sup> A few obvious and recent examples being: *The Path of Philosophy: Truth, Wonder and Distress* (Marmysz 2011), *Philosophy: An Introduction to the Art of Wondering* (Christian 2008) and *From Wonder to Wisdom* (Kirkland 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Just a few of the works that consider wonder as primary to philosophy include Plato’s *Theaetetus* ([c. 369 B.C.E]), Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* ([c. 350 B.C.E.]), Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* ([1927] 2008b), and Alfred N. Whitehead’s *Nature and Life* ([1934] 2011). For an overview of wonder in the work of philosophers

envisioned to be ‘born’ in wonder, and raised as a hard worked-for, repeatedly questioned and matured truth or wisdom. From Socrates onwards, wonder is secured as philosophy’s point of departure. And it is also declared a phase that may be surpassed in attaining proper knowledge of its object. The Platonic legacy grounding philosophy in wonder – *thaumazein* in ancient Greek – has been vital to the way in which wonder was conceived and came to be defined in Enlightenment philosophy and beyond (cf. Marmysz 2011).

Turning first to Plato’s *Theaetetus* ([c. 369 B.C.E.] 2004) – which centers around the question ‘What is knowledge?’ – we find that wonder is evoked as that in which knowledge is embedded from the very start. In this particular dialogue, Socrates famously finds confirmation of Theodorus’ appraisal of the philosophical qualities of the young Theaetetus in the wonder that the latter expresses during their investigations into the nature of knowledge. Theaetetus’ wonderment convinces Socrates of his being in the presence of a potential philosopher “for wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder” (Plato 2004, 155d). For Socrates, according to Plato, wonder is nothing less than the very origin of philosophy.

This idea will be repeated later by Plato’s student Aristotle who in his *Metaphysics* ([c. 350 B.C.E.] 1933) states: “it is owing to wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize” (I:982b). Wonder starts in wondering “that things should be as they are.” According to Aristotle, it begins with the “obvious perplexities” on the ground floor of life and its particularities, and is then elevated to greater matters when we wonder, for instance, about the moon, the stars, the genesis of the universe and the primary causes in their grand generality (I:982b). Knowledge about the divine cause, for Aristotle, constitutes the highest form of knowledge and the highest good achievable. When we wonder about things, we are, in principle, able to gradually climb up the ladder of important objects of knowledge and rid ourselves of ignorance. All men naturally desire knowledge (I:980a), Aristotle claims, and knowledge acquisition begins in wonder. An indication of our natural desire for knowledge is to be found in our “esteem for the senses,” which we don’t only use in a utilitarian sense, but also enjoy for their own sake (I:980a). We see or hear or feel something, activating wonder and the love of wisdom characteristic of philosophy. Without wonder, there would be no motivation to pursue wisdom, the essence as well as etymological meaning of philosophy.

Aristotle stresses, however, that wonder can and should be surpassed in order to reach

a state of understanding, starting a long tradition of ‘overcoming wonder.’ This is where we first see very clearly that wonder takes on the role of an epistemological tool. We move from ignorance to understanding through wonder and arrive at “the better view” (Aristotle 1933, I:983a), ending with the contrary to our initial ignorance. As an example, Aristotle names the wonder we experience at the sight of “marionettes, or solstices, or the incommensurability of the diagonal of a square” (I:983a). Although these things may seem ‘wonderful’ and worthy of wonder to those who don’t yet understand their causes, the sense of wonder is lost at the very moment one understands, or grasps how things “should be as they are” (I:983a). For when one understands the causes behind the way the world is organized, they do not evoke wonder any longer. For Aristotle, thinking of a world that is not organized as it is suddenly becomes something absurd and wonder-provoking. The way things are fail to fill us with wonder at the moment we gain an understanding of it.<sup>25</sup> Thus the wonder that Aristotle delineates has a beginning and an end. It has a particular life span and it is to be overcome as soon as we acquire knowledge about the thing wondered at. It goes hand in hand with what could be viewed as the enchantment and disenchantment of the things that fill us up with wonder, after we have found out the true reasons behind their existence. Once we understand, there is no need to wonder any longer. Wonder in Aristotle is therefore a temporary affair.<sup>26</sup>

Returning to Socrates in the aforementioned dialogue *Theaetetus*, we find that here, too, wonder is temporary, as well as a state with spatial dimensions: it is a place in which one can find oneself, in fact, terribly lost. That wonder is a sort of *temporary location* becomes evident when Socrates rhetorically asks Theaetetus whether he is not “lost in wonder” (Plato 2004, 155c) at a point in the dialogue at which the doctrine of knowledge as relative to what appears to each one, appears to have reached its limits. Theaetetus consequently admits that he is indeed lost in wonder and his confession is followed by his assertion that now “the face of things has changed” (155c). The dialogue portrays him as young, and at times lost in wonder. Yet his dialectical talents again and again make him come up with new thoughts

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<sup>25</sup> Aristotle turns to mathematical metaphors to illustrate this point. He uses the geometrical example of the discovery by Greek mathematicians of the incommensurability of the diagonal and the side of the square to show that, contrary to ‘common sense’ of laymen who assume that all lengths are ‘measurable’ (with integer numbers), the geometer knows that this is not the case. He has moved from ignorance, *through wonder*, to understanding. So now, what would really provoke wonder in a geometer’s mind is if such a diagonal were suddenly to become measurable (Aristotle 1933, I:983a). That is, if what we came to understand as the organization of the world, would suddenly shift.

<sup>26</sup> This finding contradicts the view commonly held that wonder enchants the philosopher endlessly, again and again. As contemporary philosopher Simon Critchley states: “Philosophy begins in wonder but, as anyone who philosophizes can tell you, it doesn’t end there.” Adding also to that that “[t]he more one pierces the veil of illusion, the more wonder the world reveals” (2010, 44).



through ‘midwife’<sup>27</sup> Socrates, arriving at general conceptions and ideas that in the end overcome this loss. Throughout their quest for a definition of knowledge, Socrates continues to leave Theaetetus in a state and place of disorientation. This wondering lost-ness only serves the cause of the conversation: the arrival at a true knowledge of knowledge itself.

What wonder *does* to Theaetetus and the philosopher in general, then, involves a disorienting and displacing of the subject. It is a kind of wandering wonder, absolutely necessary but then to be discarded in the end. Wonder here demands from the wondering subject that one finds a way *out*, because only then can one find a way *into* the realm of conceptual knowledge. Wonder is not a place to dwell in endlessly, a characteristic that later runs through Descartes’ thought on wonder as well. This turns wonder into something that is spatially and temporarily defined, disabling as well as enabling at the same time. Wonder is therefore a kind of threshold, and the threshold to knowledge full of wonder.

### *To Straddle the Boundary Between Body and Soul: Descartes’ Passions*

[M]y whole aim was to reach certainty—to push away the loose earth and sand so as to get to rock or clay. I had pretty fair success in this, I think.  
– Rene Descartes<sup>28</sup>

We jump several generations,<sup>29</sup> turning to a dominant figure of early-modernity in the philosophical canon: René Descartes, often referred to as the ‘father of modernity.’ He takes up the ancient Greek line of thought on wonder as spatially and temporarily defined as well as bound up with knowledge. It is necessary to review his conception of wonder, because in his thought the connection between wonder and knowledge really sediments. Moreover, wonder is itself thoroughly investigated for the first time in Descartes’ thought: what it does, how it is provoked in the body and the soul, and how wonder fits within the philosopher’s overall theory of the passions. Although we already find some significant traces of a wonder-knowledge-knot in Plato and Aristotle, the concept of wonder is most clearly linked to reason

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<sup>27</sup> Socrates compares himself to a midwife in helping his student ‘give birth’ to the right ideas and deciding whether the newborns are worthy of life. He throws Theaetetus’ ‘babies’ away, one after the other, when he deems them to be miscarriages of the soul. The men that give birth through him, he claims, “(...) are in pain and are full of trouble night and day, much more than are the women” (151a). The obvious sexism in trivializing and devaluation of childbirth by using midwifery and child-bearing as a metaphor for something considered way more painful and way more valuable – philosophizing – should not go unmentioned at this point. For a thorough discussion of different facets of ancient philosophy through multiple feminist lenses, see: *Feminism and Ancient Philosophy* (Ward et al. 1996)

<sup>28</sup> From *Discourse on the Method*: (Descartes 2009).

<sup>29</sup> ‘Jumping generations’ is a term borrowed from van der Tuin (2009).

and knowledge only in early modernity.

With the rise of modern science in the aftermath and worldview of the Middle Ages and Christian and scholastic interpretations of Aristotelian philosophy, a new philosophical mechanist perspective develops, symbolized, amongst others, by pioneers Thomas Hobbes (cf. 1996) and Descartes (cf. 2003) and later under the influence of Newtonian physics continued by French materialist philosophers such as Julien Offray de la Mettrie (cf. 1996) and Denis Diderot (cf. 1981). Moving from a teleological worldview in which God had a fixed purpose for everything, to a mechanic worldview in which the world could be explained as well as changed by the study of its components, the body started to be understood as a machine, and nature as a mechanism (cf. Faber 1986).

Descartes, a substance dualist, argued that reality was composed of two radically different types of substance: corporeal substance, on the one hand, and mental substance, on the other. Although unlike other mechanist philosophers, he denied that the soul could be explained in corporeal terms, he did understand corporeal substance as purely mechanistic. That is, he understood all natural objects as entirely mechanistic automata. In order to justify a free will, the soul escaped this determined understanding of nature. Understanding nature as mechanistic meant a radical departure from the common Aristotelian teleological, naturalist understanding of the world at the time. For instance, the idea of Aristotle's 'active shapes' that work unto and provide power to passive matter were to the seventeenth century what the concept of gravity is to us. But Descartes was ready to let go of the idea of an active causality and apply the idea of a machine to the entire world as one big system of materiality and movement (van Ruler 2001, 37). However, his philosophy still needed an initial and divine "push" by God to set the machine in motion. And although God's role shrunk significantly in Descartes's work, pushing the world of materiality and movement into motion, and keeping the idea of the immortal soul and free will in place still required him to take God into account. His philosophy can be thought of, therefore, as caught in-between two worlds, on the threshold of the old toward a new line of Enlightenment thought.<sup>30</sup>

Looking at nature in mechanical terms meant that bodies, too, could be explained through purely mechanical terms. In *Treatise On Man* (1633), Descartes writes: "I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth" (Descartes [1633] 2003, 99) As the body was categorized under corporeal substance, this meant that many bodily processes which Aristotle had assigned to the soul, could now be explained

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<sup>30</sup> For an interesting rereading of Descartes' thought and an inquiry into the implications of Cartesian modernity, see: *Reading Descartes Otherwise: Blind, Mad, Dreamy, and Bad* (Lee 2013).

through a mechanical lens. This included digestion, respiration, the receptions of light, sound, heat, taste and smell and our imagination and memory of them, the workings of the heart and arteries, the external movement of our limbs, our appetite, and finally, the passions. However, the passions also seem to trouble the strict divide between what can be assigned to the body and what belongs strictly to the soul.

Arguably, wonder in the Middle Ages was mainly used as a religious tool to point at the miraculous (as will be discussed in chapter 2), and now in Descartes' thought it provided a way to arrive at true, scientific knowledges mediated in a slow but sure divorce from a world in which an all-knowing, omnipotent god still took center stage. That is, wonder provided a tool, so to say, to start thought from the newly assigned center of the world – autonomous, rational man – and arrive at epistemological conclusions that were scientific, secular and of strictly human instead of divine descent. Descartes' thought – known to emphasize the human capacities to think and acquire knowledge, strictly differentiating the body from the soul and placing the latter above the former – can be held responsible to a substantial extent for establishing and tightening the knot of knowledge production and wonder.

In his *Passions of the Soul* ([1649] 1999), Descartes provides answers to his friend and critical reader, Elizabeth of Bohemia, who in their private correspondence (cf. 2007) requests for him to clarify the role of the passions in our lives and how they can be of use to us. Herein, Descartes outlines that we respond with the passions to the world around us because of the various ways in which certain events or things can be harmful or beneficial to us (James 1997, 100). He regards the passions as a very pervasive sort of thought that is caused by both bodily motions, as well as other types of perceptions (97). We experience passions not only when we perceive something, but also when we remember or imagine something. To understand the position of wonder within this framework, a general sketch of the ordering of the passions in *Passions of the Soul* will be of use here.

Descartes attributes only 'thoughts' to the soul (1999, art 17:335), and thus to mental substance. Remaining indebted to Aristotelian tradition, he divides thoughts into 'actions of the soul', what he calls volitions and voluntary imaginings, and thoughts that are, in a general sense, 'passions of the soul', what he calls perceptions (art. 19:335). He then continues to divide this general 'passions of the soul' into those passions caused by the soul and those caused by the body (art. 21:336). The passions caused by the body are divided again into two branches: neural and non-neural. The passions of the soul, caused by the body and involving neural mechanisms can be divided lastly into three categories: those referring to external

objects, those referring to the body and finally, those that refer to the soul. It is this final category to which wonder belongs, together with the other five primary passions: love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness (art. 69:353). Of all the thoughts the soul may have, “there are none that agitate and disturb the soul so strongly as the passions” (art. 28:339) that is, the passions that refer specifically to the soul.

From this it may seem that the passions of the soul that refer to the soul do not fall under the workings of corporeal substance, and are thus not explainable in mechanistic terms. Although according to Descartes we refer them to the soul, they do depend on the body as well, pulling them across the boundary of body and soul. In *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (1997), Susan James takes the example Descartes gives in the case of joy. Descartes writes that when we imagine ourselves enjoying something good, the imagination of something good does not contain the feeling of joy. Rather, it causes the animal spirits (comparable to our modern conception of nerves) to travel from the brain to the muscles in which the nerves around the heart are embedded. This causes the openings of the heart to expand. And this in turn produces movements in the tiny nerves of the heart, resulting in the feeling of joy. As James argues, this involves a “three-stage transaction from soul to body to soul”: first we have the imagination moving the infamous pineal gland, then the gland pushes the animal spirits to the nerves that are around the heart and this motion again pushes the animal spirits to the brain, moving the gland and finally, causing the feeling of joy (James 1997, 97). This example clarifies that the process of having passionate responses contains both mental and physical components and, as Susan James notes, straddles the strict divide between body and soul, thereby indirectly challenging Descartes’ own theory that “matter moves and soul thinks” (106).

#### *Spatio-Temporal Restrictions: To Dwell or to Emancipate*

As feminist philosopher Rachel Jones argues, wonder for Descartes is the “passion that can accompany not knowing” (Jones 2009, 1), and, as I will suggest in the following, it is the passion to be *emancipated from* in order to reach the state of ‘knowing.’ After the brief delineation of the role and position of the passions for Descartes above, it is now possible to zoom in on the most important of the six primary passions: wonder. As the following excerpt demonstrates, wonder takes up quite an exceptional role among the passions in Descartes’ thought:

When our first encounter with some object surprises us and we find it to be new, or very different from what we formerly knew or from what we supposed it ought to be, this causes us to wonder and be astonished at it. Since all this may happen before we know whether or not the object is beneficial, I regard wonder as the first of all the passions. (1999, art. 53:350)

As the primary passion, wonder – the English translation of the Latin *admiratio*, which is not to be understood as the modern word *admiration*, but rather as the capacity for amazement, astonished or surprise (Malabou 2013a, 8) – is the first of the six primitive passions of the soul that Descartes distinguishes. What makes wonder so special according to Descartes is that it precedes judgment, for it is the only passion which does not judge its object to be good or bad, useful or useless, beneficial or harmful. Rather, its character implies that it be followed up by other passions and reflection as we gradually work our way towards a better understanding of the encountered object.

Descartes gives us some clues as to what wondering does to the body in *Passions*. A feature of wonder that distinguishes it from all the other passions is the way in which it affects the body: it leaves an impression in the brain that “represents the object as something unusual” as well as “worthy of special consideration” (Descartes 1999a, art. 70:353). Yet wonder, contrary to the other passions, is not accompanied by a change in the blood and in the heart (art. 71:353). This is because the intentional direction of wonder – “knowledge of the thing that we wondered at” (art. 71:353) – does not require anything apart from the brain. For Descartes, wonder resides in the head, and is therefore untainted by bodily movement that could trouble and distract the subject (James 1997, 188). It is wonder alone, which consists of a rush of spirits to the brain that serves to deprive the body of the means to consider anything else.

Free of immediate interest (in the goodness or badness of the thing wondered at), wonder is then a perfect passion to precede and accompany philosophy in the pursuit of knowledge. It concretely “sows the seeds of a more systematic kind of knowledge” (Malabou 2013a, 187) through the feelings of what strikes us as novel and surprising. It is useful as it “makes us learn and retain in our memory things of which we were previously ignorant of. For we wonder only at what appears to us unusual and extraordinary” (Descartes 1999a, art 75:354). It is common to all the passions that they are only serviceable insofar as they bring about “strengthening thoughts” that the soul preserves. But the key here is moderation. Too much strengthening and preserving, or other thoughts on which “it is not good to dwell” (art. 74: 354), are a bad thing, and can cause *astonishment*. When we wonder about something

which is unknown to us, then, we do not learn from it unless “our idea of it is strengthened in our brain by some passion, or perhaps also by an application of our intellect as fixed by our will in a special state of attention and reflection” (art. 75:355).

Whereas wonder “makes us disposed to acquire scientific knowledge,” (Descartes 1999a, art. 76:355) we should nevertheless be cautious and “still try afterwards to emancipate ourselves from it as much as possible” (art. 60:351). Wonder alone is not enough, and needs to be followed up by other passions, the will to know and, ultimately, knowledge. If this does not happen, we become subject to “blind curiosity” and turn into one of those people who “seek out rarities simply in order to wonder at them and not in order to know them” (art. 78:356), which completely defies the aim of wonder: knowledge.

Descartes insists that if we do not emancipate ourselves from wonder by carefully considering all that seems rare and unusual to us and working up to acquiring knowledge about them, we might get ‘stuck’ in excessive wonder: astonishment (Descartes 1999a, art. 76:355). We learn that “the whole body remains as immobile as a statue” (art. 73:353), which consequently makes it impossible to properly perceive the object of wonder, or acquire detailed knowledge about it. What thus happens when we wonder excessively is that wonder *transfixes the subject*. The threshold to knowledge, wonder, in the case of its resultant excess of astonishment becomes a quarantine that holds us captured and stands in the way of adequate judgment.<sup>31</sup> It defies the aim of wonder and makes the now subject incapable of acquiring a more specific knowledge of the thing wondered at. And this, Descartes insists, may “entirely prevent or pervert the use of reason” (art. 76:355) For, as we have seen, we might develop a blind curiosity by seeking out rarities simply to be able to wonder, instead of getting to know them. Astonishment, then, is always a ‘bad’ thing (art. 73:354) because it prevents the subject from the production of knowledge concerning the thing highlighted through wonder. And trans-fixation is, after all, not the aim of this primary passion. In order to gain knowledge of the thing of wonder, it is imperative to rid oneself as soon as possible of wonder once we have acquired knowledge about its object:

Although it is good to be born with some inclination to wonder, since it makes us disposed to acquire scientific knowledge, yet after acquiring such knowledge we must attempt to free ourselves from this inclination as much as possible. (art. 76:355)

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<sup>31</sup> One example of how this caution against wonder is passed on amongst philosophers can be found in Hannah Arendt’s explanation of Heidegger’s commitment to national socialism as an ‘excess of wonder’ (Strong 2012: 325-370).

It seems clear that the aforementioned knot of wonder and knowledge sinks in deeply in the dominant canon of Western philosophy, where both strings of the knot (knowledge and wonder) are tied together in a way that will be a directive for the following centuries.

Because wonder alone leaves the subject ‘blind,’ aimlessly and immaturely looking for things to wonder at, it *needs* to grow into a higher aim: knowledge. Descartes was certainly not the first to entangle wonder and knowledge, for as we have seen the two were already inseparable in the work of classic figures such as Plato and Aristotle. Yet everything becomes much more explicitly defined in Descartes. The spatial and temporal dimensions that were assigned to wonder in Ancient Greece are further developed in his thought, and take on a much more prescriptive character.

As far as the spatial dimension of wonder in Descartes is concerned, this means that one cannot only get lost in wonder (as Theaetetus does in his dialogues with Socrates), but that it is also possible to ‘dwell’ in wonder. And this has temporal implications: it is not just a matter of time and patient searching – again, think of Socrates patient guidance of Theaetetus’ search for a perfect definition of knowledge – for wonder to turn into knowledge anymore: there is in Descartes an urgency to get out of it as soon as possible. The longer one ‘dwells’ in wonder, the more unknowable the world becomes and the more prone the subject is to getting caught in an endless loop of wonder and astonishment. Although it is necessary to have touched the grounds of wonder, it is essential to not get stuck there. “The woods are lovely, dark and deep,/ But I have promises to keep” writes Robert Frost (2001), and this seems quite an adequate comparison to the spatio-temporal dimensions of wonder for Descartes, when we add to it that those promises – knowledge of the thing wondered at – are on a strict time-schedule. Any dwelling, or blind curiosity on the knower’s part will make it harder to keep the promise of knowledge and will result in the forest growing thicker and more difficult to traverse.

Staying with the metaphor of trees, it is notable that Cartesian wonder is quite Aristotelian in that it is teleological. Aristotle held a teleological view of the natural world that takes plants and animals to be paradigm cases of natural existents, for they have an internal causal principle which explains how they came into being, as well as how they will behave. An acorn, for instance, has an intrinsic and natural tendency, independent of craft or chance, to grow into an oak tree. The nature of a thing in Aristotelian physics is thereby identified with its end: its final cause. And the final cause of a thing is also its function (Aristotle 2008, II). While Descartes no longer works with a teleological view of the natural world, his concept of wonder does adhere to a teleological structure, instead of a mechanical

one. That is, one could say that for him wonder is the seed, destined to grow into the tree of knowledge. The true nature of wonder therefore is knowledge acquisition, which is its final cause and therefore also its function.

*Passions* therefore marks the point of ‘no return’ in early modernity when it comes to the entanglement of wonder and knowledge, and I would suggest Descartes’ thought on wonder does so in the most explicit way in the canonized history of philosophy thus far. But in this close reading of Descartes’ theory of wonder in his *Passions*, it also becomes clear that there are quite some obstacles to overcome for wonder to fulfill its function and final cause. His cautionary notes signal that wonder, if not restricted in spatial and temporal terms, has the tendency to go elsewhere, to open up and to avoid certainty. Descartes suggests that the seed of wonder, if not tended to correctly, never germinates. Yet this begs the question of what would happen if wonder were allowed to grow under different circumstances, with plenty of time and space.

But such time and space was not given to the wonderer in Descartes. By developing an *a priori* method to uncover infallible and true knowledge, he paved the way for wonder to stand in the service of knowledge. Knowledge here corresponds to the Enlightenment projects of the development of clean scientific methods, based on logic and the emphasis on rationalization and *objectivity* that have come to define to a large extent, the main mode of relating in the following centuries (Lloyd 1993; Haraway 1997). This relating is defined in terms of conceptualization, categorization, practices of scientific taxonomy and an instrumental attitude towards objects, others and eventually, ourselves. In moving *from* wonder and *towards* (amongst other processes of) observation, theory, hypothesis and correlation, it is a quest defined by knowledge practices that are aimed at an accumulation of certainty and control – quite the contrary to a surprising, uncertain, marveling and open character that is often associated with wonder.

After considering the role of wonder in the thought of Ancient Greek philosophers and the tying of the wonder-knowledge-knot in Descartes (a formative point in creating a discourse on wonder that is still prevalent today), the relative feminist abstinence from wonder will not come as a surprise. Feminist epistemologists, as we have discussed in the introductory chapter, have worked relentlessly to show that the aforementioned relation to the world in terms of knowledge acquisition aimed at control and disguised as objective observations leaves much to be desired (Harding 1986; Lloyd 1993; B. Prins 1997; Schneider 2005). As wonder in Enlightenment-thinking stands in the service of exactly this kind of control-directed knowledge that feminist thinkers have convincingly critiqued while



proposing new ways of knowing and different parameters of knowledge, it now makes sense that this very wonder has not often played a key role in such re-thinking. The philosophers have, so to speak, positioned wonder as *Knowledge's handmaiden*.<sup>32</sup> This can explain our connotations of wonder that consist of armchair contemplation or the ivory tower of the disengaged and isolated philosopher. As such, its reputation as unengaged, not invested in anything and noncommittal has restricted its meaning for feminist work.

To (re)claim wonder as a feminist passion – and to understand the philosophical foundations underlying the work of feminist philosophers who have engaged with the passion – it is essential to understand these philosophical roots in order to emancipate it from the wonder-knowledge-knot so that wonder's plentiful other potentialities can be developed. For as we have seen, philosophy has restricted wonder's reach in a cautious and nearly anxious way, which gives one all the more reason to think of what wonder could do without the restrictions of true and infallible knowledge acquisition. However, this narrative of knowledge acquisition as the function of wonder was not uncontested at the time. A counter-narrative of wonder put forth by Spinoza will open up the potential for untangling it from capitalized Knowledge and dominant philosophy, enabling new feminist connections and alliances.

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<sup>32</sup> This is a play on the designation of philosophy as 'religion's handmaiden' in the Middle Ages (cf. Gracia and Noone 2003).

## Chapter 2

### Spinoza: The Wondering Jew?

[T]he great floodgates of the wonder-world swung open.  
— Herman Melville<sup>33</sup>

In the previous chapter I discussed the wonder-knowledge-knot in philosophy. The chapter focused specifically on the work of one of the grand figures of the Enlightenment, Descartes, who assigned a primary position to wonder within his theory of the passions, yet restricted its role as much as possible and warned against its excesses. By discussing formative moments of the philosophic elaboration of wonder in Ancient Greece and Enlightenment thought, the chapter worked towards an understanding of the wonder-knowledge-knot in which wonder is restricted spatially and temporally and has at its aim and as its function a specific knowledge acquisition aimed at control and objectivity. This chapter focuses on an important philosophical intervention into this knot.

As Elizabeth Grosz argues, the Cartesian tradition has been more influential than any other tradition “in establishing the agenda for philosophical reflection and defining the terrain, either negatively or positively, for later concepts of subjectivity and knowledge” (Grosz 1994, 10). In the preceding, we have thus discussed wonder within the framework of the triumph of reason, and the specific kind of objective knowledge that was becoming imperative during this time of early Enlightenment. Yet this period and its outcome were not directionally linear, or without any friction or contradiction. And although we have come to associate the Enlightenment in terms of philosophy with the establishment of the reign of mind over body, strict dualism and the autonomous free will (and wonder with philosophy and knowledge acquisition), a few important interruptions into these ideas and their hegemony, as well as an interruption into the wonder-knowledge-knot, take place around the same time.

One of them is represented by the work of Descartes’ contemporary Spinoza. As will be shown in the course of this chapter, the entanglement of wonder and knowledge is straightforwardly denied by Spinoza. His discussion of the workings of wonder aside from its antagonistic nature towards knowledge is nevertheless not very straightforward and should not be understood without further contextualization. In order to understand his exceptional

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<sup>33</sup> From *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*: (Melville 2013, 24).

take on wonder and the valuable break it constitutes in the formation of the wonder-knowledge-knot, an opening up of the concept of wonder itself, a framing of his thought in respect to Descartes and an exploration of his monist ontology as well as his take on the passions through his theory of the ‘affect’ is in place.

*Debunking Descartes: Affirmative Reading and Monism*

Grosz names Spinoza (along with philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Giambattista Vico) an “anomalous philosopher” (Grosz 1994, 56). This could be said to not only count for the counter-Cartesian-direction of his thought, but also for his position in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch society. At the time, within the Portuguese-Jewish community that decisively turned its back on Spinoza and from which he was excommunicated, and also within the context of the relatively liberal climate of Amsterdam, the categorization of “anomaly” would not be an overstatement (Negri 1999; Nadler 2001; van Reijen 2013). In contemporary times, although often still bypassed in the canon of continental philosophy, Spinoza’s thought is increasingly revisited and put to work, whether it be in recent discussions in moral philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, or neuroscience (cf. Damasio 2004; Norris, Badiou, and Duffy 2011; Marshall 2014; Cook, Haas, and Homan 2015).<sup>34</sup>

One of Spinoza's earliest publications, aptly titled *The Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (1663), actually centers entirely around Descartes' philosophy ([1663] 2002a). Spinoza read Descartes' works greedily. He has been called “an incomparable commentator” of the latter (Lloyd 2002, 10). Criticizing requires engagement first and foremost and Spinoza seemed to be aware of this. The *Principles* can be regarded as an affirmative reading of Descartes’ work.<sup>35</sup> Yet being able to explain Descartes' methods perfectly and logically within their own conceptual framework and style of thinking didn’t stop Spinoza from heading in an entirely different philosophical direction. Instead of a strict dualism of

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<sup>34</sup> Needless to say, widely different interpretations of Spinoza have resulted in the fact that there are many ‘Spinozas’ to choose from. It will be useful here to position myself in respect to, or in alliance with what Rosi Braidotti calls the ‘French reception’ and Deleuzian line of Spinoza, as opposed to the Anglo-American thinkers for whom Spinoza’s rationalism is highlighted and for whom “it is axiomatic that ideas are interesting only insofar as they achieve requisite standards of logical consistency and truth” (Braidotti 2006, 146). Contrary to such views, the interpretations discussed here, as developed and elaborated by pivotal feminist thinkers, stress the affectual, corporeal, (new)materialist and political resistance threads running through Spinoza’s work. See (Braidotti 2006, chapter 4).

<sup>35</sup> Affirmative reading is a feminist reading strategy. See for instance: (Grosz 2005; Braidotti 2011; van der Tuin 2011; Braidotti 2013).

corporeal substance and mental substance as discussed in the previous chapter, Spinoza in part I of his *Ethics* ([1677] 2002b) builds his entire philosophical system around a radical monism that is based on the speculative idea of an indivisible and all-encompassing self-subsistent substance, also called God or Nature: absolute, infinite and “singular in both kind and number” (Grosz 1994, 10), of which all other things are modifications (Lloyd 2002, 11).

The implications of his idea of God are even less conventional than they might seem from this initial description, for God, as substance, gains power through existing and not through an ability to create or through a 'free will.' There is nothing outside of him (Lloyd 2002, 43) and a free will would contradict God's freedom, which according to Spinoza has nothing to do with a determinate act of will, but rather consists of a free cause, “acting from the necessity of a nature which includes neither will nor intellect” (45). And this God as substance expresses itself in potentially infinitely different attributes, whereby ‘to express’ could arguably be understood as a simultaneous enveloping, as in the example of the tree in the seed (31). Such expressions are no longer properties of a transcendent God looking down on us from above, but instead become ways in which reality is expressed, construed or articulated. These expressions of reality are now no longer ‘created’ with God as the *causa activa*; they are attributes of God himself (31). God, no longer an emanative cause or the one who set the world in motion as is the case in Descartes’ thought, does not unfold (Beistegui 2010, 30-43).<sup>36</sup>

He is what Gilles Deleuze calls an 'immanent cause': “not only does it remain in itself in order to produce, but what it produces remains in it” (Deleuze 1980). God produces everything within itself, and not outside of him, because there is no exterior to him.<sup>37</sup> Thought and extension are two of the potentially infinite attributes that are intelligible to us and make the divine substance intelligible (Spinoza 2002b, II:245). Deleuze calls this divine substance ‘univocal being,’ although Spinoza does not use the term himself. Deleuze asserts:

Univocal being is precisely what Spinoza defines as being the substance having all attributes equal, having all things as modes. The modes of substance are beings [l'étant]. The absolutely infinite substance is Being as Being, the attributes all equal to one another are the essence of being, and here you have this kind of plane on which everything falls back and where everything is inscribed. (Deleuze 1980)

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<sup>36</sup> The distinction between an active cause and an emanative cause can be illustrated by this example: fire is an emanative cause of its own heat, it produces by operating. Fire is an active cause of the warmth in someone warming themselves, as an exterior and immediate effect. See: (Bac 2010).

<sup>37</sup> See also (Thiele 2008) for a discussion of the concept and implications of immanence.

This “anti-hierarchical thought,” as Deleuze describes it, implies that every being, “the stone, the insane, the reasonable, the animal” is the same from the point of Being (1980). Deleuze explains: “Each is as much as there is in it, and being is said in one and the same sense of the stone, of the man, of the insane, or the reasonable. It is a very beautiful idea. It is a very savage kind of world” (1980). That is, whereas Cartesian philosophy consists of an ontology that divides everything up in binary pairs that are hierarchically charged, such a thing is not possible within Spinozian monism. We can already see how this is very different from Descartes' theories, who asserted the existence of two very different substances in theory of a strict hierarchical body-mind dualism, while Spinoza's God as infinite substance is 'only' or rather *all* one. For him, contrary to Descartes, God as well as the soul, are not independent of extension or matter. The unity of mind and body is not established in the causal interaction of the two as is the case in Descartes' interactionism, for thought and extension are not two separated, casually functioning entities in Spinozian monism – they are one in a non-unitary way.

Authorities on Spinoza have argued about the meaning of this oneness. Some claim his theory springs from occasionalism, many others interpret his thought as based on a parallelism (Balz 1918; Nyden-Bullock 2007; Rocca 2008). Yet, as Spinoza-expert Miriam van Reijen convincingly argues, Spinoza is neither an interactionist, nor an occasionalist, nor – finally – a parallelist (van Reijen 2013, 78-79). Regardless of the final and definitive interpretation, interactionism was most certainly not part of Spinoza's plan, as becomes apparent from the way in which he ridicules such a theory in Descartes. After having read and interpreted his work very generously in the *Cartesian Principles*, Spinoza mocks Descartes for his theory around the pineal gland as “an hypothesis more occult than any occult quality,” and he satirically asks: “[W]hat does he mean by the union of mind and body? What clear and distinct conception has he of a thought united most strictly to a certain small portion of matter? I deeply wished that he had explained this matter through its proximate cause” (Spinoza 2002b, III:364).

In part II of the *Ethics* Spinoza writes: “The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, in other words a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else” (Spinoza 2002b, II:251).<sup>38</sup> It follows from Spinoza's positioning of the attributes

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<sup>38</sup> Based on this information, van Reijen convincingly argues that Spinoza's standpoint is therefore not one of occasionalism – a variant of parallelism – for there can be no parallelism within Spinoza's philosophical structure. The latter would presuppose two lines that, even though they do not cause each other, still are separately next to each other. According to van Reijen, then, Spinoza is undoubtedly a naturalistic monist, explaining that for Spinoza, there exists only one process, one series of events that can be named, described and

of thought and extension that Descartes' hierarchically established dichotomy between mind and body – the mind being overvalued at the cost of the body in Descartes' work – becomes something quite incomprehensible within Spinoza's philosophical structure. The one-ness that can be considered from two perspectives (thought and extension), takes place on the level of Substance, the level of the attributes as well as the level of causal modes. And as Deleuze asserts:

[...] if thought is an attribute of God and if extension is an attribute of God or of substance, between thought and extension there won't be any hierarchy. All the attributes will have the same value from the moment that they are attributes of substance. (Deleuze 180)

This anti-dualist, non-hierarchical thought has been especially significant to feminist thinkers. As we have touched upon in the introduction, women (and others deviating from the white, heterosexual norm) are historically associated with matter; the body and the bodily have been largely excluded from the scene of the mind and from the symbolical and concrete space of reason reigning over the body (Lloyd 1993; Grosz 1994a). This is arguably one of the important reasons that Spinoza (considered mostly within the Deleuzian lines of interpretation) has been taken up and put to work so much in the past two decades by notable feminist scholars and philosophers, such as Rosi Braidotti (2006; 2011; 2013), Luce Irigaray (1993), Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens (1999), to rethink issues such as human agency, the sex/gender distinction, embodiment, sexual and racial imaginaries, as well as political practice, ethics, epistemology and ontology at large.<sup>39</sup>

#### *Understanding the Passions: Affects and Ideas*

Without a fundamental dualism between mind and body, the passions will necessarily also shift meaning and arise differently within Spinoza's system. For Spinoza, mankind – as one of the many modes of Nature – does not occupy any special position within the world. What happens to human beings, mentally and physically, happens as it does in the case of all other modes. Whereas for Descartes, humans are exceptional in that they have souls that do not abide to the rules of mechanic automata, as opposed to everything else in the natural world,

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experienced physiologically as well as psychologically. This is to say that body and mind are one and the same thing, sometimes considered under the attribute of Thought, and sometimes under the attribute of Extension (van Reijen 2013, 76-77).

<sup>39</sup> For a comprehensive selection of feminist interpretations of Spinoza, see: *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*: (Gatens et al. 2009).

no place for such anthropocentrism exists in Spinoza's thought. What happens, happens as an effect of previous causes that are, in principle, knowable to us.

In part III of the *Ethics*, 'The Origin and Nature of the Emotions,' it becomes clear that the same goes for the passions, which Spinoza does not refute or depreciate, but rather wants to understand. Whereas in Descartes, the passions straddle the boundary between body and soul, and, as in the case of wonder still carry a trace of Aristotelian teleology, Spinoza aims to understand them, geometrically, "as if it were an investigation into lines, planes, or bodies" (Spinoza 2002b, III:278). Human beings in this geometrical puzzle are positioned as but one mode among the expressions of attributes, striving for persistence and always in confrontation and combination with other forces (other modes, with each again their own strivings). The human condition as a mode in the whole of nature, together with the striving for self-preservation, then, explains the nature of the passions. Gaining understanding of these passions for Spinoza means enabling ourselves to transform them into a source of virtue and freedom and into active, rational emotions (Lloyd 2002, 72).

An understanding of the passions in Spinoza entails taking stock of the complex human body, which undergoes many external influences in various ways of which it is not itself the cause. This undergoing, or 'suffering', from influences can have a positive, neutral or negative effect on our attempt to persevere. For Spinoza, the passions expose the capacity of our bodies to undergo many changes and at the same time retain images from those bodily changes (Lloyd 2002, 72). He uses the word 'affect' to constitute a subclass of bodily 'affections' that make the body's power of acting increase or decrease. Whereas an *affection* is a state of the affected body, which implies an 'affecter,' an *affect* refers to a passage instead of a state. It concerns a passage from one state to another in one's body, which decreases or increases the body's power of acting. And these affects, always accompanied by mental movement, can be either passive or active, depending on whether they are based on adequate or inadequate ideas.

An inadequate idea is based on the mind's passivity, its 'suffering' or 'undergoing,' whereas an adequate idea involves the mind's activity, its 'doing' (van Reijen 2013). As Lloyd formulates it, for Spinoza, "to understand the passions is to understand the passivities that result from the human body's insertion in the order of nature, which makes it constantly affected by the impingements of other bodily modes" (Lloyd 2002, 73). And these impingements or influences are always there – we are in constant contact with the world and its strivings. Most of the influences, most of the 'sufferings' our bodies undergo, are not even met with our awareness of them. Van Reijen gives the example of life-threatening viruses or

bacteria that go about in our bodies unnoticed, or even the ongoing variations in sound, light, air pressure or temperature around us (van Reijen 2013, 97): while we ‘suffer’ their influence, they often go unnoticed.

In the rare instances that we *are* aware of our sufferings, Spinoza speaks of an affect, a feeling. An affect does not differ from all the other 'undergoings' of our body, but is combined with an awareness of the pleasant or unpleasant experience that accompanies it and an idea about its cause. Deleuze interprets it as follows: “affectus in Spinoza is variation [...] continuous variation of the force of existing, insofar as this variation is determined by the ideas one has” (Deleuze 1980). As we have seen, for Spinoza, the mind is the idea of the whole body. The affects, in turn, are accompanied by the *ideas* of the sufferings, influences or passions of the body (van Reijen 2008, 97) and of the confrontation of one's striving to persist in being together with other beings striving to persist as well. This creates, in Deleuze's words, a “kind of melodic line of continuous variation” (Deleuze 1980).

What does this mean for those passions that Descartes asserted were primary, and what do they *do*? First of all, the *Ethics* defines not six primary passions, but only three. The primary affects, according to Spinoza are 'joy' and 'sadness,' together with the underlying drive to persist in being, the *conatus*, which he calls 'desire' when conscious. These three primary affects – desire, joy and sadness – as opposed to Descartes' six primary passions, form the building blocks of all the other affects.<sup>40</sup> Joy increases one's power to act, whereas sadness diminishes this power. According to Spinoza, as soon as one undergoes an affect one almost immediately imagines a cause of this primary feeling, for there is a need or a drive to explain it and to match it up with a cause. This is again explained through the fact that the mind is set on realizing itself as much as possible, which for the mind means to *understand*.<sup>41</sup> However, this cause that one imagines to lie behind one's feelings can be either adequate or inadequate. The imagination fails to see the true cause behind the affects and thus ultimately fails to grasp the necessity of one's bodily situation, while one imagines instead that what has happened, did not need to happen at all – something that is impossible in a Spinozian worldview.<sup>42</sup> This is where Spinoza draws a line between the ideas about the causes of our

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<sup>40</sup> Sometimes it seems as if desire is put on par with joy and sadness as three equally primary affects, but a reading of desire as truly primary, subsequently evoking joy when fulfilled and sadness when not fulfilled seems more accurate (van Reijen 2008).

<sup>41</sup> For further explanation of how self-realization of the mind actually empowers the body and denies the power of the will to impose itself on the body, as well as an explanation of how self-understanding involves a notion of the body as self-organizing and able to coordinate its powers among other bodies, see: (Sharp 2011, 26-30).

<sup>42</sup> For Spinoza, all ideas of things that could have been otherwise are ideas of the arbitrariness of things. This means that they are inadequate ideas, because an adequate understanding of ourselves means that we know that everything that is, everything that we and others do or are, could not have been otherwise (van Reijen 2008, 98).



feelings as adequate and thus active (actions), and inadequate and thus passive (passions).

The inadequate conceptions that cause our (always passive) passions rest on a couple of problematic thoughts, such as the thought of man as an isolated, individual and free being, and man as powerful and autonomous – in short, failing to see man's place as a part of the totality. From these thoughts arise further inadequate imaginations about coincidence, free will, aims, not being perfect, failing and good and evil. These things do not exist as such for Spinoza, and they keep us from gaining real insight into our feelings or actions (van Reijen 2013, 100). The impressions on our body either bring a joyous feeling or a sad feeling along with them, and once connected to an inadequate imagination or a confused idea of the cause of this feeling, this feeling becomes a passion or emotion in the usual sense of the word. But it does not have to be that way. Neither initially joyous, nor initially sad feelings need to lead to passive affects. An adequate idea of the cause of a sad feeling can never lead to a negative affect, or emotion. It can only bring us joy because of our insight and understanding of its cause. That does not mean that the primary feeling of sadness leaves us, but it does mean that it is not 'topped up' by a negative emotion.<sup>43</sup> Only adequate, internalized knowledge about the causes of the affects will make way for active affects. Reason or intuitive knowledge lead to adequate knowledge by knowing and recognizing the dependency and limitedness of our humanity and the overpowering forces of other things, not only in the world, but also within ourselves and our own physical and psychic forces. One often knows what one feels and does, but almost never understands the true causes. When we adequately understand these, our affective 'sufferings' can become actions. And when we inadequately imagine a cause, a passion can be the result.

And this happens often, because we still have a long way to go to understand the body for *we do not even know what a body can do* (Spinoza 2002b, III:280),<sup>44</sup> For contrary to Descartes, who upheld the view that through the passions, the body acted and the mind was

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God or Nature does not lack in anything, feelings such as regret and guilt about what should have been only exists in the realm of inadequate knowledge.

<sup>43</sup> Van Reijen gives the example of a toothache: one can have pain, but there is a difference between having pain and also being additionally frustrated by that pain (2013, 104). Bluntly said: the one who truly understands the cause of this feeling will find joy in the insight that this pain is unavoidable, that it could not have been otherwise and that he or she is as perfect as he or she can possibly be at this particular moment in time. It is not things make us sad or happy but our imaginations of them and judgments about them.

<sup>44</sup> This groundbreaking statement, and the lack of a mind/body or nature/culture distinction in Spinoza has served as an inspiring starting point for feminist investigations, and has fed into feminist notions of the body and bodily imaginaries (Gatens and Lloyd 1999; James, Lloyd, and Gatens 2000), feminist philosophy and theories of embodiment (cf. Braidotti 2002; 2006), what has come to be known as the 'affective turn' (Koivunen 2010; Seigworth et al. 2010), as well as new materialism, which relies heavily on Spinoza and the elaboration of his thought in, for instance Deleuze, and Brian Massumi in arguing that "we know nothing of the (social) body until we know what it can do" (van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010, 113).

acted upon, Spinoza's idea of the mind as the idea of the body entails that "what is an action in the mind is necessarily an action in the body as well" (Deleuze 2001, 18) and this implies the workings of the passions. That is also to say, it is necessary to understand the body just as much as we understand the mind, in order to understand adequately the causes of the affects. Philosophy, however, does not typically focus on the body, but on the mind, which it places in a superior relation to the feminine-coded body (cf. Lloyd 1993). And therefore, instead of gaining an understanding of the working of the body to understand the affects and therefore make them active, it is preferred to imagine an independent mind or a free will, or to project a certain future or a certain past – imaginations which all lead to further passions themselves and keep one from understanding the true causes behind the affects. With this knowledge about the affects in mind, it will now be possible to contextualize the position of wonder within Spinoza's thought.

### *Ambiguous Wonder in Spinoza*

Wonder has thus far been curiously absent from this mapping of the affects of Spinoza. Surprisingly, for Spinoza wonder is absolutely *not* a primary passion. It is nowhere to be found among or near desire, sadness or joy. When one thinks of wonder as primary for philosophy, this is something that may easily be overlooked with Spinoza. Malabou, for instance, writes that wonder appears to be "for both Descartes and Spinoza, the most fundamental of them all" (Malabou 2013a, 8). This is inaccurate, for one of the many points at which Descartes' and Spinoza's roads notably diverge is to be found at the crossroads of wonder. Moderate wonder in Descartes' work is put on a pedestal for its instrumental value for knowledge acquisition as we have seen in the previous chapter. Spinoza, on the other hand, rather looks down on the emotion. He considers it to be a hindrance to knowledge production rather than the most fundamental affect.

Wonder, according to Spinoza, does not in the least lead to the acquisition of knowledge. In fact, he goes so far as to claim that "there is no wonder in him who draws true conclusions" (Spinoza cited in Rosenthal 2010, 237). As Michael A. Rosenthal suggests, Spinoza thinks of wonder as a "dead-end emotion" (Rosenthal 2010, 237). He still follows Descartes' systematic ordering of the passions in *The Short Treatise of God, Man, and His Well-Being* ([c.1660] 2002c) and like Descartes puts wonder at the forefront in listing the primary passions, considering wonder as arising when a certain thing or phenomenon does not correspond with our previous experiences and the rules we have established about them

(Spinoza 2002c, 64). However, his treatment of the affects has changed drastically by the time his *magnum opus*, the *Ethics*, is published.

In the *Ethics*, wonder loses its status and value for knowledge production as well as its position among the other primary emotions. Using the philosophical concept of affect [*affectus*] as the modification or variation that is produced in a body (of which a mind is the corresponding idea (Spinoza 2002b, II:283, 286, 289)) by an interaction with another body that could either increase or diminish the power of activity of the body, the *Ethics* now considers desire, joy and sadness as the primary affects from which all other affects unfold. Wonder, however, misses the cut: in defining the affects in part III, Spinoza states he does “not number Wonder among the affects” (III:312), explaining that “[w]onder is the thought of any thing on which the mind stays fixed because this particular thought has no connection with any others” (III:312). What wonder *does*, then, is keep the mind in a state of contemplation of the thing it wonders at, an impasse that will persist until it is determined by other causes than wonder alone. Spinozian wonder is therefore lacking. As will be further explained in the following, to Spinoza wonder distracts the mind because the mind attaches an inadequate idea of a negative, non-existent cause to the wonder it experiences. In doing so, wonder disables one from finding a ‘real’ cause of the wonder that encourages one to stop contemplating a singular thing and think about other things (III:312). For Spinoza, then, wonder is characterized by a sense of non-conclusiveness and indetermination. As “the imagination of a singular thing, insofar as it is alone in the mind” (III:305) it is quite unproductive and, more so, responsible for a paralysis of associative processes of knowledge production and thus the arrival at true conclusions. In wonder, one does not categorically assimilate the object to other similar objects. The processes of association stop and we “dwell on it” (Rosenthal 2010, 237). Descartes’ definition of astonishment in the *Passions*, then, bears similarities to the position of wonder in the *Ethics*. But whereas Cartesian wonder, when temporally and spatially restricted, can climb up to knowledge, the spatiotemporal ‘dwelling’ character and paralysis attached to astonishment by Descartes is now a default feature of Spinoza’s conception of wonder when it comes to its (non-)relation to knowledge production.

In wonder, the mind is, so to say, quarantined until further notice. Wonder does not ‘move’ the mind to make connections and thus does not constitute a real affect as such. As Rosenthal aptly formulates it: “The singular event does not lead to any systematic relation with other things, whether or not the relation is true or false, and so it does not constitute knowledge of any kind and indeed stands in the way of it” (Rosenthal 2010, 237). In other

words, when we wonder, we grasp the world in an inadequate manner.<sup>45</sup> We are unable to connect our singular imagination of the thing wondered at with anything else, unable to form “common notions”<sup>46</sup> and to discover laws of what other things or people have in common. We thus are unable to climb the ladder of knowledge to the level of reason, because we remain fixed on something that stands out and powerlessly dwell upon it. Thus, whereas Plato’s Socrates posits wonder at the forefront of philosophy, and Descartes’ moderate wonder makes the intellect prone to the desire for scientific knowledge, Spinozian wonder and its capability of drawing true conclusions through scientific knowledge are deemed generally incommensurable.

### *Miraculous Wonder and Layering Affects*

Yet the fact that wonder is epistemologically futile does not mean that this is all there is to say about Spinoza’s take on wonder. As again Rosenthal shows, wonder can be layered on affects such as love, hate and fear, and produce new lines of affection and as such, wonder plays an important role in certain relations producing our social world (Rosenthal 2010, 238; Gilge 2013, 5). As Spinoza puts it: “[...] it is customary for certain emotions derived from the three basic emotions to be signified in different terms when they are related to objects that evoke our wonder” (Spinoza 2002b, III:312). And these “complex interactions of imagination and affect” and their layering yield a “common space of intersubjectivity [...] and the processes of imitation and identification between minds which make the *fabric of social life*” (Gatens and Lloyd cited in Bal 2015, 74).

Spinoza offers some insightful examples for this: wonder becomes veneration [*Veneratio*], when it concerns someone’s personal qualities we wonder about and we find them incomparable with something else. In this case, the relation to the other is intensified, while at the same time any process of comparison or reasoning is suspended. Veneration can link up with love, turning into devotion [*Devotio*]. Consternation [*Consternatio*] in turn arises when we wonder at something that we fear at the same time. As such, the latter disarms the subject in his or her potential avoidance of the evil that he or she is confronted with. And finally, anger, when layered on wonder, produces dread [*Horror*] (Gilge 2013, 5-8).

What these more kinetic affects such as love and fear – combined with a seemingly

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<sup>45</sup> For a more affirmative reading of the role of the imagination as the first kind of knowledge in Spinoza, see (Bal 2015).

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed explanation of the ‘common notions’ in Spinoza, see (Boros 2010).

primarily cognitive, but always already embodied wonder (Rosenthal 2010, 239) – have in common is that they *transfix* the bodily and mental capacities of the affected subject. Veneration disables reasoning faculties and by lack of comparison, keeps the subject tied to the object of veneration, a tie strengthened when combined with love, resulting in a sense of devotion that works almost blindingly. Spinoza defines consternation as a fear that holds one “in such a state of stupefaction and hesitation” that one’s desire to get away from the evil “is checked by a feeling of wonder” (Spinoza 2002b, III:317) that keeps the subject “paralyzed” (III:305). Wonder, then, when layered on other affects, grasps us, refuses to let us go – even when it might be wiser to do so, and even when it is necessary to move away. We are ‘checked’ by it and kept in place until further affective notice.

However, when the presence of the thing in question somehow forces us to negate our initial wonder, wonder can turn into its opposite (note that for Descartes wonder had no opposite): disdain [*Contempus*]. Other affects produced when layered with wonder may turn in a similar way, resulting in mockery [*Irrisio*] in the place of devotion, and contempt [*Dedignatio*] instead of veneration (Spinoza 2002b, III:305; Rosenthal 2010, 239). The negation of wonder, for Spinoza, is not caused by a personal wonder producing a curious and scientific attitude, and thus emancipating from itself. Rather, Spinoza associates these affects, the ones that turn against wonder (disdain, mockery, contempt) as well as the ones that intensify it (veneration, devotion, consternation, dread) closely with the social realm and the passing on of the affects that makes wonder and its opposite spread from one person to another. Rosenthal compares this process to a “flock of birds that follow a leader and then as soon as the leader is frightened all turn in another direction (239),” making wonder *essential to the formation of social emotions and collective action*.

It is on this wider social scale that we get to the core of an understanding of Spinoza’s own disdain for the workings of wonder when it comes to the so-called ‘works of wonder.’ In order to understand his ultimately suspicious attitude towards wonder, it is necessary to turn once more to Spinoza’s written work, this time to the *Theological-Political Treatise* ([1670] 2002d), published a few years before the *Ethics*. In chapter 6 of the former, a critique takes shape of the evocation of miracles in order to domesticate the masses and justify religious and political authorities. This chapter critically examines the way in which a lack of knowledge is covered up by deferring an explanation to something supernatural and miraculous in order to keep up the *status quo* of certain power relations. He witnesses this in his time in religion and politics (the two intrinsically connected in Spinoza), where the priests use the veneration of God through miracle-infused scriptures to indirectly support their own

position. Scriptures, for Spinoza, employ “such method and style as best serves to excite wonder, and consequently to instill piety in the minds of the masses” (Spinoza 2002d, 451). Miracles prove to be a ‘wonder-ful’ tool for maintaining existing political powers and consolidating them, building upon people’s ignorance of the true state of affairs and causes of certain power structures by evoking and producing wonder, again and again. We can easily think of various political and religious leaders that declare themselves as chosen by a higher power, securing obedience by declaring the punitive dangers involved in disobedience.

Spinoza’s stance on religious and political affairs, then, provides a context for his particular suspicion of the workings of wonder. As touched upon in the previous chapter, Descartes' wonder could be said to play the role of mediator between a world in which God and his miracles took center stage, and the modern period in which the free will takes over and man posits himself in the center of the universe. God's role shrinks significantly in Descartes' work, but his thought is still in-between two worlds, on the threshold of the old to a new line of Enlightenment thought. Descartes still needs God for many things, and he needs him most of all during his project of methodic doubt to ensure that the fundamental certainty on which he builds his whole philosophy of the mind – I think, therefore I am – is secured. That is, Descartes needs to prove (and he does, devoting the entire third meditation of *Meditations on First Philosophy* ([1641] 1999b) to this) that the traditional Christian God exists in order to sustain his criteria for knowledge: distinctness and clearness (cf. Descartes 1999b). For Descartes, until he has ruled out a deceptive God and safeguarded the omnipotent and benevolent God, his theories hold no ground. There remains a sense of wonder connected to this existence of God, and in his early work we can already see how wonder (in this case translated as ‘marvel’) is a kind of threshold that combines the traditional divine with more modern concepts such as the free will when he writes: “The Lord has made three marvels: something out of nothing; free will; and God in Man” (Descartes cited in Boros 2010, 178).

Spinoza, as discussed, denies the existence of a God who creates things, as well as the existence of a free will. He is especially critical of the notion of wonder as a religious concept providing the basis for “political-theological attitudes of superstitiously religious people, which makes them the supporters of monarchic political order and false religion” (Boros 2010, 187). It is exactly this religious dimension of wonder, connected to miracles that we wonder at, that arguably makes Spinoza treat wonder, like the other affects connected to it, in such an ambivalent manner. On the one hand he denies wonder the status of an affect, and goes so far as to say that his discussion of wonder is just a formality (Spinoza 2002b, III:312). On the other hand, he does write about it in his summary of the definitions of the

affects right after treating the primary affects desire, joy and sadness, and right before discussing ‘love’ (III:277-312). He also treats it as an affect in the sense that it is possible to layer wonder on other affects.<sup>47</sup>

This all ties in to the fact that Spinoza is suspicious of any case in which wonder is mobilized in justifying religious and/or political authority through the miraculous or, even in justifying philosophical authority, through the myth and miracle of the free will, the inexplicable union between the separated mind and body, and the miraculous functions of the pineal gland. Obviously referring to Descartes’ pineal gland (and not without a sense of humor/irony) he declares to be “*lost in wonder* [emphasis added] that a philosopher who had strictly resolved to deduce nothing except from self-evident bases” would find it necessary “[...] to have recourse to the cause of the entire universe, that is, God” to justify the authority of the free will and the functioning of “that pineal gland of his” (Spinoza 2002b, V:364). Spinoza himself refuses to back up the foundations of an entire philosophy and science through divine validation and – wonder.

### *Mobilizing Wonder and the Wonder-Knowledge-Knot Untangled*

Spinoza marks a crucial point of philosophical intervention into the wonder-knowledge-knot, just as it is severely tightened in Descartes’ thought. The socio-political conditions surrounding Spinoza’s ambiguous treatment of wonder have been investigated, together with wonder’s legacy of the miraculous. Through a discussion of the affects, as well as a discussion of Spinoza’s broader theoretical divergence from Descartes, Spinozian wonder has been examined from a more technical philosophical perspective as well. Nevertheless, situating Spinozian wonder and Spinoza’s struggles with the passion, while partly explaining his journey, does not explain away his innovative ideas around the concept.

Spinoza, as opposed to his contemporaries, opposes the idea of wonder as a great epistemological tool, or of wonder as the link between non-knowing and knowing. He even goes so far as to say that wonder and knowledge exclude each other in his *Ethics*, thereby disregarding the wonder-knowledge-knot completely. Most importantly, Spinoza, although

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<sup>47</sup> The fact that Spinoza does treat wonder as connecting to other affects, and discusses wonder in the same part of the book as the other affects, yet denies wonder the status of an affect has been contextualized by his suspicion of the miraculous evocations of wonder. This, in my opinion, further explains why Spinoza does not want to name it among the affects on a more technical level. Contrary to the other affects that can either be a passion or an action, the miraculous character of wonder leads him to believe that the very nature of wonder does not allow for a determination of its adequate causes, which disqualifies the affect from ever becoming an action.

generally negative about this aspect, here starts thinking about wonder as relating to others; how it idealizes another in the case of veneration; how it results in devotion when combined with love; how it creates consternation when layered on fear; and dread when layered on anger. Spinoza sees these processes at work around him in the intertwined phenomena of religion and politics, so it is imaginable that it makes him wary of wonder's potential to enable getting to the heart of the matter of things when he sees wonder concretely clouding people's vision in the form of such affective layering. After all, what these various layered affects have in common is that their wider social and relational effects have a paralyzing and transfixing character. We see this most clearly in Spinoza's treatment of consternation, which "keeps a man so paralyzed in regarding it alone that he is incapable of thinking of other things whereby he might avoid the evil" (Spinoza 2002b, III:305). The desire to avoid evil is then "checked" by a feeling of wonder at the evil that is feared (III:317). This stops one from thinking clearly or acting adequately, which one can see in concrete cases throughout history as well as in our own times.

So while wonder in Spinoza seems to lead to the opposite of social engagement, paradoxically and interestingly he does leave an opening to think about the potentiality of wonder as connected to inter-subjective relations and social change. Spinoza mobilizes wonder to become something other than an epistemological tool. What is important here is that an entirely new dimension of wonder is opened up that connects it to society at large, albeit still largely to a negative extent in Spinoza's own thinking. But his thinking does create a space to explore what can happen when wonder is 'unknotted' from knowledge and connected to other possibilities. Moreover, as Spinoza has been taken up by many feminist scholars, the work of feminist philosophers about to be discussed is not only fed by Cartesian soil, but (whether implicitly or explicitly) feeds off a Spinozian discourse on wonder and the bodily, affective and social dimension of the passions. The exploration of other potentialities of wonder will occur in the following chapters with the help of contemporary and influential feminist philosophers who have critically yet affirmatively read the philosophers that I have engaged with up to now, and will raise the potential of wonder to a new level.



## Chapter 3

### Feminist Potentials of Wonder: Irigaray and Malabou

The more I wonder, the more I love.  
– Alice Walker<sup>48</sup>

In the previous chapters, I have engaged with wonder from the viewpoint of classical seventeenth-century philosophy and touched upon wonder in ancient Greece. Starting off with an analysis of the wonder-knowledge-knot in Plato, Aristotle and Descartes, I thereafter turned to Spinoza in the second chapter. Here, an intervention into the discourse on wonder was made, resulting in a distinct ‘unknotting’ of the wonder-knowledge-knot discussed in the first chapter. This engendered an opening up of the concept of wonder at a point in history that still relied on the reassurance of God and, in the case of wonder, particularly on miracles, which consolidated the power of religious authorities. In addition to the suspicious stance on wonder in Spinoza, his take on wonder as affective and ambiguously embedded within his theory of the affects was discussed. Wonder was thus ‘cracked open’ as an ambiguous social passion contributing to social relations by being layered on other passions and instigated and strengthened between bodily beings like a flock of birds.

This Spinozian take on wonder ties into and has influenced the feminist legacy on wonder, for wonder – however scarcely theorized in comparison to the other passions as we have discussed in the introduction – takes on a strong, distinctly relational dimension in feminist theory. Wonder in feminist studies is always about social and ethical relations. It centers on *relationality* first and foremost, much more than on merely instrumental epistemology and knowledge acquisition. In fact, as we have discussed in the introduction as well as in chapter 1, for most feminist theorists epistemology always brings with it manifold ethical and ontological (how does *how* we see effect *what* we see?<sup>49</sup>) concerns of being invested in our topics and having to make certain “agential cuts.”<sup>50</sup> Knowledge and its acquisitions are never innocent.<sup>51</sup> And subsequently, nor can wonder be an innocent gateway to knowledge. Spinoza realized this, especially in respect to its religious connotations, but

<sup>48</sup> From *The Color Purple* (Walker 2003, 283).

<sup>49</sup> For examples of approaches to research practices from the vantage point of the entanglement of ethics, ontology and epistemology, see for instance the ‘praxiographic’ approach (Mak 2012), and diffraction (Barad 2007; van der Tuin 2014; Thiele 2014b).

<sup>50</sup> A term borrowed from Karen Barad. See (Barad 1998, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> As Donna Haraway writes in *Situated Knowledges*: “[...] we are not in charge of the world. We just live here and try to strike up non-innocent conversations [...]” (2004, 96).

some feminist thinkers have opened up wonder more radically and with a more positive outlook on the passion itself. The affective line of thinking about wonder is continued in the thought of the two feminist philosophers that this chapter will focus on: Luce Irigaray and Catherine Malabou. I will now turn to wonder's (feminist) potential in transforming social relations and undermining the *status quo* of relating in the thinking of these feminist philosophers.

### *Luce Irigaray: Wonder as a Mode of Relating*

Mapping the feminist potential of wonder would not be complete without discussing Luce Irigaray, who could easily be regarded as the 'Descartes-figure' of the feminist canon. Her work undoubtedly is the biggest and most extensive source of feminist takes on wonder within feminist philosophy. As one of the most prominent figures in the discipline, she is regarded as an authority within the tradition of 'difference feminism' and what has come to be known as *l'écriture féminine*.<sup>52</sup> This tradition is generally associated with the reductive term 'French feminism' and with, apart from Irigaray herself, feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Catherine Clément and, more recently, Bracha Ettinger (cf. Marks et al. 1979; Pollock 2003). It is embedded in poststructuralist thought, wherein language is understood as something that *does* something, as a 'material,' which produces the world. The term *écriture féminine*, which was first coined by Cixous in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' ([1975] 1976), refers quite literally to a feminine practice of writing that according to Cixous is and will remain "impossible to define," for "this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn't mean it doesn't exist" (Cixous 1976, 883).

Irigaray, rooted in and at the forefront of this not-so-easily-delineated tradition, was arguably the first feminist philosopher to engage with wonder extensively and in a distinctly positive way. To her, wonder has the enormous potential to change the way we relate to 'the Other' within the framework of sexual difference. Irigaray directly draws upon and at the same time challenges Descartes' work in her elaboration of wonder.<sup>53</sup> Yet the social,

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<sup>52</sup> For an early anthology of the tradition, before it became contained and the 'summaries' and 'definitions' unavoidably got a hold of it (including my own attempt of a definition to hold on to here), see, *New French Feminisms*, (Marks et al. 1979). Included herein are different excerpts from well-known, but also lesser-known feminists who all wrote in a new, more bodily-engaged way.

<sup>53</sup> Irigaray noted in an interview that the option left for her was to "*have a fling with the philosophers*" (Irigaray 1985b, 150). Irigaray does not want to give a proper reading of the philosophical Masters, but, as Butler suggests, she rather performs a kind of overreading, a reading that mimes and exposes the speculative excesses in philosophers (Butler 1993, 11). The question one might ask, of course, is whether and when a *fling* becomes a *romance*.

relational, as well as corporeal nature of wonder that we discussed in chapter 2 in the context of Spinozian wonder implicitly returns in her work. Through her intense reading, interpretation, critique and, in part, affirmation of Descartes's work, Irigarayan wonder is fleshed out.

In her *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993), Irigaray finds positive material in Cartesian wonder for her own project of cultivating a new way of relating between the sexes. This relation for Irigaray presently still relies upon appropriation, disrespect and an annihilation of the feminine other. That is, according to Irigaray, we are still caught up in the economy of the Same in which there is no place for the 'feminine,' no separate subject position for women and no genuine sexual difference that is not based on the reduction of the other to the masculine subject (Irigaray 1985a; 1993). Taking up Descartes' insight that when we wonder about something, *we do not yet judge it to be good, bad or useful to us*, she suggests that this open feature of the passion means that the object of wonder, in surprising us, is not yet made *ours* and thus has not yet been appropriated or (dis)assimilated to/from the self (Irigaray 1993, 75). It is exactly this "openness to the unfamiliarity of that which is encountered" (Jones 2009, 112) that Irigaray takes from Descartes and stresses in her own proposal for a new kind of relating which *relocates* wonder to the realm of ethics.

Wonder, according to Irigaray, is crucial to the founding of an ethics, especially to the creation of an ethics of sexual difference (Irigaray 1993, 74), a difference that she judges to be the defining philosophical and ethical problem of our age (5). One of Irigaray's main lines of thought is that unless the ontological difference between men and women is recognized, the model of sameness that rules relations between the sexes will constantly be perpetuated even as we try to attend to differences (Jones 2011, 198). As Marguerite La Caze clarifies in her recent book *Wonder and Generosity* (2013), when it comes to the development of an ethics, previous developments thereof have either considered women only in relation to men, or claimed the existence of a neutral human subject for whom all ethical rules and principles can be applied in the same way (15). In order to avoid these constellations, which leave no room for sexual specificity and irreducible difference – the economy of the Same in which the Other is only the other to the Same as Irigaray would put it – Irigaray sets out to find a way to relate to otherness without assimilating it, or "*dis-assimilating it as known*" (Irigaray 1993, 75) and uses wonder to help her do so.

Having "appropriated" from Descartes his concept of wonder (La Caze 2013, 15), wonder now becomes of value for responding directly to the other instead of *projecting* our self-understanding or alleged knowledge on the other (17). This is explained by the fact that

in wonder the object still lacks a clear definition or circumscription (Irigaray 1993, 81): it can be *responded to*, but it cannot be appropriated. In experiencing wonder, then, we can learn that the other cannot be possessed (75) as well as develop receptivity to the “advent or event of the other” (74-75). The ethical mode of being Irigaray proposes would thus be infused with a *cultivation of wonder* in a remaining and recurring openness to the ‘sexuate other’ (Jones 2011, 112) that manages to surprise us over and over again, instead of assimilating the other to the self or discarding it as useless. This makes Irigaray consider wonder as a potential “point of passage between two closed worlds, two definite universes, two space-times or two others” (Irigaray 1993, 75). When meditating on the potentials of wonder, the philosopher has big plans for the passion and suggests that it might be able to transform human nature as a whole in cultivating a “perpetual rebirth” whenever we encounter irreducible others which can result in a “perpetual newness of the self, the irreducibly other, the world” (82).

Irigaray thus uses Descartes’ insights into wonder as a way to turn his own philosophy upside down. Wonder undoes or precedes the oppositions that Descartes is so specific about, such as body and soul,<sup>54</sup> mind and matter, and takes on a more bodily dimension in her work, linking it not to the separated and solipsistic Cartesian *cogito*, but to the sensual, carnal and already spiritual world (Irigaray 1993, 82; Jones 2011, 113). There is also an element of desire in Irigaray’s reconceptualization of the first passion. When lost in wonder, “the beginning of the subject as such still welcomes as desirable that which it does not know, that which it ignores or which remains foreign to it (Irigaray 1993, 79). This is, as La Caze notes, a remarkable shift from Descartes’ conception of wonder, where desire does not yet enter the picture before we know whether the object is desirable (thus useful) or not to us. By re-reading Descartes as saying that *differences attract*, Irigaray’s wonder takes on a shape of attractiveness and curiosity, perhaps even a bodily ‘pulling’ towards the object of wonder that differs from the contemplating and relatively free-of-immediate-interest-nature of the first passion in Descartes’ writings. Wonder, here, is no longer a simple passageway to knowledge, but a passion responsible for the inauguration of love, art and thought (Irigaray 1993, 82) and forms a potential bridge to respect and appreciation. It is not destined for a distanced contemplation, but meant to develop respectful engagement and ethical relating.

This hopeful framework of wonder, of course, is not descriptive but should instead, as La Caze suggests, be understood as normative, although I would be more inclined to call this framework visionary. For making the cultivation of wonder normative bears too much

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<sup>54</sup> Although, as seen in chapter 1, Descartes’ passions (whether he wanted this or not) already straddle the boundary between body and mind.

similarity to knotting it up with knowledge, and would interfere with wonder's elusiveness as needed for Irigaray's aim of mobilizing the passion for relations which do not 'grasp.' For Irigaray, if wonder should be cultivated in such a way that it would permeate every encounter, this leads to appreciation of the other's qualities and moreover allows the sexes "to retain autonomy based on their difference, and give them a space of freedom or attraction, a possibility of separation or alliance (Irigaray cited in La Caze 2013, 16). Now more a mode of relating than a way to acquire knowledge, wonder entails a desire for what we do not fully understand (17) and, for Irigaray, it can actually lead to an appreciation of the qualities of the sexed other from which a new ethics could emerge.

*Reworking Irigaray: Broader Differences, Bigger Problems*

Irigaray's take on wonder and its non-grasping nature is indeed itself quite elusive itself. However, the fact that this is a *visionary* take might allow for such relative non-concreteness. After all, Irigaray's relational, non-appropriative wonder is yet to be concretized. Yet this does not mean that her vision is closed off for supplementary elaborations or contestation. Critique springing from affirmative reading makes ideas grow and expand, and eventually helps bring them to life. Irigaray's powerful vision for the workings of wonder as discussed in the above have not remained uncontested and have been further elaborated on and developed by different scholars in the field.

One objection to her theory of wonder is that as a mode of relating the poles of the relation – man and woman – are too limited. That is, there are other relations that need to be attended to aside from the one between the – presumably heterosexual<sup>55</sup> – sexes. This criticism ties in to the more general controversy around Irigaray's prioritization of the relation between the (implicitly heterosexual) sexes when it comes to tackling relations of oppression and inequality. Is sexual difference really the most fundamental difference, an ontological difference even, which precedes all other differences and needs to be worked through via the heterosexual relation? And in that case, what about race, what about class, sexual orientation or other possible axes of differences that matter? (cf. Cheah et al. 1998; Whitford et al. 1994;

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<sup>55</sup> In an interview with Pheng Cheah and Elizabeth Grosz, Butler for instance states that sexual difference "not only brought to the fore a kind of presumptive heterosexuality, but actually made heterosexuality into the privileged locus of ethics, as if heterosexual relations, because they putatively crossed this alterity, which is the alterity of sexual difference, were somehow more ethical, more other-directed, less narcissistic than anything else" (Cheah et al. 1998, 27). As an earlier response to such critique, defending Irigaray's project of sexual difference from the common accusation of heterosexism and not taking the relations along the axe of sexual orientation into account, see (Grosz 1994b).

Miller et al. 2007) In *Wonder and Generosity*, La Caze finds a lot of potential in Irigaray's approach to wonder, but echoes such questions and criticisms. She argues that wonder as a mode of relating could and should be opened up to include all kinds of differences, including but not limited to differences along the axes of race and class as well as sex. Yet this objection might not do Irigaray justice in the specific case of wonder, and without taking on the impossible task of an all-round summary of Irigaray's thought, I will briefly and in a simplified manner argue why, while a valid point, it may not do her thought justice.

Sexual difference is primary for Irigaray, but it is not an isolated issue biting its own tail. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* opens with the statement that “[s]exual difference is [...] the issue, of our time” and the one thing that might be “‘our salvation’ if we thought it through” (Irigaray 1993, 5). The question here is: a salvation for whom, and from what? The same page gives us the answers to such questions in a broad yet specific way. ‘Our salvation’ is not ‘just’ about the relation between the sexes; it is about the “living subject” (7). Salvation is needed from all things that fail to consider this living subject; salvation is needed from “the many forms destruction takes in our world”; from “consumer society”; from “the reversal or the repetitive proliferation of *status quo* values”; from “the end of philosophy”; and from “religious despair or regression to religiosity, scientific or technical imperialism” (7). Beginning to “consider the living subject” for Irigaray *starts* at sexual difference, but it does *not end* there. For Irigaray, it is the fundamental relation that needs to be tackled in order to unlock possibilities for a more ethical world for all living subjects.

Wonder, in *An Ethics*, plays a crucial role in creating this ethical world, as it can be a mode of relating that we can cultivate between the sexes. In transforming the relation between men and women, wonder for Irigaray will change more than our relation to sexed others: it will change the way in which we relate in general. Moreover, it potentially changes the meaning of the ‘living subject’ or subjectivity<sup>56</sup>, by recognizing in the first place at least two different sexes through wonder. As Braidotti formulates it, the project of sexual difference and its primacy is “about how to identify and enact points of exit from the universal mode defined by man” and how to “elaborate a site, that is to say a space and time, for the irreducibility of sexual difference to express itself, so that masculine and feminine libidinal economies may co-exist in the positive expression of their respective differences” (Braidotti 2002, 172). Issues of “other differences, notably religion, nationality, language and ethnicity are crucial to this project and integral to the task of evolving towards the recognition

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<sup>56</sup> For a reading of Irigarayan sexual difference in terms of non-unitary (Deleuzian) subjectivity and embodied materiality as linked to issues of power, exclusion and hegemony, see (Braidotti 2003).

of the positivity of difference” (172). Therefore, when critics claim Irigaray focuses only on the differences between the sexes, this is at best only partially true. To say that Irigaray restricts herself to one particular difference, or that her conception of wonder needs to be broadened to include other differences as well, is to read her too reductively.<sup>57</sup>

A further objection to Irigaray's take on wonder is brought to the fore by La Caze in *Wonder & Generosity*: how can wonder, as Irigaray claims, be *both* nonjudgmental and at the same time appreciative to the extent that respect is produced? Wonder, she continues, cannot *both* be prior to judgment as outlined in Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*, and at the same time involve the attraction to and respect for the other that we see in Irigaray's reworking of Cartesian wonder (La Caze 2013, 23). La Caze suggests that in order for wonder to turn into esteem and respect, and not into arrogance or contempt, it needs to be linked to other passions in order to get there (reminiscent of the way in which I outlined Spinoza's thoughts on wonder as linkable to other passions in the previous chapter).

It is at this point that La Caze points out the limits of wonder *alone* and introduces the additional concept of 'generosity,' also borrowed from Descartes, to clarify how we can move beyond wonder to esteem and respect by respecting others and ourselves for our common capacity for freedom. Generosity, she explains, can be seen as the converse of wonder: it recognizes differences as an expression of similarity. In generosity we esteem ourselves as well as others for having a free will that we can use for good or evil ends (La Caze 2013, 26). Thus, in borrowing Cartesian 'generosity,' La Caze asserts that in the recognition of the fact that a similar ground underlies our differences, we are able to respect others as we should respect ourselves. Wonder at the difference of the other alone is not enough for a truly ethical mode of relating, and the additional concept of generosity can complete this aim to balance out the 'difference' stressed in wonder with the 'sameness' that is recognized in generosity. The general thought behind this is that if wonder does not link up with other passions, it might lead back to appropriation or remain indifferent toward the other in that it creates a contemplating distance.

Yet, Irigarayan wonder is distinctly bodily and engaged, which is why I am unsure whether the point La Caze makes about the danger of wonder as indifferent or distanced does justice to Irigarayan wonder. Her critical elaboration may rather be a further development or crystallization of what is already implied in Irigaray's thought. Either way, the fact that La Caze here layers the affects over each other (wonder and generosity, also combined later with

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<sup>57</sup> For a convincing contextualization of Irigaray's primacy of sexual difference in a dialogue with historical, cultural and philosophical forces, see (Schwab 2007).

‘love’) takes us back to the affective layering we have seen in Spinoza and demonstrates how Spinozism has seeped into feminist thought about the feelings, or affects. Wonder, by itself a mode of relation, can be layered on or combined with other affects to produce different results. In Spinoza, the results of such a process are negative – resulting in false idealization, dread, etc. - but as La Caze shows in *Wonder and Generosity*, it does not need to be this way. Wonder, instead of paralyzing us when we dwell upon it (Descartes), or leading to unproductive feelings and attitudes (Spinoza), can be a productive starting point for a different kind of relating, and is able to link up with other affects to inspire an intimate undoing of the appropriation, devaluation and negation of others.

Feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young has also criticized Irigaray’s take on wonder and is concerned exactly about such appropriative forms of relating. Whether her critique is completely justified remains to be debated, but even as a general caution, Young’s words powerfully transmit what might be the risks involved in the usage of wonder. She states that:

This concept of wonder is dangerous. It would not be difficult to use it to imagine the other person as exotic. One can interpret wonder as a kind of distant awe before the Other that turns their transcendence into a human inscrutability. Or wonder can become a kind of prurient curiosity. I can recognize my ignorance about the other person’s experience and perspective and adopt a probing, investigative mode toward her. Both stances convert the openness of wonder into a dominative desire to know and master the other person. (Young 1997, 56)

Ironically, this dominative desire to know and master the other person is exactly the process that Irigaray wants to turn around when thinking about wonder. I want to argue here that Young’s cautionary note applies more to what happens to wonder in the original writings of Descartes than it does to Irigaray’s reworking of his writings. Irigaray rather *turns around* the process of wonder that drives us to desire to master and investigate the wondered object. Put briefly: Descartes’ wonder mobilizes the subject to seek knowledge about the object wondered at; Spinoza’s wonder stands in the way of true knowledge about this object, but in Irigaray it does neither of these things. For her, wonder allows a relation to the other where appropriation and objectification make place for an open, receptive and respectful relation.

Wonder in Irigaray can thus be cultivated in an ethical manner and mediate between oneself and the other in such a way that there is space for closeness, touch and desire, without hierarchy, domination or objectification between (sexed) subjects. Moreover, her take on wonder as a mode of relating is still about knowledge too, but the



approach is different. In Irigaray, similar to the work of the feminist epistemologists we have come across in the introduction as well as in chapter 1, knowledge is never 'clean,' and the question of how we know comes paired with ethical dimensions and entails questions in which ethics and epistemology become more and more entangled. Why do we know? Why do we *want* to know? Which methods do we use, which outcomes do we desire and what do we *do* with the knowledges we produce? And more specifically in Irigaray's case: what can we know about woman when she has for so long been defined by others, and not by herself? In taking back *the power of definition*<sup>58</sup> Irigaray searches for ways of knowing in which there remains space for the researched thing or the person to 'speak back,' whereby the knower is more receptive than she is investigative. Wonder can rework the relation between those who differ by creating the space to suspend judgment and to open up to the other instead of forcefully 'opening the other up.' The discussed critiques and elaborations of Irigaray's visionary take on wonder by La Caze and Young not only help to further develop Irigaray's take on wonder, but they are at the same time demonstrative of the cautionary feminist stance towards wonder. No wonder – for as we have discussed in chapter 1, wonder was used as a tool to 'master' and attain knowledge with a capital K in philosophical discourse.<sup>59</sup> Yet as we have seen now with the feminist author behind *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985): wonder *is not one* either, and carries with it plenty of other potential.

### *Malabou and the Loss of Wonder*

He who [...] can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as  
good as dead, a snuffed-out candle.  
– Albert Einstein<sup>60</sup>

In Irigaray, wonder becomes a mode of relating that helps one get 'in touch' with the other in an ethical way. Contemporary philosopher Cathérine Malabou is another feminist 'authority' whom we cannot keep out of the picture when discussing the potentialities, or even necessities, of wonder. Malabou works intensely with the concept of wonder, as

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<sup>58</sup> Rosemarie Buikema defines interfering in the power of definition as interfering in "the power to determine major and minor issues in science and history and to think about equality and justice in such a way that subaltern voices are able to be heard, that is to say able to help shape new praxes, spaces and vocabularies, destabilize hegemonic ways of seeing and thus effectuate change" (Leurs et al. 2014, 282).

<sup>59</sup>And philosophical discourse, as Irigaray has aptly formulated, concerns more than just a discipline. It is philosophical discourse that should be challenged above all, for: "Unless we are to agree naively –or perhaps strategically- to limit ourselves to some narrow sphere, some marginal area that would leave intact the discourse that lays down the law to all the others: philosophical discourse. The philosophical order is indeed the one that has to be questioned, and *disturbed* inasmuch as it covers up sexual difference" (1985a, 159).

<sup>60</sup> From *The World as I See It* (Einstein 1999).

witnessed in one of her more recent publications, *Self and Emotional Life* (Johnston and Malabou 2013a). Best known for her elaboration and adaptation of the Hegelian concept of ‘plasticity’ (cf. Malabou 2005, 2010), she is also known, like Irigaray, to always engage with the work of major philosophers. In Malabou's case those include, amongst others, Jacques Derrida, who supervised her PhD dissertation (Malabou 1996), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, as well as philosophers of early modernity such as Spinoza and Descartes.

*Self and Emotional Life* consists of two parts: the first written by Malabou, the second by Adrian Johnston. Whereas Irigaray discusses the role of wonder in self/other relations revolving around sexual difference, Malabou in her part of *Self and Emotional Life* – ‘Go Wonder: Subjectivity and Affects in Neurobiological Times’ – finds the relational potential of wonder to *be already and primarily* present in self/self-relationships. That is, we encounter wonder before we encounter an external other. Wonder, she argues, *enables our relation to ourselves*. Here, through the work of Derrida, Descartes, Spinoza, Deleuze and Jean-Luc Nancy, but also through neurologist Antonio Damasio's and Sigmund Freud's writings, Malabou draws attention to what she finds to be one of the main functions of wonder: *to enable auto-heteroaffection*, which, according to Malabou, is “the real source of all affects” (Malabou 2013a, 21).

This is also the outcome of the question she poses throughout her part of the book, namely: is it possible to develop “a philosophical or theoretical approach to affects that does not determine them to be simple consequences of an originary autoaffection?” (Malabou 2013a, 63) This “originary autoaffection” can be seen as a kind of “hearing and feeling oneself” in self-touching, where the self coincides with itself and there is no other yet (63). Together with Derrida, she argues that a pure and immediate, psychical autoaffection in fact does not exist, but that affection always comes from something other than ourselves.

Thus, in heteroaffection, or rather auto-heteroaffection through a kind of primary wonder, we can think of *the other involved in the structure of the self* in two senses: firstly, as affection that comes from the other outside of us, and secondly, as affection that takes place in “my being affected by the other in me” (Malabou 2013a, 63), which means that in auto-heteroaffection, *I am touched by the other in me*, I do not coincide with myself, but I am always already – from the start – different from myself. I am not

‘selfsame.’<sup>61</sup> Wonder according to Malabou plays a primary role in this and, in an effort to narrow the gap between neurology and philosophy, she turns to the philosophical tradition to explain why this is so.

### *Malabou and the Philosophical Tradition*

In Malabou’s reading of wonder in the philosophical tradition, the *capacity to wonder* figures not only as fundamental to the act of philosophizing but, in a broader sense, as an *anthropological fact*, which is most evident in her recorded lectures on the topic, such as her lecture at *Cornell University* (Malabou 2013b) and her contribution to the *Provost Series at Stony Brook University* (Malabou 2013c). She also repeatedly states that wonder, for Descartes as well as for Spinoza, is the most fundamental affect “of them all” and is that which attunes the subject both to the world and to itself (Malabou 2013a, 8-9).

While it is to be debated whether the whole philosophical tradition has taken wonder to be an anthropological fact,<sup>62</sup> the last statement is definitely doubtful, as we have seen in chapter 2 that for Spinoza wonder is not even unambiguously counted among the affects. In fact, it may be so that by describing wonder in the philosophical tradition as fundamental for human subjectivity and an anthropological fact as such, which according to Malabou has been taken for granted, she somewhat ‘instrumentalizes’ philosophy for the sake of her argument. As has become clear from discussing Descartes and Spinoza on wonder, ‘philosophy’s take on wonder,’ cannot be generalized in the way Malabou does. I would suggest, then, that although Malabou gives a reading of Descartes and Spinoza, it is not one that stays very close to the text.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, she derives some interesting

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<sup>61</sup> Much (new materialist) feminist scholarship and (phenomenological) philosophy works with the concept of touch to think about difference, the idea of the other within and the potential of thinking about the sense of touch as opposed to the hegemonic primacy of vision in knowledge practices. As Barad writes: “Is that not in the nature of touching? Is touching not by its very nature always already an involution, invitation, invisitation, wanted or unwanted, of the stranger within?” (Barad 2012, 206). See also (Irigaray 1980; Kirby 1997; Vasseleu 1998; Merleau-Ponty 2000)

<sup>62</sup> Malabou opens her investigations into the workings of wonder with a focus on Descartes. Although she does not back up her assertion that wonder is fundamental to human subjectivity in philosophy, there may be some truth to the generalization. In Plato, as well as Aristotle, wonder is seen as tied to philosophy and knowledge, and consequently tied to our general characteristics as human beings too. Think for instance of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which opens with the statement that “[a]ll men naturally desire knowledge” (1933, 980a22). As it provides the starting point for such knowledge acquisition in both Aristotle and Plato, wonder may well be considered an anthropological fact. That is, it is not hard to read Aristotle here as implying that to wonder comes to men just as naturally as desiring knowledge does. Consequently, it is not hard to see how Malabou can read wonder in philosophy as a most fundamental, perhaps even ontological ground for human existence as well as basic subject-formation.

<sup>63</sup> An objection to this critique could be to say that Irigaray does not stay very close to the text either. Yet I think the difference lies in the fact that Irigaray’s subversive, mimetic reading springs from a deep engagement with

insights from this rather loose, yet at times also thorough engagement with the philosophical tradition.

According to Malabou, continental philosophy's tradition affirms a double, ambiguous dimension of wonder as both a self-feeling, or 'auto-affection', and an opening up to the other, 'heteroaffection.' Wonder's ambivalent status as being "*in between auto- and heteroaffection*" [emphasis original], according to Malabou, "makes all its philosophical interest" (Malabou 2013a, 9). What is important here is that she, like Irigaray, uses philosophy to read wonder in a way that is different from the wonder-knowledge-knot reading as discussed in chapter 1, yet is grounded in the same tradition. Whether she reads this philosophical tradition accurately can be debated, but her reading does provide interesting insights about the potential of wonder, as it opens us up to not only the other, but first of all to (the other in) ourselves.

#### *Malabou Reads the 'of' in Passions of the Soul*

Turning again to Descartes in *Self and Emotional Life*, Malabou explains how in his *Passions*, Descartes ranks wonder under the 'passions of the soul,' and notes that the word *of* is of crucial importance here. As Malabou recalls, Descartes defines the passions of the soul, consisting of the six primary passions, as follows: they are "the perceptions we refer only to the soul [and] whose effects we feel as being in the soul itself." (Descartes cited in Malabou 2013a, 10). She notes that this statement is pivotal for understanding the role of wonder within the framework of the passions of the soul in the restricted sense, as they occupy a different position among the passions than the passions of the soul in general. Next, she turns to part 1 of the *Passions*, in which Descartes gives a general definition of the passions and asserts that we should recognize that "what is a passion *in* the soul is usually an action in the body" [emphasis mine] (Descartes cited in Malabou 2013a, 13). According to Malabou's reading, the word *in* here designates a difference to the restricted word 'of' used for the passions *of* the soul (12-16).<sup>64</sup>

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the text that allows her to closely engage with the philosophers at hand and strategically infiltrate their theories to make them work for her own thought. The way in which Malabou reads the philosophers she discusses and gets a fundamental fact such as the importance of wonder for Spinoza wrong, however, makes me inclined to argue that it stems from insufficient engagement and immersion in the original texts and a too quick generalization of the tradition from Malabou's part. On Irigaray's strategy of mimesis, see (Kozel 1996).

<sup>64</sup> However attentive to details, it must be noted that this is a rather creative structuring of Descartes' theory of the passions. Descartes himself seems to use the two prefixes interchangeably. This is demonstrated by the fact that the above citation actually follows proposition 2: "To understand the passions *of* the soul we must distinguish its functions from those of the body" [emphasis mine] (1999a, 327). Yet the distinction drawn by

To understand this, let us recall from chapter 1 that the passions of the soul in the general sense are perceptions, whereas the passions of the soul in the restricted sense are those among the general passions of the soul that are caused by the body and involve a neural mechanism, which also refer to the soul (Malabou 2013a, 21). Now according to Malabou, the passions *of* the soul differ from the other passions in general in that they are related to the body, but they are not *caused* by it as such, designating a specific kind of disturbance that “appears to characterize psychical affects as such” (16). Although it is indeed true that the specific passions of the soul “agitate and disturb [the soul] strongly” – recalling the branches of the tree of thoughts of the soul summarized as such in chapter 1 – the fact that Descartes holds *all* the passions of the soul in the general sense to be caused by the body, or some movement of the animal spirits (the little particles responsible for moving the body “in all the various ways it can be moved” (*Passions* art. 10: 332)), cannot be denied.<sup>65</sup>

So while technically not exactly true to the text, what *is* telling about Malabou’s discussion of the passions of the soul in the restricted sense is that we do *feel* them to be in the soul and refer them to the soul exclusively. Although the (primary six) passions in the restricted sense are not an exception to the rule of the passions of the soul as related to the body, they are *experienced* as residing *in* the soul and this indeed makes them different from all the other passions/perceptions. Thus although still bodily in character, wonder as constituting the primary passion of the six ‘passions of the soul in the restricted sense,’ does take up an exceptional position. Aside from being *felt* in the soul, wonder is also significantly less physical in its functioning than the other primary passions.<sup>66</sup> In this way

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Malabou, unfaithful as it may be to the original text, does bring to the fore some essential differences between Descartes’ own general definition of the passions of the soul in the general sense as perceptions, and the passions of the soul in the restricted sense as referring to and experienced in the soul.

<sup>65</sup> In fact the bodily character of wonder is embedded within Descartes’ description of its causes quite clearly: “It has two causes: first, an impression in the brain, which represents the object as something unusual and consequently worthy of special consideration; and secondly, a movement of the spirits, which the impression disposes both to flow with great force to the place in the brain where it is located so as to strengthen and preserve it there, and also to pass into the muscles which serve to keep the sense organs fixed in the same orientation so that they will continue to maintain the impression in the way in which they formed it” (Descartes 1999a, 353). Thus, contra Malabou, although wonder is related to bodily changes just like all the other passions, it is related chiefly to the brain and the muscles, not to changes in heart or blood.

<sup>66</sup> Let us recall that for Descartes, contrary to all the other passions, wonder does not require anything apart from the brain. Whereas in all the other passions, including those we commonly call perceptions, the animal spirits move through the nerves, the heart, the blood and muscles, wonder is not accompanied by any change in the heart or in the blood at all (Descartes 1999a, 353). It has, Descartes states, a relation with the brain alone (353). The animal spirits thus pass into the brain, but also into the muscles, somewhat contradicting Descartes’ statement that wonder solely requires the brain. Yet this activation of the muscles does not occur in order for us to start moving. Quite the contrary, the muscles are activated to keep us in place; to preserve our impression and fix our senses in regard to the object in question. The reason for this is that wonder is not concerned with an object that is good or bad for us, but has only knowledge as its aim. Therefore, according to Descartes it only

it can be argued that wonder is differentiated from the rest doubly: not only does it differ from the passions in the general sense together with the other primary passions, it also stands out among those six passions.<sup>67</sup>

*Wonder at Thyself, the Affect of Difference and the Union of Body and Soul*

The reason Malabou highlights this special position of wonder within Descartes' definition of the passions of the soul as she continues to read his theory of the passions through the theories of other philosophers, notably Spinoza, and later Derrida and Deleuze – is to show that “the passions of the soul for the soul,” wonder in particular, are “the foundation of every other kind of affect” (Malabou 2013a, 10). As such, wonder reveals a kind of *self-pleasure* – an aspect reminiscent of the pleasure involved in wonder for Irigaray – of the soul, a self-touching underlying human subjectivity. That is, Malabou thus reads wonder through Descartes not so much as “the ability to be astonished by something external to the subject,” but as in fact the “faculty of self-surprising, the amazement of the mind at itself, its own opening to objects” (10).

Malabou turns to Spinoza to find further philosophical support of this notion of wonder as a kind of amazement of the soul at itself, a self-surprising that invokes pleasure. He declares that “[w]hen the mind regards its own self and its power of activity, it feels pleasure, and the more so, the more distinctly it imagines itself and its power of activity” (Spinoza cited in Malabou 2013a, 10).<sup>68</sup> Thus in reading the *Passions* together with Spinoza's

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needs the brain “in which are located the organs of the senses used in gaining this knowledge” (71).

<sup>67</sup> Philosopher Gábor Baros, in discussing the primacy of wonder in Descartes, argues that the 'first-ness' of wonder should rather be interpreted as something *preceding* the passions, as something that takes priority over the rest of them. Wonder, he explains, sits uncomfortably within Descartes' own definition of the passions in which bodily changes constitute efficient causes of passions, for the bodily changes connected to wonder are quite tiny. Descartes resolves this by maintaining that in wonder there are bodily changes, but they are located in the brain and thus not technically observable. Yet it remains peculiar that the first of all passions needs to be fitted into his definition of the passions instead of it being the 'prototype' of a passion. Boros argues that it is necessary for us to be grasped by the novelty of an object, or else we will simply contemplate it without any passion. This makes wonder for Descartes a kind of necessity, “a general condition of possibility for the passions” (2010, 176) and explains why wonder plays such a fundamentally positive role in the philosopher's writings, even though it is also full of risks of excess.

<sup>68</sup> A closer examination of the text by Spinoza on which Malabou claims to base her argument shows us that she is quite eclectic in choosing citations in order to support her findings. The passages taken from Spinoza do not directly connect the pleasure involved when the mind regards its own self to wonder. This is only logical, since Spinoza himself does not link up wonder with pleasure and self-knowledge, as we have discussed in chapter 2. As we have seen, the status of wonder as an affect is ambiguous in Spinoza, for he literally discounts it as an affect, yet discusses wonder in his list of the affects. However, for the sake of the argument, if we would for a moment count wonder among them, it would be possible to see how wonder and pleasure would go together from the ‘proof’ Spinoza offers right under proposition 53 and the part cited by Malabou. This proof entails that: “Man knows himself only *through* the affections of his body and their ideas” [emphasis mine] (Spinoza 2002b,

*Ethics*, Malabou reads the passions of the soul, and especially wonder, as fundamentally pleasurable. This reveals a different dimension of wonder: one that, like Irigaray's, goes far beyond an incentive for knowledge acquisition. Malabou's focus here is on the affect of wonder as it touches us and ignites processes of pleasurable auto-heteroaffection. In her words: "[W]e have to understand that the soul essentially wonders at and about itself and feels pleasure at its own contemplation" (2013a, 10). Thus, before wonder reaches out to external objects of wonder, there is a self-wondering at the heart of existence. In Malabou, then, '*know thyself*' arguably becomes '*wonder at thyself*,' as a key imperative of human subjectivity.

Moreover, as she interprets Descartes' take on the passions of the soul and distills her own version of it, wonder turns out to be crucial to *a sense of wholeness and union of the subject*. Malabou takes from Descartes the fact that the passions of the soul, of which wonder is the very first, play a pivotal role in uniting the body and the soul, in giving us a sense, a feeling of this very union. They form a point of seamless fitting between body and soul and "move and dispose the soul to want the things for which they prepare the body" (Descartes cited in Malabou 2013a, 16). The resulting "psychosomatic unity" (Malabou 2013a, 16) – in Descartes still enabled by the role assigned to the infamous pineal gland as a material locus of this union – makes wonder necessary to the experienced unity of mind and body.

To recapitulate, wonder for Malabou is always already ambiguous – an ambiguity that we have already detected in Spinoza's work and is expressed here differently – and thus philosophically interesting, being at one and the same time the affect of *self* (the self-touching in pleasure) as well as *other*. This other appears firstly as the difference within oneself; an other that is already there in the moment of self-affection. The "intrusion of alterity into the soul" evokes the soul's realization "that the self is not alone" (Malabou 2013a, 10). This makes wonder, for Malabou, *the affect of difference*: I wonder at myself, because I am already different from myself. Wonder moreover establishes a kind of pleasure involved in feeling oneself; it helps establish the union of body and soul so crucial to subjectivity in Descartes. Starting with a confrontation with the difference within ourselves, within the subject, this fundamental affect makes us receptive to being affected in general, and at the same time receptive to differences without us too. This more general, basic and primary wonder, as opposed to the strictly philosophical wonder discussed in chapter 1, is seen here as vital to all human life and not just a tool to arrive at knowledge. As in Irigaray, we find

closeness instead of distance, pleasure and affect instead of abstract contemplation and a focus on relationality – wonder as crucial to our relation to the self as well as to what is different, whether it be in the form of the other within the self, or without it.

*Losing Wonder: Crossing the Bridge to Neurobiology*

By now it will be clear how pivotal a role wonder plays for Malabou in human subjectivity. According to her, this wonder as described in the above, has been curiously taken for granted by the philosophical tradition, and philosophers at large have never imagined the option of *a loss of the capacity to wonder*. That is, philosophical discourse takes wonder as so essential, so self-evident, that even the possibility “that wonder may be destroyed, that the capacity to wonder may be definitely impaired” is unimaginable and never even envisaged by philosophers (Malabou 2013a, 10-11). Claiming rather boldly that from Aristotle to Heidegger the whole tradition of continental philosophy affirms that wonder is indestructible, she concludes that there is a general, but naïve trust in wonder as a human capacity (Malabou 2013b, 2013c). Whether this premise is actually valid for the entire tradition or mostly a rhetorical tool strengthening her argument goes beyond the scope of this thesis. What is relevant and revealing here, however, is her analysis of contemporary times and the urgency of wonder that arises from envisioning its destruction.

To underpin this vision, Malabou leaves the realm of philosophy and turns towards the neurobiological sciences to paint a grim picture of such subjectivity devoid of any wonder: “the neurobiological approach to emotions allows us to think *a strangeness or estrangement of the self to its own affects* [emphasis original]” (Malabou 2013a, 33). As she explains in *Self and Emotional Life* as well as through the course of several academic lectures, neural patterns that pertain to a biological order and which mirror the mind-body organism are susceptible to neurological damage. There are many case histories of neurologically damaged individuals that report personality changes – cases resulting in severe impairment of emotional processes.

Building upon findings of, amongst others, neurologists Antonio Damasio, Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull she argues that there is a “possibility, for the self, of being detached from its own emotions after brain damage,” after which the patient can become indifferent and disaffected (Malabou 2013a, 33). What is even more unsettling is that this impairment can happen without any accompanying loss of the cognitive faculties, allowing for an ‘acting in cold blood,’ or being, so to speak, *absent without leave*. The ‘emotional



brain,' a term developed by Joseph Ledoux (Ledoux 1996), and vital in making good decisions (Damasio 1995), can be destroyed.

In recalling that for Descartes wonder does not have an opposite, Malabou argues that wonder actually does have an opposite, namely *indifference*. Through the study of severe brain damage, seizures and trauma, we can see that the emotional brain stops functioning. This causes some subjects to cease to be auto-affected and to cease being open to the world. The result is disaffection – to be cut off from the world and from oneself.

Yet the most unsettling, societal and political part of this story develops – so far – not in *Self and Emotional Life*, but in front of audiences of Malabou's more speculative and openly-questioning recorded live lectures. Returning to Damasio, she speaks of how this condition of 'failing to be affected' reveals something present in each of us: *we can all suffer from the loss of wonder*.<sup>69</sup> This is not just about pathology, but as Malabou seems to suggest, rather exposes something about what is characteristic for humanity and culture at large.<sup>70</sup>

She continues to argue that there is a commonality between brain traumas such as strokes and seizures, and social traumas. Recent studies suggest that people suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, such as victims of rape, or homeless people, present the same type of behavior that is so typical of having lost wonder: that is, being absent without leave, in the Oliver Sacksian manner. Her question is, then: might the capacity to be untouched by wonder be in the process of becoming the new type of affected, non-affected subject? And why? And what is a subject who does not wonder? Who does not open itself to itself and others? In sum: "Are we experiencing the end of wonder" (Malabou 2013b)? This is where power comes in to the picture and the political stakes get high, for Malabou argues that *indifference to indifference* is the mode of being that political power or authority tries to invoke in us. And now, she asks: "How does power foster emotional absence, hidden behind discourses on solidarity?" (Malabou 2013b)

### *Power, Affect and Neurobiology: Malabou and Spinoza*

To get into the intricate political questions and web of implications of an approaching loss of

<sup>69</sup> Barad's article 'On Touching: The Inhuman that Therefore I am' puts touch in relation to the search for "an ethics committed to the rupture of indifference" (Barad 2012, 214). Since Malabou relates wonder to touch, and the loss of wonder implies indifference to the world, it would be interesting to read the two in conjunction with each other as they are both committed to similar aims, yet come from completely different angles.

<sup>70</sup> This seems to bear similarities with Freud's metaphor of the crystal in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* ([1905] 2011), where he compares pathology with a crystal breaking along its internal fractures that only become visible when they break, yet are always present in everyone. This establishes a continuum of pathologies instead of a clear cut separation between the normal and the deviant.

wonder, Malabou returns once more to philosophy. This time, she zooms in on Spinoza's theory of the affects, which I have discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. She recalls that affect induces modifications of the *conatus* and that to be alive means to have some power of acting. Life through a Spinozian lens, she explains, is power in potentiality. The striving of each thing is its essence. That is, to be is to want to be here and to persevere in one's being – "I am here and I want to stay, and I want to get more and more powerful." Different affects, in turn, modulate this power. One's power of acting is never isolated, constantly encountering other powers of acting. To be affected with joy is to determine one's own power for a moment, whereas in sadness the other's power is influencing the self. And the more one determines oneself, the more joyful one becomes. Conversely, the more one is determined by external causes, the weaker one grows. Echoing Deleuze, Malabou reiterates that the *conatus* is therefore a musical instrument played by affect (Malabou 2013a, 39). And we can add to that: as Deleuze interprets Spinoza, it follows that "sadness and joy are the two big affective tonalities" (Deleuze 1980).

As we have discussed earlier, affections of the body are at the same time affections of the mind in Spinoza. Hence what increases or diminishes the power of the body to act also increases or diminishes the power of the mind to think (for the mind is the idea of the body, see chapter 2 of this thesis). Considering Spinoza's two fundamental affects, this entails that in feeling joyful one is more powerful and one's feeling for life is intensified – one feels more open, and so does one's mind. Yet when one is sad, one grows weaker and more docile; one's power diminishes and so does one's power to think. Joy is the affect whereby the mind and body grow to greater perfection; sadness results in a state of lesser perfection.

Siding with Damasio – who presents Spinoza as a proto-neurobiologist in foreseeing that what happens in the body happens in the mind as well (this correspondence or coincidence is now interpreted by neurobiologists in the form of 'neural-maps') – Malabou claims there is one cross point at which she diverts from Spinoza. This diversion is to be located at their designation of the lowest end of power in regards to affects and affection. Malabou explains that for Deleuze in his interpretation of Spinoza, in order for *political power to be exercised*, sadness needs to be evoked or inspired.<sup>71</sup> That is, passions deriving from sadness, one of the two fundamental affects, combined with an inadequate idea of their

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<sup>71</sup> In Deleuze's words: "The sad passions are necessary. Inspiring sad passions is necessary for the exercise of power. And Spinoza says, in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, that this is a profound point of connection between the despot and the priest—they both need the sadness of their subjects. Here you understand well that he does not take sadness in a vague sense, he takes sadness in the rigorous sense he knew to give it: sadness is the affect insofar as it involves the diminution of my power of acting" (1980).

cause, diminish the subject's power of acting, and thus promotes docility. One could think here, for instance, of the tyrant who invokes fear and humility through cruel punishments for civil disobedience, or of the priest, invoking obedience through guilt and shame. Yet, as Malabou argues further, although sad passions represent the lowest point of our power to act politically – these feelings create a form of enslavement – sad passions never destroy the capacity to be touched as such. This means that *we can always transform*. No matter how much hate, aversion, fear, despair, pity, indignation, envy, humility, shame, regret or resentment (to name a few) we feel, there always remains the possibility of a symbolic projection of oneself, a “re-imagining oneself which allows the conversion of sorrow into joy” (Malabou 2013b).

Another way in which we could argue (Malabou herself does not go here) for the transformability of sadness is by looking at the way Deleuze interprets Spinoza in his lectures on the philosopher. As he explains what happens when we are affected by a sad passion, Deleuze takes the example of having someone enter the room whom one doesn't wish to see. In this case, one's power decreases. This does not mean that one has less power, he explains, but that “part of [one's] power is subtracted in this sense that it is necessarily allocated to averting the action of the thing.” One makes an investment, so to speak, to “warding off the thing, warding off the action of the thing,” resulting not in the disappearance of power, but in immobilizing part of one's power, as it is completely *invested* in “isolating the trace, on [oneself], of the object which doesn't agree with [oneself]” (Deleuze 1980).

If we see power as partially fixating us when we are affected by sad passions, it becomes clear why sadness is not necessarily fatal to one's power of acting, as it can somehow be ‘un-fixated’ or ‘mobilized’ again. And because of this potential transformation of sad passions, Malabou asserts that there may be a much more effective and permanent way for authorities to gain power. Perhaps, she speculates, power is exercised differently in current times. Perhaps it is established by inspiring *indifference*, instead of a sad passion. Therefore, she continues, the *conatus*' lowest point of power is to be located here: at the opposite of wonder, indifference (Malabou 2013c).

For Spinoza, as we have discussed earlier, the two extreme points of affects and affection are joy and sorrow, whereby the sad passions represent the lowest point of our power as expressed in aversion, despair, hate, indignation, shame, regret, and so forth. Indifference, however, replaces sadness as the *conatus*' lowest point of power in Malabou. Sad passions do diminish our power for the moment, or fixate part of it, and in their extremes we are at the mercy of feelings from outside and incapable of stopping them, and in this way

these feelings can create a form of political enslavement. However, they can never destroy the *capacity to be touched as such* and to be emotionally moved. For in sad passions there is always the possibility of transformation, a redirection, or a reinvestment. This very possibility, however, can also be destroyed according to Malabou, after which a kind of “death in life” occurs (Malabou 2013b).<sup>72</sup> The subject ceases to give meaning to anything without the feeling of basic emotions, of social emotions. Sometimes the capacity for reasoning remains intact after, for instance, a seizure. But, Malabou argues, pure reason is not sufficient for decision-making. In order to make decisions, we need to see the value of acting, of choosing, preferring and judging. Without this, we arrive at a ‘to know, but not to feel.’

To illustrate this, Malabou discusses Damasio’s ‘detached’ patient Elliot (Malabou 2013a, 11, 59-60; 2013b, 2013c), who became indifferent and “approached life on the same neutral note” (Damasio 1995, 45) after the seemingly successful removal of a brain tumor and having all his motoric and lingual capacities still intact. Such cases are merely magnifying glasses for Malabou, used to look at ‘normal’ subjects. To her, the possibility of the ‘emotional brain’ – and with it wonder – to be destroyed and separated from cognitive networks *is present and latent in all individuals*. A ‘crack-up’ between reason and affects, according to Malabou, *determines the contemporary psyche*. From there it follows that power, according to Malabou, has an interest in evoking indifference in us, so that we may become incapable of being affected at all. But which power or authorities does she mean to point to here? What causes indifference when we are not facing a seizure or a stroke?

It is hard to answer this precisely with Malabou, as such questions are not specifically addressed in *Self and Emotional Life*, which is more concerned with the relation between philosophy and neurobiology than with a diagnosis of our times and a cultural critique. However, again in her lectures, Malabou starts to sketch the possible answers, or at least give us some clues as to the broader societal causes and implications of a loss of wonder. But most of all, true to the task of philosophy, she raises some important questions. As she affirms that we “live in times in which we clearly need transformation”, she asks: “is it the lack of wonder that keeps us from transforming our current world?” (Malabou 2013b) Posed differently: may the activation of wonder be what is missing from our (feminist) toolbox to change the world?

“The neural subject of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” the subject defining the contemporary

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<sup>72</sup> Malabou argues that in sad passions we can always substitute the biological for the symbolical: I may not be a joyful person, but I may symbolically project myself as a joyful person and converse my sorrow into joy. In pointing at philosophy, Malabou stresses there is a limit to what the symbolic can do and claims symbolic reshaping is useless in cases of severe cerebral lesions and cuts in neural networks whereby the power of acting is not diminished, but destroyed.

psyche, Malabou continues, “presents us with a subject deprived of all capacity to wonder” (Malabou 2013b). Inspiring indifference has become necessary for the exercise of power, as it can be exercised by making the subject unconcerned about the power, authority or system that is controlling it, therefore de-politicizing this subject. That is, Malabou signals a contemporary subject who does not care about such power, or its own power. She signals a growing absence of empathy, an indifference to politics and an indifference to sensations or circumstances. Political, societal, environmental, violent or catastrophic events today appear as mere “blows,” devoid of meaning. Politics assumes the face of nature, the meaningless accident (Malabou 2013c).<sup>73</sup> There is no *sense* to all the catastrophic events around us. In fact, our indifference towards all these events is the new political violence according to Malabou. We should notice, she argues, that there is a kind of war on sense itself going on. Indifference characterizes society, an ‘unconcernedness’ about our bodies and minds. She calls what we are dealing with a “global psychic pathology” (Malabou 2013b), which shows itself through symptoms normally associated with PTSD: a profound passivity, indifference to the world, lack of political engagement, loss of curiosity and motivation, a general distrust and withdrawn behavior. “The profile of this loss is universal,” Malabou concludes (2013b).

All of this highlights the need to resist disaffection and to further engage with wonder as a serious passion. Malabou proposes a different way of thinking about wonder: as a way to bring to the fore the potentialities of wonder that juxtaposes the traditional philosophical wonder that we started out with, and that is essential to the self and other in opening us up to ourselves and the difference within and without us. ‘Personal’ wonder in Malabou automatically becomes political. In calling for a consideration of what happens when we lose this capacity to wonder and become indifferent, one can see that the absence of wonder de-politicizes. By placing indifference in opposition to wonder, the political potential of wonder now stands out. This makes wonder more politically urgent in Malabou than anywhere else, and it is this thought that I will further explore in the last chapter.

If it is the lack of wonder that is holding us back from transforming the world as it is, Malabou raises some important issues. The ethical and political dimensions of wonder opened up by Irigaray and Malabou are a long cry from wonder as tied up in a restrictive wonder-knowledge-knot. Irigaray signifies an important transformation in thinking about wonder, unlocking its transformative potential in introducing it as a relational mode to find a

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<sup>73</sup> One could think for instance of the way in which the free market is described as an unstoppable beast, something that cannot be controlled. As I will explain in the fourth chapter, much of this is true for the many legitimizations for capitalist and neo-liberalist society: it is explained and reified as a ‘natural’ state of being, adhering to human nature as such.

way to think of difference not in terms of appropriation and categorization, but in a way that fosters respect and openness to the ‘event of the other.’ In both Irigaray and Malabou, we see that wonder figures as a capacity to *think difference differently* – a thought to which will be explored in the final chapter. Finally, Malabou’s thought experiment (or perhaps even the very real threat) of a loss of wonder outlines its political potential. If ‘all is equal’ to us, we stop caring or advocating for change or transformation. Yet how can we resist such disaffection? How do we evoke wonder in others and ourselves? Is there a way to further deploy wonder as a feminist passion? The closing chapter will be devoted to my own take on this matter together with insights from Sara Ahmed, Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway and informed and inspired by the development of wonder in the philosophers discussed thus far.

## Chapter 4

### Towards a Politics of Wonder: Transforming the Relation to Difference

Wonder is about learning to see the world as something that does not have to be, and as something that came to be, over time, and with work.<sup>74</sup>

-Sara Ahmed

With the previous chapters in mind, I would like to return to the question posed in the introduction to this thesis, namely: why wonder? So far, the concept of wonder has been mapped out and traced back to its formative, canonical philosophical as well as feminist philosophical roots. Throughout the preceding chapters, the notion of wonder has been explored from the presumption that it can be *more* than a narrative of origin and a knowledge-tool for dominant philosophy with the accompanying cliché of the armchair philosopher. Even more so, this cartography of wonder has been mapped out in order to begin uncovering its potential to engender change and transformation. Wonder in the thought of the feminist philosophers discussed so far does things that are not at all restricted to the acquisition of scientific knowledge, and opens up new territory at the intersection of ontology, ethics and epistemology. In this chapter, I would like to continue working across these borders and, together with Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti and Sara Ahmed, build upon the developments of wonder covered so far to work towards my own understanding of the potential of wonder as a feminist passion today. For, rather than being strictly ‘theoretical,’ apolitical or noncommittal, wonder can radically shake up the way in which we relate to difference and make us see how things could and should be different in the future.

After selectively mapping out ‘wonders’ of classic philosophy and contemporary feminist philosophy, it should now be evident that there is not just *one* wonder. Wonder, through the thought and scholarship of different thinkers, takes on multiple forms. With its changing meaning, it is a passion that can be studied almost kaleidoscopically. It forms different sets of relations not only with philosophy and knowledge, but also with the self, with (sexed) others, and with society at large. I want to attend to wonder here as it relates to difference, which I see as a common thread running through the different constellations of wonder come across so far. For as Malabou put it in *Self and Emotional Life*: wonder can be considered the *affect of difference* (2013, 10).

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<sup>74</sup> From *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*: (Ahmed 2004, 178).

Wonder already relates to difference when it comes to the epistemological view of wonder in classical philosophy. Here, difference is situated in the object we relate to in wonder: something strikes us as unusual, as different *from* the rest, and through wonder, we get to know it. In making knowledge the final objective of wonder, however, wonder is mobilized to strive toward a homogenization of what strikes the knower as different. As discussed in chapter 1, wonder also relates to differences in Descartes. However, the teleological direction in which it is steered aims at undoing those differences at the same time. The new object of wonder is circumscribed and categorically fitted into the world of things that are known. It thereby supports, not challenges, the framework developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century wherein a ‘knower’ relates to the ‘known’ in a way that manipulates, controls, and dominates.<sup>75</sup> Here, in order to make sure wonder stays within the confines of scientific knowledge acquisition it is restricted both spatially (its territory is scientific knowledge, and the space it opens should only lead towards the expansion of this area) and temporally (one should not ‘dwell’ on it too long, for that would result in getting lost, which defies the aim of knowledge acquisition).

As discussed in length in chapter 2, the one who untangled this discourse on wonder around the same time was Spinoza, who was extremely suspicious of this approach in which wonder is a tool to arrive at a knowledge which is accompanied by the sense of control. He resisted the separation between body and mind and therefore, also strayed from the discourse prevalent at the time of a disembodied thinking and reasoning, even arguing for wonder in opposition to knowledge acquisition altogether. As I argued, this can be considered a break in the wonder-knowledge-knot, allowing for an exploration of wonder as both bodily and social in the framework of affects within our previous discussion of the affects, as well as a freeing of wonder from disembodied knowledge and opening it up to other linkages.

These potentials come to the fore in Irigaray and Malabou. Wonder in their thought relates to difference, but its spatio-temporal dimensions change drastically. The focus shifts from knowledge and orthodox epistemology to ethical relating (to sexual differences in Irigaray, and first of all to the difference within the self in Malabou). This is not to say that wonder cannot be about knowledge any longer, but rather that the entanglement of

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<sup>75</sup> And, as Genevieve Lloyd, amongst others, has observed in *The Man of Reason*, this discourse is problematic for the history of Western thought: superior reason has been associated with masculinity and maleness, in opposition to inferior nature, associated with the feminine realm. A ‘good knower,’ she argues, has “male content” (1993, 16-17). Haraway notably analyzes this male, white, upper class content of the subject of knowledge further when she revisits Robert Boyle’s normative treatment of the ‘scientist’ as a modest witness (1997). As examined in the preceding discussion of feminist epistemology, wonder in the context of knowledge – in the sense of a one-sided control over a seemingly passive object marked as feminine, as appropriation and manipulation – does not make it a very agreeable passion to feminism.



epistemology with ethics is recognized and taken into account. Wonder here loses its final aim, its *telos*, of incorporating the thing wondered at into a strict body of knowledge. What is different does not need to be negated or assimilated as known. Instead, for instance in the work of Irigaray, wonder is put to work to mean a continuous striving for openness. Instead of looking for closure to avoid excessive wonder, as in the case of the work of ancient philosophy as well as enlightenment philosophical discourse, feminist perspectives tend to look for a further expansion, a broadening, a growing sense of wonder. In a feminist reworking of wonder, it thus becomes vital to keep wonder open, and to *not* arrive at a confining conclusion and to *not* appropriate as known that which makes us wonder. By opening up the territory of wonder to include ontology, ethics and epistemology, the focus shifts to wonder's potential without the confinements of space and duration.

### *Wonder in Advanced Capitalism*

Taking up the thread of wonder as the affect of difference, I want to attend now to the relation between wonder and social change, and the way in which wonder can *make a difference* when it comes to the existing inequalities between differently situated subjects. In shifting my focus to contemporary society and its injustices, I bring to the fore the question of what wonder could do and how it can be developed to move toward a more just and feminist future. There are many ethical concerns characterizing our “technologically driven historical phase of advanced capitalism” (Braidotti 2006, 1), where everything has become exchangeable. To loosely elaborate on what Martin Heidegger wrote a couple of decennia back: ‘being,’ today, means being replaceable: “Sein ist heute Ersetzbarsein” (Heidegger 1986, 369). This observation is closely related to the way in which ‘being’ in our times of modern technology appears: as an object of deposit, control, usage and consumption (A. Prins 2007, 261). Everything in our current world has been made into a *Bestand*, “stock”, the worth of which can only be established as a valuation of *use*. This includes humans, non-humans, the natural elements, everything organic, and inorganic on earth and beyond. That is, anything can be made into a *thing*. Philosopher Awee Prins in *Uit Verveling* (2007, trans. *Being Bored*) offers the incisive example of the unnoticed idiom of ‘Human Resource Management’ as well as ‘social engineering’ (262) to demonstrate how humans are literally compared to and understood as resources: exploited for maximum profitability and valued along the parameters of functionality and efficiency. In a never-ending process, everything continually calls for perfection and optimization, whereby growth is imperative and a model

of scarcity is upheld.

Moreover, as Braidotti observes in her analysis of contemporary times, society is fascinated, even obsessed by the ‘new.’ She argues that globalization and its technologies are characterized by a celebration of “*new technologies, new economy, new lifestyles, new generations of both human and technological gadgets, new wars and new weapons*” (Braidotti 2006, 4). Paradoxically, contemporary society completely dismisses the ‘new’ when it comes to “the social rejection of change and transformation” (4). That is, while everything related to consumerism must constantly change and be exchanged in the name of the new, meaningful social change is blocked by a kind of conservatism when it comes to the *status quo*. As Braidotti argues, neo-conservative political liberalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall tells us that all the grand ideologies, such as Marxism, communism, feminism, and socialism no longer serve any function, and thus “people can now relax and carry on with the normal task of minding their own business” (1), instead of working toward social reformation. In doing so, neo-conservative political liberalism offers us the banal narrative, disguised as a natural fact, of human beings as necessarily self-interested and competitive, justifying ever-growing inequality and exorbitant injustice. Differently put: ‘all is fair’ in the economy and the free market. As self-interest is presumed to rule us within this discourse and the market regulates itself, there is no sense in looking around us and wondering about the status quo and the possibility of a different future, thus little incentive to care. ‘Caring,’ too, is neatly packaged in terms of buying things as the solution to every problem – it is not a coincidence that out of all the things that president G.W. Bush could have said after 9/11, he urged people to go out and *buy things*. As Braidotti powerfully sums up this phenomenon: “In a totally schizophrenic double pull the consumerist and socially enhanced faith in the new is supposed not only to fit in with, but also actively to induce, the rejection of in-depth changes” (Braidotti 2006, 2).

When weaving in Malabou’s insights, it makes sense that such rejected in-depth changes, if realized or even just imagined, would expose neo-conservative political liberalism for what it is and does, and would shake it up with no guarantee of a return. Whereas Spinoza delineated power as invested in instilling ‘sad passions’ in the masses, as argued by Malabou in the previous chapter, power in contemporary times benefits from invoking indifference, the opposite of wonder. In this technologically-driven historical phase of advanced capitalism, making people care less and careless helps to solidify existing inequalities and distract people from generating change. This works not by way of tyranny or instilling Spinozian passions such as fear and terror, but by insidiously creating the conditions for a passive indifference

and a disabling disaffection. Neoliberalist discourse thus tells its ideal subject to stay home on the couch in front of the manifold flickering flat screens, and these screens continuously inform us in short little news feeds and sound bites that the gap between the haves and have-nots steadily grows; that racism, sexism, homophobia, islamophobia, populism and nationalism and other relations to differences prevail; that the ice caps are melting and the sea levels are rising; that wars are being waged, weapons developed, bought and sold, *etcetera*. And somehow, it does not, or is not supposed to *hit home*.<sup>76</sup> As naturalized injustices in the name of self-interest, all of it seems unavoidable. The injustices of the world constitute endless “blows” (Malabou 2013b) that overwhelm, perhaps even numb their recipients, and as such present battles that are continually lost from the start. The overwhelming amount of injustices mediated through constant *news* feeds and the growing realization of the interconnection of all ethical concerns in an ever increasingly globalized world create the perfect conditions for contemporary subjects to shrug at the world. Perceived powerlessness insidiously slips into indifference. Malabou diagnoses contemporary discourse as encouraging and instilling this indifference in us, drawing analogies between contemporary neoliberalist subjects and neurological cases of heavily traumatized patients with brain damage whose ability to wonder has been destroyed and who are thus incapable of being affected as such. While such linkages have yet to be further explored and refined, it is not hard to see how our current age could discourage wonder to take a hold of us. Are contemporary subjects supposed to ask radical questions, to wander and look around, to get to the root of things and mobilize for change? And how could we create the conditions that would cultivate and support a desire for change? How do we bring about an in-depth transformation of the *status quo*?

### *Thinking Difference Differently with Wonder*

Obviously, these are not questions with simple, clear-cut answers, nor questions that are answerable within the scope of this research. Yet this does not mean that one cannot engage

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<sup>76</sup> I realize that this time analysis is by no means complete and does not do full justice to the complexities of our living world today, which would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet to concretize the political potential of wonder in relation to difference, it is necessary to roughly sketch the problematics of the way our relation to difference plays out today. However, I want to stress the fact that the subject position I am using here as a negative emblem of our time is not accessible nor occupiable to all. The subject who sits indifferently in front of the TV is geopolitically situated and privileged and in many ways relatively optimally located along such axes as class and ethnicity in society. For a taste of the complexities of modern neoliberalist capitalism today, an analysis of processes of globalization, precarious work and capitalist invisibilities would be called for. See for instance: (Altman 2001; Waller and Marcos 2005; Joynt et al. 2016).

with them, however partially. And this is where I want to bring wonder to the table as a political passion that can break open and disturb the *status quo*. Our philosophical discourse and the way we think are foundational to how the world concretely plays out and how we live in it. In strategically thinking about change it is thus essential to understand the philosophical groundwork: which concepts and ways of thinking underlie the way we inhabit the world, and what are the injustices, inequalities and wrongdoings that unfold from them? In that vein, one can trace a main root underneath the surface of injustice, all the way back to the way in which one thinks about ‘difference’ *an sich*, and one can unravel the potential of wonder as the affect of difference within that framework.

The problem of difference points to the heart of feminism and is as old as feminism itself, stretching from feminist, liberal, radical, lesbian and socialist theories to Black and post-colonial feminisms. Such theories work with differences *from* or *between* certain groups – men and women and the assumed and actual differences between them, but also differences along the axes of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and age. As many different feminist thinkers have brought up, stretching from Simone de Beauvoir (cf. 1956) to Butler (cf. 1993), Braidotti (cf. 1994) and thinkers throughout the wide field of feminist theory and gender studies (cf. Weedon 1999), difference is presently characterized by negation and exclusion. There is an ideal dominant subject, typically signified by whiteness, heterosexuality, urbanization, able-bodiedness and authority over women and children (cf. Irigaray 1985; Grosz 1994; Butler 1999; Braidotti 2011). Anyone who diverts from this ideal (along axes such as sex, race, ethnicity or class) is constructed as less and lacking, but necessary to the self-representation of the dominant subject. By *not* embodying the ideal, the ‘others’ are constructive to the sense of self, superiority and entitlement of the dominant subject. Within the context of sexual difference, thinkers such as Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have named this state of affairs the “economy of the same,” and the “Empire of the Selfsame” respectively (Irigaray 1985b; Cixous 1986), whereby the masculine subject is self-conscious and self-same and women form ‘the other,’ the non-subjects, the constitutive supporting matter of these subjects. Rather than being restricted to sexual difference only, this mechanism pertains to any aberration from what has been constituted as the norm. As Braidotti formulates it: “difference [...] is indexed negatively on that standard definition of the human subject,” making normality the “zero-degree of difference” (Braidotti 2014, 1).

This makes for a lot of ‘others’ below this zero-degree level and structurally creates others who are marked by their diversion from the standardized norm. Examples are sexualized others: women, ‘LGBT’ or queer people; and racialized others: everyone who

does not pass as ‘white’ or ‘Western’ or ‘European.’ But they also include non-human others: naturalized others such as animals, plants, the planet or technological others.<sup>77</sup> What all these ‘others’ have in common is that their difference is consistently treated as de-valorized difference, a difference *from*, as a *negative* depreciative difference ready to be appropriated and controlled (Braidotti 2014, 3). From this it follows that there is an inherent injustice in the way relating works and in the way we differentiate between others. Therefore, one cannot look at separate injustices without looking at what arguably is a main binding factor: the mechanisms of difference itself that historically divide the world into opposing pairs such as reason/emotion, mind/body, human/animal, man/woman, culture/nature, posing the one (‘masculine’) ‘pole’ in a hierarchical, controlling and appropriative and normative relation to the other (‘feminine’) pole (cf. Derrida 1978; Lloyd 1993; Grosz 1994; Hooks 2015). Such binary pairs become normalized and they capture our way of conceptually thinking about difference and the way in which this system plays out concretely. Difference is reduced to a hierarchical either/or. Within this mechanism, it is fixed, and difference is thought of *negatively* as a difference *from*.

Within feminist scholarship, there is some discussion as to which pair comes first, which is primary, or which should be deconstructed most urgently. For Irigaray, this is the sexual binary, and she explores sexual difference as the “philosophical problem of our age” (Irigaray 1993). But a thinker such as Vicky Kirby, for instance, starts her deconstruction of binary thinking from the pair of nature/culture (Kirby 1997), and the same could be argued for Haraway (Haraway 1997). Rather than extrapolating from one particular pair here (it may well be that any binary pair can be taken as a starting point, because one ‘pair’ will eventually lead to other pairs that are associated with it and related to it) I want to continue to discuss the way in which we relate to difference itself, as expressed in a negative and fixed way in these hierarchal pairs and how this relation to difference cuts through society today.

That is, difference itself is problematized within feminist thought, as a mechanism that excludes, controls and appropriates. At the root of many injustices that feminisms are concerned with today lies the problem of difference itself, and society’s failure to think difference *positively/affirmatively* (cf. Lorde 1984; Irigaray 1993; Braidotti 2006; Barad 2007; Thiele 2014a; Thiele 2014b; hooks 2015). As Braidotti’s project of reworking difference illuminates, difference in western, Eurocentric thought is characterized by a “difference-as-a-dialectics,” whereby difference is “predicated on relations of domination and

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<sup>77</sup> For an introduction to feminist science studies and technoscience studies that work with these themes, see for instance the reader *Feminist Science Studies* (Mary Wyer, Mary Barbercheck *et al* 2013).

exclusion” and to be “different from came to mean to be *worth* less than” (Braidotti cited in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 27). Feminist thought, embedded within feminist new materialism in particular, is committed to finding ethico-political alternatives to think difference differently and to understanding it not in oppositional and hierarchal terms, but affirmatively: “i.e. structured by positivity rather than negativity” (127). In aligning with this project, I follow Braidotti in her assertion that it is “important to focus seriously on the notion of political passions, and to stress a rigorous vision of affectivity” (Braidotti 2006, 4).

If any passion would carry within it the potential to change our approach to difference it should be wonder, the affect of difference. Certainly, contemporary indifference to the way in which difference plays out concretely in relating (difference as being worth less) blocks the way to think difference differently, and consequently to *do* difference differently. The absence of wonder and the threat of indifference thus keep one locked in the current workings of difference. In order to open up the question of difference in the first place, then, it is essential to avoid disaffection by indifference and to further unravel the potentialities of wonder.

Through wonder, we are affected by difference. Without it, we find out just how essential it is to be affected by the other, and without it, a passive submission to the *status quo* is enabled. This entails passively submitting to neoliberal capitalist society in which relations between differently-marked (e.g. markings by sex, gender, class, ‘race’ and age) humans, between humans and non-humans, and between humans and the environment are growing more unequal, appropriative and controlling. In order to move towards a more just world, different differences have to be made and affirmed in order to break through an indifference that paralyzes transformative practices. I argue that wonder can help us think this through and that through wonder we can learn to think about difference differently. There are many ways in which I believe wonder can be developed to do this, none of them being the final conclusive ‘wonder,’ but each of them carrying the potential to further challenge the relation to difference, the workings of difference itself, and the conceptual frameworks that underlie it today. I have already discussed what Irigaray and Malabou have opened up in regards to (in)difference, taking wonder as their starting points. To address the question of how to think difference differently, I will now map out two further potentialities of wonder that I find particularly helpful for this purpose.

### *Haraway's Curious Critters*

In the introduction, I touched upon Haraway's reworking of the concept of objectivity in the discussion of feminist epistemology. Trying to avoid the trap of the appropriative, controlling and 'transcendent' way of acquiring knowledge on the one hand and a paralyzing relativism in regards to knowledge on the other, she makes the strong point that knowledge is always situated and partial, resulting in an epistemology of partial perspectives.<sup>78</sup> Instead of weakening knowledge claims, according to Haraway, situating knowledges and the knower, and acknowledging that the object of knowledge has agency itself actually makes for a more objective account of the world.<sup>79</sup>

Haraway herself does not explicitly speak about wonder. However, the term she prefers is closely related: *curiosity*. This concept is central to her thought, and she works with it most explicitly in *When Species Meet* (2008), an extension of her earlier *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003). Curiosity, she explains, is "one of the first obligations and deepest pleasures of worldly companion species" (Haraway 2008, 6). Haraway contemplates the interactions of human beings with many kinds of 'critters,' especially domestic animals, including her own dogs, but also chickens, sheep, micro-organisms, cats, baboons and wolves. Debunking human exceptionalism and de-centering the human subject, she explores how different companion species 'meet,' encounter each other and are deeply implicated with each other. Haraway takes the thought of the other as already implicated in us as we 'become' with other 'critters' and we are bound up and mutually implicated in 'meetings' with all sorts of organisms, surfaces and environments. This renders the illusion of human autonomy and anthropocentrism unsustainable – a motive running through the entire scope of Haraway's work.

Whereas Irigaray develops wonder within the context of relating, not specifically within the context of knowledge, and Malabou's discussion of wonder gravitates towards a discussion of affects, Haraway's concept of curiosity is still explicitly linked to knowledge. However, in contrast to the wonder-knowledge bind in traditional philosophy, knowledge has

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<sup>78</sup> That is, an epistemology that stems from the partial perspectives of different subjugated groups, a critical localization of these perspectives in their mobility and multiplicity and a rejection of *any a priori* knowledge or knowledge-categories. Moreover, it entails that the knower should be ethically accountable for the ways in which they engender and articulate their research and from which partial positions. This means an active undoing of the 'god-trick' of transcendental knowledge and a cut between subject and object, knower and object of knowledge. See also the chapter 'Rethinking Epistemologies' in *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (Lykke 2010b).

<sup>79</sup> For an insightful account of the term 'objectivity' I refer to Baukje Prins' discussion of feminist epistemology in *The Standpoint in Question* (1997).

been transformed by a feminist epistemology that takes seriously the partiality of knowledge and the ethical responsibility involved in knowledge practices. Haraway's work on curiosity, like the previously discussed potentialities of wonder, opens up the boundaries between ethics, ontology and epistemology.

It becomes clear what curiosity demands for Haraway when she engages with Derrida's posthumously assembled 1997 lecture series about standing naked in front of his cat in his bathroom – *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008). For her, Derrida was not sufficiently curious, thus weakening his intellectual rigor significantly. Derrida investigates the distinction between man, as a thinking animal, and every other living species, by starting from his personal experience of standing naked in front of his cat in the bathroom and feeling shame about this. These experiences of shame and nakedness lead him back to a myriad of mythologies of man's superiority over beasts, tracing a history of systematic displacement of the animal by humans, who project their own failings onto the animal. Whereas Haraway expresses contentment over the fact that Derrida understood that "actual animals look back at actual human beings" (Haraway 2008, 19), she argues that he failed the obligation of companion species by not becoming curious about "what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available in looking back at him that morning" (20). That is, although Derrida criticized everyone who claimed to see from the animal's point of view or engaged with them as mere objects of their own vision, as well as those who engage animals purely as literary figures, he was not able to consider "practices of communication outside of writing technologies he did know how to talk about" (21). The result, as Haraway argues, was that he knew nothing more "from, about, and with the cat" at the end of the morning than he knew at the beginning of it (22).

His failure was in not responding to the cat's response to his practice, in not taking the risk of asking and in not becoming curious about what that cat might have cared about that morning. According to Haraway, he could have studied her bodily postures and "visual entanglements" for what they might invite; and he could have studied what cat-behavioralists have to say about them (Haraway 2008, 22). In sum, he could have delved into the "developing knowledges of both cat-cat and cat-human behavioral semiotics when species meet" (21). As Derrida focused on his own shame, his shame won from his curiosity, and in stopping at recognizing that the cat's gaze could not be conceptualized, he stopped looking and instead focused on himself rather than engaging in an actual "*autre-mondialisation*"



(22).<sup>80</sup> He therefore did not meet the obligations of curiosity for Haraway, which “requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning” (36).

This approach is different from Irigaray’s, for whom wonder is not so much about knowing as it is about being receptive to the other. Yet while Haraway stresses knowledge much more than Irigaray, Haraway’s concept of curiosity, while requiring a ‘reaching out’ also relies heavily on being *receptive*, tuning into what the other – in this case non-human species – gives us or invites us to see. For Haraway, engaging in knowledge practices and taking responsibility for them and situating them, while at the same time taking the *risk* of engaging with them is key. She calls this way of engaging in knowledge practices through curiosity as getting “into thick mud” meaning that it is not easy or safe or doable from a ‘pure’ position, that it requires work and one will have to get ‘dirty’ (Haraway 2008, 38). But it is exactly this kind of looking back at the other – “becoming-with-companions” – that, according to Haraway, matters in “making *autres-mondialisations* more possible” (38).

While at first sight, Haraway focuses on the binary of human/animal as well as the collision of culture/nature divides in contemporary society, the larger issue at stake for her is how to live with all the others, all the differences that make up the tissue of this world, in a positive, just and respectable way. She writes:

In the fashion of turtles (with their epibionts) on turtles all the way down, meetings make us who and what we are in the avid contact zones that are the world. Once “we” have met, we can never be “the same” again. Propelled by the tasty but risky obligation of curiosity among companion species, once we know, we cannot not know. If we know well, searching with fingery eyes, we care. That is how responsibility grows. (Haraway 2008, 287)

Haraway points out that we are never self-identical, that there are no such things as “preconstituted identities” (287), but we become through the meetings with our environment, and through the encounters and contact zones that make up the manifold ‘intra-actions’ (cf. Barad 2007) with ‘others’ who are not strictly separated from us, but with whom we constantly become together. We touch and detach from and are deeply implicated with others, which include human and non-human others, technological others, micro-organismic others, environmental others, etcetera. Zooming in on our zoological ‘others,’ specifically in

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<sup>80</sup> This concept (translatable as other-globalization) was originally coined by Beatriz Preciado and has aided European activists in framing their responses to “militarized neoliberal models of world building” as being not about “anti-globalization,” but rather about “nurturing a more just and peaceful other-globalization” (Haraway 2008, 3). Haraway uses this term *autre-mondialisation* to indicate what one might learn in re-tying some of the knots of ordinary multispecies living on earth by raising “the most basic questions of who belongs where and what flourishing means for whom” (41).

*When Species Meet*, she argues that through curious engagement with such others, there is a “chance for getting on together with some grace” (Haraway 2008, 15).

Knowledge practices of curious engagement thus have nothing to do with a clean, disengaged scientific attitude. For Haraway, curiosity is closely tied to care and to what Carla Macchiavello calls a “disarming form of knowledge” (Macchiavello 2015). Haraway writes: “Caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning” (Haraway 2008, 36). Knowing within her worldview comes to mean something very different from what it meant to Enlightenment thinking, positivist thought or mainstream modern science. Knowledge gained from Harawayan curiosity is a knowledge that entails becoming implicated with what we are curious about, and to become part of an ethical process with responsibilities and obligations. As Macchiavello explains, the etymological roots of curiosity lead back to the Old English and Old German *caru* and *chara* – grief and wail – and it can manifest itself as aiding or sometimes even finding a cure for someone. Moreover, it can be understood as an act that is close to compassion, to feeling with, or an “empathic response to others’ troubles leading to action” (Macchiavello 2015).

A matter of curiosity, or concern, can be a matter of caring, a question of empathy and a question of marvel, which paints a much more intimate, mutually implicated picture of the ‘knower’ and the ‘known.’ That is, curiosity and the knowledge practices driven by it are deeply ethical in nature. For Haraway, curiosity means looking at difference not as something outside of us or responding to a “radically exterior/ized other,” but about “response-ability” and being accountable for the “lively relationalities of becoming of which we are part” (Haraway 2008, 11, 289). In this intimate, bodily, responsible and responsive way of knowing, curiosity according to Haraway should “nourish situated knowledges” and their “ramifying obligations” (289).

As we are all connected with others “on many scales, in layers of locals and globals, in ramifying webs,” curious engagement with differences means getting to know these webs and learning about the histories of connections and touch that make us who we are (Haraway 2008, 97). Through curiosity, we can engage in such ethical knowledge practices, which trace how the “entanglements of becoming together” were formed, in order to gain greater understanding and “[get] on together with some grace” (208, 15). Haraway thus writes: “I want to know how to live with the histories I am coming to know” (97). Curiosity thus involves confronting the history of relations and relations to difference in our current world, and becoming aware of the ways in which we are linked and become together. This is

something that once learned cannot but lead to change and transformation. “[O]nce we know, we cannot not know,” (287) and this knowledge requires ‘response-ability’ and accountability for the world we live in. Haraway’s curiosity relates to difference not in the mode of devaluated difference-from, but rather in a way that stresses mutual implication, connections with various ‘others,’ and interlinking histories of becoming. When using curiosity as a mode to relate to others and their differences, then, the knowledge it may result in is always at the service of relating *better* and co-inhabiting the world in a more ethical way.

*Sara Ahmed: Energizing the Hope of Transformation and the Will for Politics*

The awareness of historicity that is present in Haraway’s curious engagement with differences manifests in another way for Sara Ahmed and takes center stage in her thought on wonder. With Ahmed I would like to open up an essential potential of wonder that has remained uncovered thus far, but that has largely defined my own relation to wonder and feminism as outlined in the introduction. In order to make a difference and to do away with injustices that spring from devaluing all that is *different from*, we have to know that things can be different, have been different and should be different. Wonder, for Ahmed, plays a crucial role in this and in her life as a feminist. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Ahmed sets out (in a Spinozian manner) to analyze the affective economies “where feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation” (2004, 8). This circulation asks for an investigation into the sociality of emotions, which is more about the circulation of the objects of emotion, than about the circulation of emotions as such (11). In her chapter ‘Feminist Attachments’ she relates that wonder brought her to feminism and that it gave her the capacity to call herself a feminist. Moreover, it taught her that things come to be over time, and that they can therefore be different. In the first place, she explains, it was not anger or pain (more often associated with feminist movements) but a critical wonder that opened her up to her own feminist desires (180), as it did my own.

Ahmed’s take on wonder focuses primarily on its value for feminism as an impetus for social change and a reorientation of our relation to the world. For her, too, wonder is personal and political. In ‘Feminist Attachments’ wonder is defined as extremely active, concretely bodily and energizing. According to Ahmed, in working within and beyond Cartesian as well as Spinozian lines of thought, wonder has a transformative quality. It changes the ordinary into the extraordinary. What it *does* to the body entails an expansion of our field of vision and touch: wonder moves us. When we see the world around us ‘as if’ for

the first time, wonder constitutes an affective relation to the world and its historicity (Ahmed 2004, 173-180).

And although through wonder we see the world as if we see it for the first time, for Ahmed this does not mean that history is erased. Without wonder, however, history *is* negated. When we do not wonder, we assume that the world is ‘already there,’ and this ‘thereness’ can then easily be taken for granted as “the background of action in the present” (Ahmed 2004, 180). This allows one to think that things are the way they are and always will be, and there is nothing left to be done, just as advanced neoliberalist capitalism claims. Indeed, without a sense of historicity, it is easy to see how economic ideologies can be naturalized and therefore seem uncontested and immune to change, resulting again in a paralyzing indifference.

Wonder, on the contrary, “allows us to see the surfaces of the world *as made*, and as such wonder opens up rather than suspends historicity” (Ahmed 2004, 171). It is *ordinariness* that conceals the historicity of the state of affairs in the assumption that the world is ‘already there’ (180). When one experiences wonder, one does not wonder at an object that is ‘alone in the mind,’ as in the case of Spinoza. In wonder, the *now* and the *past* are reconnected. This means that wonder for Ahmed is still about knowing and learning, but as seen in Haraway’s concept of curiosity, it is informed by feminist epistemology and travels across the fields of ontology, epistemology and ethics. Through the historicity that wonder highlights, everything that *is*, is made contingent by getting to *know* its historicity, which in turn propels us to *act* towards a different future. So while Ahmedian wonder, then, is still about knowledge, it is not about true conclusions or detached matters of the mind, but rather about “*learning* to see the world as something that does not have to be, and as something that has come to be, over time, and with work [emphasis mine]” (180).

### *Layering Affects and Collectivity*

Wonder is first of all a bodily affect that *does something to the body* for Ahmed. Whereas for Plato and Descartes, even Spinoza, wonder pointed to a paralysis, an immovability associated with excessive wonder, she observes a different bodily response. When we see the world in wonder, our bodies are actually moved and opened up. This is, she notes, not without risks, for wonder could be closed down when what we are approaching is unwelcome, “undo[ing] the promise of that opening up” (Ahmed 2004, 180). Within this framework we can see how the affect of wonder may be closely related to shock or awe and would be able to produce

changes in the body that actually ‘close it down.’ There is thus a certain vulnerability involved in this opening-up character of wonder. But if one takes that risk of being vulnerable,<sup>81</sup> wonder opens the wonderer up to the potential of a newness of the present by virtue of its relation to the past. As such, wonder opens the body up to change. And as the affect passes and moves between different bodies, this can also be a collective process according to Ahmed. Because wonder “involves a reorientation of one’s relation to the world,” this reorientation can be sparked by wonder in different bodies in various ways and has the potential to open up a collective space for change (Ahmed 2004, 181). This element of collectivity can be traced back to Spinoza’s theory of the affects and his metaphor of a flock of birds in chapter 2 concerning the way affects bind us together. Ahmed herself refers to Spinoza and Deleuze when she explains that the capacity of wonder to affect us is not something that happens on an individual level. It circulates between bodies as bodies and surfaces affect each other in unpredictable ways, for “[y]ou do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination” (Spinoza cited in Ahmed 2004, 183). Thus, the capacity of wonder is to be able to open up not just the individual, but also a collective space, by allowing the surfaces of the world to make an impression, “as they become see-able or feel-able *as* surfaces” (Ahmed 2004, 183). The very orientation of wonder, Ahmed observes, in opening up faces and bodies concerns a reorientation of one’s relation to the world and keeps bodies and spaces open to the surprise of others. It can be passed on between bodies, have them affected in different ways, with a “capacity to leave behind the place of the ordinary” (183). Wonder, therefore concretely activates and opens up, both individually and possibly collectively, enacting the past to de-normalize the present and from thereon change the future.

Wonder, as it affectively circulates, moves bodies in the direction of learning and asking questions about the state of affairs in the world they inhabit. The aim of such questioning is not about coming to ‘true conclusions’ or about fixing the facts. In Ahmed’s conception of what she calls “critical wonder” (Ahmed 2004, 178) knowledge serves

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<sup>81</sup> It would be interesting to read Ahmed’s vulnerability together with Bracha Ettinger’s concept of self-fragilization. Ettinger is a contemporary artist (primarily producing paintings and drawings), theorist and psycho-analyst, known for interweaving art and psychoanalysis in what she calls ‘matrixial painting:’ a generative process that challenges and supplements the Symbolic and its phallic structures. Although I had to make ‘cuts’ and have chosen to engage with other thinkers that serve the purpose of this thesis more directly, it would be thought-provoking to read wonder through the notion of artwork in Ettinger, for whom art is inseparable from awe, “fascinace” and wonder (2006, 150-51). The painting in Ettinger gives rise to affects of wonder and awe, languish a “com-passion,” fragility and anxiety that make the artist and the viewer vulnerable and open to transformation, possibly resulting in a mature ethics. See (Ettinger 1996; Ettinger 2006b; Ettinger 2009).

concrete purposes of opening up the world to its possibilities and making them happen. Wonder works in a constitutive and concrete way, when conceived in terms of relation and not emerging from any individual being. In the registers of affect and affectivity that she uses, as with Spinoza, wonder has more to do with how it transforms the body into a blocked or productive force – the former suggested by Spinoza, the latter more applicable to Ahmed’s take on wonder and feminisms.

While the layering of wonder on other affects in Spinoza results in transfixing passions such as veneration or paralyzing ones such as dread, Ahmed takes wonder to be capable of positively moving, energizing and enabling. On her account and from the perspective of the ‘layerability’ of affects, it is *through* wonder that anger and pain come to life. For when we come to realize through wonder what hurts and feels wrong, while at the same time attending to the historicity of the world and the fact that things do not have to stay the same, this pain and anger is transformed into a possibility for change. In what seems like a departure from Descartes’ and Spinoza’s conception of wonder, Ahmed’s critical wonder brings up questions about how the world has become the way it is now and what it means to be invested in certain power relations. It carries with it the capacity to “leave behind the place of the ordinary” (182) and to actually go out and change the world. I would agree with the insights of Ahmed, then, that a strong case can be made for wonder as *propulsive*, taking place in the newness of the present, fuelled by the past and directed towards the future.

This is a far cry from Descartes’ wonder without immediate interest, the ‘dwelling place’ in Plato, or the fixating and disabling effects of Spinoza’s wonder. Ahmed demonstrates the value of wonder for a different kind of relating to the present world. When the place of the ordinary is left behind through wonder, indifference is left behind with it, as reorientations towards the past are set in motion and social change may occur. That is, in a present where what is *different from* is synonymous with being *worth less than*, wonder can come in and challenge such relations with the realization that they have come to be, and can be un-made. Wonder thus effectively “energizes the hope of transformation, and the will for politics” (Ahmed 2004, 180-181).

### *Wonder in the Mode of Wander*

I have thus far explored wonder as concretely tied to political engagement and social change in this chapter by mapping out further potentials of wonder (as the affect of difference) in moving across the fields of ontology, epistemology and ethics; in resisting indifference; and

in thinking difference differently as positive and mutually-implicated relations. Wonder, aligned with the feminist incentive to relate to differences and to think difference affirmatively/positively therefore deserves to occupy a central place on the map of feminist passions. When feminist work is activated through wonder, there is more at stake, or something different at stake than a solidification of current power structures such as was the case in Spinoza's critical analysis of the workings of miracles, or a disengaged wonder free of immediate interest as seen in Plato, Aristotle and Descartes. Wonder, then, is not converted into the dominating desire that Young warns of (see Introduction), nor does it result in a disinterested, contemplative stance. As it moves us to become aware of the historicity of the present and its changeability, it is made into an indispensable ally to feminist world-making practices, or *autre-mondialisation*, as well as to countering contemporary discourses of knowledge as appropriative, disembodied and controlling.

Yet while this chapter has focused on a politics of wonder and its opening-up potential to transformative practices, I would nevertheless call for keeping wonder open-ended. That is, while the force of wonder was restricted and directed in Ancient Greek and Enlightenment philosophy to work towards a specific kind of knowledge, feminist theories of wonder demonstrate that wonder, when allowed to transgress spatio-temporal restrictions of dominant philosophy, roams freely across the borders of ontology, ethics and epistemology. And while the feminist thinkers discussed so far do have different aims in mind for the potential of wonder, it is key that these are potentialities, not strictly teleologically determined destinies. This is important, because there is an element of *indirection* to wonder that makes it so subversive. Wonder as propulsive seems to *move* bodies with an extrapolating quality, opening up more and more questions in an inconclusive way, instead of providing clear-cut solutions. While it is linked to political action, wonder is not directed necessarily at tackling one specific issue (as can be the case when, for instance, anger is directed at a very specific event and towards a very specific change), but rather disrupts trajectories of linear thinking and doing. And this undirected, wandering quality, I argue, defines one of wonder's most subversive potentials to open doors that are not supposed to be opened in our technologically driven historical phase of advanced capitalism. To illustrate this, I want to close with a short reading of Rosemarie Buikema and Lies Wesseling's exploration of the gothic narrative in *Het Heilige Huis: De gotieke vertelling in de Nederlandse literatuur* (The Sacred House: The Gothic Narrative in Dutch literature) and relate it to wonder and wandering (Buikema and Wesseling 2006).

As part of their analysis of the gothic narrative in Dutch literature and its cultural

function, Buikema and Wesseling consider the gothic narrative as exploring the restrictions for feminine subjectivity in patriarchal society. They argue that one could look at gothic novels as endless variations on the folk tale of *Bluebeard* in which a young heroine is seduced into entering a marriage with an unattractive, but wealthy (blue-bearded) nobleman. Shortly after marriage, the nobleman has to go away for business. He hands the young woman a set of keys to all the rooms of the big house, except one room. She is not to enter this room and her husband tells her that she will be punished in a horrible, unspecified manner if she disobeys him. As the heroine wonders what her husband hides from her, she starts to explore the house as soon as Bluebeard leaves. Upon entering the forbidden room, she finds that it is covered with corpses of her husband's previous wives who all disregarded Bluebeard's prohibition and ended up dead. Upon closing the door, the key in the door starts to bleed, leaving a trace of the heroine's transgression. When Bluebeard returns he immediately inspects the door and finds that he now needs to punish his new wife too. While she pleads for her life, her brothers come to her rescue and kill him. Buikema and Wesseling argue that the house of Bluebeard serves as a symbol for cultural and social power. The house gives the young woman status and stability, but also submits her to the law. Her restricted power of acting is represented by the existence as well as the content of the forbidden room. Trespassing beyond the place she has been assigned is punishable by death. This, according to Buikema and Wesseling, demonstrates that patriarchy does not give room to women to acquire knowledge and insight (Buikema and Wesseling 2006, 20-21).

I want to suggest reading this narrative of the gothic through the lens of wonder as approached in a mode of *wandering*. Subjects in advanced capitalism, with all its inequalities and its attendant devaluated differences and injustices, are not supposed to wander around the 'chambers' of power. They are not supposed to ask disruptive questions, to bring to light invisible mechanisms of exclusion, appropriation and control, or to stray from a directed, linear, goal-oriented path of life and thought. Staying within the metaphor of Bluebeard's house, some of us are allowed to sit at the table and enjoy the luxuries of his mansion, but only on the condition of not asking questions about the situation and staying indifferent towards its secret chambers, watching TV and shrugging at the news. Disorienting and reorienting, wonder could thus be said to allow us to wander through the territory of society on which we are not supposed to set foot. Trespassing may however provide the key to the 'power of definition,' that is, "the power to determine major and minor issues in science and history and to think about equality in such a way that subaltern voices are able to be heard, that is to say able to shape new praxis, spaces and vocabularies, de-stabilize hegemonic ways



of seeing and thus effectuate change” (Leurs et al. 2014, 282-283). In making a case for approaching wonder in the mode of wandering, then, I call for a stretching of wonder’s territory and a prolongation of its duration to open up the forbidden chambers of our technological age of advanced capitalism. It may just be that this wandering, undirected wonder, devoid of a final destination or efficient thinking, is most disruptive and threatening to the organization of contemporary society and its underlying conceptual frameworks today, and allows us to snatch back the keys to change.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to create a cartography of the potentialities of wonder and to reclaim wonder as a feminist passion. Tracing the concept of wonder through the philosophical canon toward feminist philosophy, chapter 1 started by locating some of the formative philosophical roots of wonder as embedded within the narrative of wonder as the origin of western philosophy. Through an engagement and close reading of texts from Ancient Greece and the Enlightenment by Plato, Aristotle and Descartes, I analyzed what wonder is allowed to *do* in their texts and how it serves as an epistemological tool to arrive at true knowledge. In discussing Descartes' teleological view on wonder in his *Passions*, I furthermore analyzed how at this point the wonder-knowledge-knot sinks deeply into the dominant discourse about wonder.

The restrictive function of wonder within the wonder-knowledge-knot would at least in part explain, as I argue in chapter 1 following my engagement of feminist epistemology in the introduction, why most feminist thinkers have shunned the concept altogether. That is, it is still unmistakably associated with a concept of knowledge that feminist epistemologists have devoted much work to transforming. As feminism is invested in knowledge and knowledge acquisition that is informed by ontology, ethics and epistemology, wonder tied up in the wonder-knowledge-knot and associated with abstract and unengaged philosophy, is a concept immediately suspicious by association.

Spinoza's intervention in chapter 2 marks the opening of a route to other connections to and from wonder. Embedded within his theory of the affects, wonder becomes thinkable as both embodied and as a social/relational passion. Irigaray and Malabou explore these connections of wonder to relationality and embodiment in chapter 3. As the feminist philosophers that have engaged with wonder demonstrate, the 'poison' of wonder (when tied up in the wonder-knowledge-knot and in the contemporary discourse that treats difference as 'different from and thus worth less') is also its 'antidote.' For as we have seen in chapter 3 and 4, when feminist philosophers do engage the concept, wonder is set free spatio-temporally to the extent that it covers the entangled realms of ontology, epistemology and ethics. Knowledges that may arise as a result are now embodied, situated and engaged. Whereas classic philosophy mobilizes the passion to work for a system of knowledge that treats difference as 'different from thus worth less' (prevalent today in our technological age of advanced capitalism), feminist mobilizations of wonder actually work in a way that disrupts this system, as shown through the workings of sexual difference in Irigaray; auto-

heteroaffection in Malabou; Haraway's mutually implicated becomings; and Ahmed's concept of the power of historicity.

As power is invested in making the contemporary subject indifferent as argued with Malabou and Spinoza in chapter 3, chapter 4 works towards a politics of wonder. Here the potentialities of wonder as the affect of difference were unraveled further to concretely resist indifference and open up a feminist future informed by the awareness of the contingency of the present in relation to the past and the possibility of transformative practices to see and treat difference in a positive/affirmative and welcoming way. This final chapter closed with a reflection on the subversive connection between wonder and wandering that transgresses linearity, and called for an approach of wonder through wander. The challenge is to further unravel wonder's potential without defining the outcome in advance and without restricting wonder's territory or duration, and to find new ways of cultivating and encouraging a receptivity to wonder. For just as the Spinozian insight that 'we do not yet know what bodies can do,' in the same fashion we do not yet know what wonder can do.

I decided to put wonder on the map of feminist passions and explore its potentialities cartographically for three related reasons. Firstly, the idea was set in motion because of my transformative experiences of becoming-feminist through wonder. Wonder, similar to Ahmed's experiences, has always guided me in all my feminist endeavors and revelations. Secondly, I sensed a lack of wonder and a growing indifference in contemporary society, the theoretical foundations of which I later found in Malabou's writings. And thirdly, after researching the feminist literature on wonder, I was concerned about the relative abstinence from wonder in regard to feminist (theoretical) mobilizations of the passion. That is, what was missing was a feminist genealogy. In order to build such a feminist genealogy on wonder, further research is required to locate wonder as it figures implicitly or explicitly in feminist work. In drawing out several promising potentialities of wonder, I hope to have contributed to its formation. I also hope to have contributed to a reclaiming of wonder from dominant canonical philosophy; to have shown its significance for feminist work; and finally, to have opened up a space for further feminist engagement of wonder as an embodied, potentially deeply transformative passion.

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