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Part I

Tools

1

Toolkit for a Modest Witness

In examining such a slippery and excessive articulation as cosmetic surgery, gender and culture, it is necessary to assemble a toolkit of theoretical and methodological aids. This chapter is the first of two which will introduce these tools. In it I examine three areas: Deleuze and Guattari's work on becoming; Moira Gatens' use of the term 'imaginary bodies'; and Teresa de Lauretis' development of the notion of technologies of gender. These three theoretical tools will be employed in order to pursue one of the (two) central issues of this book: the ways in which cosmetic surgery is participating in the production of gender. I will discuss these three areas separately, though I will also draw them together to create a 'toolkit' with which to try to understand cosmetic surgery in culture. Put simply, I will be arguing that the notion of becoming helps me to identify the ongoing construction of gender and the body in a constantly changing culture. I see this process of becoming as necessarily played out within the sexual imaginary that is at the heart of conventional Western understandings of difference between the sexes. In this sense, I investigate and then temper Deleuze's construction of identity as infinite, by posing the sexual imaginary as a resource. It is partly through this resource that identity is constructed within society. At the same time, this resource also functions as a limit.

Central to my use of this notion of becoming is the view that cosmetic surgery is one of many technologies of gender and that, as such, it needs to be analysed in relation to its use as a means of producing the self in gendered terms. Becoming is the process by which specific technologies of gender (along with other technologies of identity) such as cosmetic surgery shape subjectivity, at the same time that these technologies are shaped by individuals and the wider culture of which they are a product. The first section of this chapter will look at the value of making use of 'becoming' as a primary theoretical assumption in my research.

Becoming

To date, most feminist discussions of cosmetic surgery have centred on questions of agency, and on evaluations of cosmetic surgery in terms of its status as 'feminist' or otherwise.¹ My interest in this area is not directed towards this now longstanding debate, but, more broadly, towards the ways that cosmetic surgery practices produce and are the product of change. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming' is taken up here to explore cosmetic surgery in terms of change. I look at the way a perspective based on becoming as opposed to being destabilises every category I may wish to use in discussing cosmetic surgery. This process of destabilisation is desirable in that it prompts me to question accepted framings of what are taken to be 'the issues' and indeed to question the very limits of these issues. Certainly, central to my overall argument is the idea that the effects of cosmetic surgery are not limited to those individuals who undergo it. Instead, cosmetic surgery redraws and/or stabilises certain aspects of culture and thus the production of our own subjectivities and materiality in significant ways. Hence, my focus is not on cosmetic surgery participants themselves, but on cosmetic surgery as the circulation of gender. As a result of this process of destabilisation, I am aware that in my own use of categories such as 'women', 'cosmetic surgery' or 'gender,' I must recognise their contingent and temporary nature.²

In making use of becoming, I follow the advice of Deleuze himself regarding the inadequacy of simply applying theory.³ In 'Intellectuals and Power', Deleuze states that '[n]o theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall',⁴ an inevitability that arises from the status of theory as a diagram, as 'anexact'.⁵ Brian Massumi's book on Deleuze and Guattari asserts that 'You will find that you cannot use the concepts without changing them or the way they interrelate'.⁶ This view is based on an understanding of all situations as specific, thus precluding the reification of these concepts into a single, concrete methodology. My own appropriation of 'becoming' will certainly involve their adaptation to suit the needs of my topic.

The work of Deleuze and Guattari is important for this book in its obvious shift away from the primacy of the subject through the development of such notions as machinic assemblages and multiplicities. Regarding machinic assemblages, Deleuze and Guattari argue that '[t]here are no individual statements, only statement-producing machinic assemblages'. Machinic assemblages can be understood as collective agents of enunciation, that is, 'not people or societies but multiplicities'.⁷ They are temporary conjunctions of elements that interact with each other to produce certain effects. Because this concept emphasises the interaction of a wide range of elements, as well as the impermanence of such conjunctions, it decentres the traditional subject or agent. This decentring of the subject appeals to me because of my desire to avoid entering into the popular debate over cosmetic surgery which

sees it as necessarily 'about' either victimhood or agency – two sides of sovereign subjectivity.

The decentring of the traditional subject reflects a rejection of a centre *per se* in Deleuze and Guattari's work. They put forward the model of the rhizome to replace the conventional tree model in describing and understanding structures and cultural formations. The rhizome has no relationship to origins or to destinies, it renders the question of progress redundant. The rhizome is multi-directional, asymmetrical and able to regenerate itself from shattered remnants and new sites.⁸ It has no centre, but rather lines and intensities. As a model for both large and small cultural phenomena, such as the cosmetic surgery industry, it is highly suggestive. For instance, it requires a view of cosmetic surgery as a complex network of relationships and issues, rather than as a simple linear causality running from, for example, patriarchy to woman-as-victim. It also reminds me to cast widely in my understanding of the features contributing to the phenomenon of cosmetic surgery. Hence, while my project utilises published written discourse on cosmetic surgery to pursue its central questions, it does not claim that these sources constitute cosmetic surgery entirely themselves. Analyses which examine only the recipients of surgery, as some feminist works such as Kathy Davis's *Reshaping the Female Body* tend to do, leave the full reach and functions of this phenomenon unexplored. Any examination of a particular element of cosmetic surgery (or any field of inquiry) must be located within the complex network of discourses, individuals, organisations, machines and locations that make it possible. Hence, the examination of selected discourses around cosmetic surgery undertaken in this book must be seen not as aimed at establishing discourse as the defining force of cosmetic surgery, but as necessarily drawing upon and shaping many other elements such as technological developments, economic factors and broad social relations.

The rhizome is composed of various lines of segmentarity, as well as lines of deterritorialisation, where segmentarity might crudely be seen as the contingent and temporary configuring of power and deterritorialisation as the leakage and rupture of those configurations. Even the latter, which might also be called 'lines of flight', are part of the rhizome; that is, both deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are part of the process of the production and sustainability of any phenomenon.⁹ Deleuze and Guattari argue that all lines are ultimately connected in some way, so that distinctions between the intrinsically molar or entrenched (in orthodox or conventional relations) and the intrinsically molecular or tending towards escape (from these relations) are impossible:

[y]ou make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organisations that re-stratify everything, formations that will restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a

subject – anything you like, from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions.¹⁰

This view is perhaps at the heart of why my research has avoided long-standing debates about cosmetic surgery practices as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Like any cultural phenomenon, the cosmetic surgery industry exists on any number of ‘plateaus’ which may be regarded almost like cross-sections of culture. The different positions cosmetic surgery occupies on different cross-sections precludes any single, definitive pronouncement on its character. This is true in terms of differing locations within any one temporal context, or of similar locations across time, and is clearly evident in some of the repertoires marshalled around cosmetic surgery that I will be looking at presently. Discourse on cosmetic surgery can be seen as a rhizome of inter-connections without a recognisable centre, at the same time as this rhizome is part of a larger rhizome incorporating other aspects of cosmetic surgery. What emerges is that good and bad may be evaluated only temporarily and in relation to context,¹¹ though this should not preclude a willingness to recognise patterns and tendencies towards concretion where they are evident through investigation, such as are found in this book. My intention is to examine and map some of these contexts in order to discuss the ways in which cosmetic surgery is impacting on gender.

These concepts – the rhizome, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, lines and plateaus – all relate to the primary concept considered here; that is, becoming. Aside from the simple view of cosmetic surgery as a form of physical becoming for the recipient, this concept can be used to open up a number of different aspects of the area to analysis. Deleuze’s brief but valuable paper ‘What is Becoming?’ argues that existence is not static; it is constantly in flux, and further, that this existence is multiple: ‘it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes.’¹² Here, one exists in relation to both the past and the future, and as a result, one can be both more and less simultaneously. Identity as fixed and unified is challenged here, in that it can function in relation to more than one point of reference and occupy more than one category. In that identity cannot be pinpointed as stable in this model, it is considered to be ‘infinite’; always open to change and always occupying at least two locations.

Becoming occurs through a system of machinic assemblages which intricately connect people with technology, modes of enunciation, culture, the environment and desire. Machinic assemblages are rhizomes in their own right as well as parts of larger rhizomes. They are not discrete, but can be heuristically separated from a broader context for analysis; for example, in the way I identify and separate (or construct) the cosmetic surgery field for study. Through assemblages, becoming occurs when ‘one “thing” transmutes into another, becomes something else through its connections with

something or someone outside'.¹³ All becoming involves the rearrangement of machinic assemblages through the addition and loss of certain connections. It is a concrete process, specific, not general, and always temporary.¹⁴ Furthermore, becoming is not imitation or identification, it is the drawing into connection of two distinct things through an assemblage, such as the connection made between the wasp and the orchid.¹⁵ As a machinic assemblage, cosmetic surgery combines discourses, people (both as recipients and as professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, psychologists, advertising agents and scientists), equipment and locations (hospitals, clinics, courtrooms, etc.). My study incorporates discourse produced in a variety of locations and by a variety of persons, and recognises that discourse constitutes only part of this assemblage. When I examine gender through this assemblage, I examine a relationship comparable to that struck between the wasp and the orchid, where one does not become the other; rather, both (cosmetic surgery and gender) are transformed in the process of connection in specific moments.

In this vein, Paul Patton discusses the becoming of concepts. Concepts are made up of components which have a history insofar as they arise out of differing contexts and other concepts. It is the virtual (here potential or contingent) relations that concepts possess with other concepts that constitute their becoming. This becoming occurs through the pressure for concepts to render consistent their components, a pressure that is only satisfied by 'communication' between the components.¹⁶ Concepts may be seen as constituting rhizomes in their own right, but at the same time, existing within the larger rhizome of thought in a particular culture. Gender may be seen in this light as a group of concepts necessarily adapting in relation to such phenomena as cosmetic surgery in the attempt to render their components consistent. Later, I will argue that the introduction of the notion of agency to conventional femininity through feminist discourse constitutes one aspect of this process.

In relation to rhizomes and becoming, Deleuze and Guattari state that '[i]t is neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows'.¹⁷ Again, notions of origins and destinies are rejected here, along with any sense of progress which can trace an un-deviating trajectory from beginning to end. This positioning of becoming in the middle, along with Deleuze's emphasis on becoming (through his use of Alice)¹⁸ as infinite identity, suggests the multiple and varied nature of becomings.¹⁹ Where becoming emerges from the middle, it does not take any linear path and in fact can branch out, reverse and spiral in a variety of ways. Deleuze and Guattari warn us, however, that looking at things in the middle is difficult; that avoiding a view from above or below, from left to right, or vice versa, is a challenge. Indeed, even the middle is an entirely arbitrary point. Nevertheless, they argue that if we try it, we will find that 'everything changes'.²⁰

Here I would like to take up this challenge in order to see what changes occur when cosmetic surgery is viewed in terms of becoming, rather than of being. So far I have made several main points about becoming:

1. existence is not static but is in constant flux;
2. identity is infinite (it is always moving in at least two directions at once);
3. becoming is neither positive nor negative; it can be deterritorialised and reterritorialised;
4. becoming occurs through machinic assemblages, including the becoming of concepts;
5. the rhizome model positions becoming in the middle.

The first result of thinking in terms of becoming is that it draws into question all of the given categories and concepts I rely upon in my research. Thus, I cannot use terms such as 'cosmetic surgery', 'gender', 'recipient', 'the media', 'women', even 'myself' without being aware that these categories are constantly changing. They change in terms of both the phenomenon I am discussing and of countless other phenomena which sometimes subtly, sometimes plainly, bear on cosmetic surgery as an assemblage (or become part of that assemblage). Here I will discuss four of the categories in order to illustrate the value of adopting an approach based on becoming for this field of research.

Because I continually use the term 'cosmetic surgery' to delineate my area of research, it is perhaps this category that most pressingly requires analysis. Much of the feminist (and other) work conducted in this area treats this category as self-evident, failing to question its contents in terms of inclusion and exclusion, and the validity of treating it as a homogeneous entity, the implications of which may be applied across the board in all cases. From the perspective of becoming, it emerges that cosmetic surgery needs to be recognised as a category that is constantly undergoing a redrawing of borders. Due to the amount of medical research and experimentation carried out around the broad category of cosmetic surgery, new and revised procedures appear regularly. This is particularly true of skin procedures, especially those designed to reduce signs of ageing. Dermabrasion, chemical peeling and laser resurfacing²¹ are relatively new additions to the range of facial procedures, and although they do not involve surgery *per se*, they have been absorbed into the cosmetic surgery category within a range of discourses, including women's magazines and regulatory discourse. It is interesting from this point of view that such procedures, some of which perhaps bear more relation to services such as body hair waxing, should be positioned within this category. This is possibly a result of the relatively high status accorded to 'medical' procedures over 'beauty' procedures, and the concomitant benefits in terms of reputation and fee levels this entails, though it is also clear that these treatments carry a considerable degree of risk related to burning, trauma and dis-

figurement that may be absent from 'beauty parlour' treatments. However, the cosmetic surgery category contains a wide variety of procedures which vary in terms of cost, objectives, complexity and risk. Given that the reasons that procedures are located within that category vary, and given that the types of procedures also vary continually, the possibility of making useful generalisations based on an assumption of similarity is quite small. It may be that the study of cosmetic surgery treatments needs to address different procedures separately, and to map the connections between them consciously, rather than to assume their connection.

However, my definition of cosmetic surgery is guided by the specific project I am undertaking, and as a discourse analysis, this suggests those procedures that are categorised as such by the discourses I am examining. I see the process of border redrawing as culturally significant, and this renders the notion of drawing my own borders in some ways irrelevant. So, in addition to highlighting that my definition of cosmetic surgery is always contingent, the concept of becoming has prompted me to identify an important aspect of my research, that is, the process of becoming this term is undergoing in culture.

A second category that is problematised from the perspective of becoming is that of women in general, that is, those women who do not undergo cosmetic surgery procedures. As Brian Massumi argues:

Becoming bears on a population, even when it is initiated by a single body: even one body alone is collective in its conditions of emergence as well as in its future tendency.²²

Here, Massumi is referring to the impact of becoming on large groups of people and also to an understanding of the individual as itself a population; a multiple identity. From this point of view, the becoming of a cosmetic surgery recipient is a matter not only of the changes undergone on the individual level, but of the changes that take place amongst the wider population of people who are implicated in the phenomenon of cosmetic surgery as witnesses. It is also true that those linked to cosmetic surgery indirectly may act not only as witnesses but as promoters or critics of it. This realisation that, through representation, cosmetic surgery is relevant to those who do not undergo it as well as to those who do contributed to shaping my desire to conduct this project on the level of representation. Along with those who actually undergo surgical procedures, these subjects also undergo becoming in relation to cosmetic surgery.

In complicating the status of the category of those who do not participate in such surgeries, I am prompted to ask questions that focus on the becoming of that category, such as the degree to which the existence of cosmetic surgery techniques constitutes an encouragement or pressure to undergo surgery, the ways that the results of cosmetic surgery serve to alter (or

entrench) popular views about femininity, masculinity, beauty and the body; in short, how those who are only indirectly linked to the phenomenon are repositioned in culture through it. In this case, the function of becoming as enacted through machinic assemblages is particularly evident. Here, a machinic assemblage may be constituted from various specific elements such as a woman who has not undergone surgery, the media, family, medical technology, and cultural concepts such as beauty, gender and success, to produce a becoming from potentially colliding and contradictory elements.

As I suggested earlier, concepts such as beauty and gender undergo becoming. I also elaborated Patton's view that the rendering consistent of the components of a concept is its means of becoming. Concepts of masculinity and femininity may be seen to function through this process, with cosmetic surgery as one of many contributors to them. In 1987, de Lauretis argued that '[t]he construction of gender goes on as busily today as it did in earlier times'²³ and that among the many sites for this construction is the academy, and, in particular, feminism. What this suggests is that the variety of discourses arising out of the phenomenon of cosmetic surgery themselves contribute to cultural understandings of gender. These discourses include medical articles, legal documents, magazine articles and feminist work. Through cosmetic surgery, gender becomes vulnerable to a pressure, theorised by Deleuze and Guattari, to render its constituent elements consistent. This should not be seen as emerging from any kind of agency, but as merely the product of processes where contradictory ideas necessarily clash and alter each other. An example of this process might be the way femininity is refigured within feminism to take account of the determination many women exhibit in pursuing and undergoing cosmetic surgery procedures. For some feminists, such as Davis, cosmetic surgery as a struggle and a trial meshes with femininity more convincingly if femininity is re-posed in terms of agency, rather than victimhood. This process will be investigated in more detail in Chapter 6. For men (this time within aspects of advertising), a re-affirmation of masculinity as ambitious and strongly work-oriented creates space for an alliance between masculinity and cosmetic surgery. The emphasis on the importance of youth for success is perhaps a sign of the becoming of masculinity away from an emphasis on seniority to the privileging of 'youthful vigour'. The ways in which a phenomenon such as cosmetic surgery can affect powerful cultural concepts like gender emerge as a subject for study only when gender is perceived to be in flux, or becoming. Of course, cosmetic surgery is itself developing within certain cultural conditions and, in turn, is structured through paradigms of gender. Again, the becoming of cosmetic surgery itself must be recognised as ongoing and subject to other cultural pressures. Changes in the production and availability of silicone breast implants over the course of the 1990s (discussed in Chapter 6), for example, are the result of a number of cultural factors such

as women's changing relationship to medicine in general, an evident scepticism towards the claims of science, and the increasingly litigious US context.

In conducting research on an area which bears indirectly on my own life, it is valuable also to be aware of the ways in which this research constitutes my own becoming. This becoming is important if only because it reciprocally bears on my research. As Deleuze and Guattari argue:

[i]f the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a becoming, writing is traversed by strange becomings that are not becomings-writer, but becomings-rat, becomings-insect, becomings-wolf, etc.²⁴

It is not so much that in conducting my research I become-writer; more perhaps that I become-participant (in cosmetic surgery), or that I become-woman in some revised way. By this I mean that through the process of researching cosmetic surgery I familiarise myself with the material and emotional aspects of different procedures and of some recipients' responses to these and that this effects a change in my own relationship to those procedures. As an example, I now experience curiosity on meeting people who might be considered 'prime candidates' for surgery. I find myself wondering why they have chosen *not* to undergo the particular procedure designed for their specific characteristic (such as ear-pinning). Moreover, I find myself assuming that they *have considered* the option of surgery. Here, a familiarity with cosmetic surgery procedures has resulted in a shift in focus on my part so that some decisions not to undergo surgery require explanation, rather than those decisions in favour of surgery. I see this shift as a (perhaps rather specific) example of how cosmetic surgery affects those who have never undergone it. This becoming has inevitably altered the methods and intellectual treatment of my field of research. The absence of any desire to arbitrate on cosmetic surgery as basically good or bad; as indicating victimhood or agency, is in part an effect of this, though it has certainly prompted in me an interest in the mobilisation of notions of victimhood and agency in the work of others on this subject. In this sense, becoming immersed in discourse on cosmetic surgery has not simply allowed me to *answer* questions posed in my project, but to structure and restructure that project itself and hence the very questions I seek to answer.

In all these ways, becoming can be used to provide a lens through which to identify change. In his book, Brian Massumi emphasises the difference between becoming-other and becoming-the-same. This distinction is made between those changes that ultimately draw a person, category or process closer to an existing norm or ideal (becoming-the-same), and those changes which ultimately bypass or scramble these norms and ideals altogether. To draw an illustration from quite a different context, an example might be the use of the notion of 'family' by gay activists to describe the gay male com-

munity. I see this as a form of strategic molarisation where gay male culture is redefined in order to draw on existing notions of family as a means of promoting public understanding and internal support. It is a 'becoming-the-same'. An alternative 'becoming-other' might involve a refusal to figure gay male relationships in terms of existing heterosexual familial organisation and to emphasise instead an absence of identity. At the same time, a gay 'invasion' of the apparently stable category of the family will ultimately affect change therein.

Along these lines, questions of becoming-other and becoming-the-same might be posed in relation to cosmetic surgery. Where change is identified, is it change towards molarity or molecularity; entrenchment or escape? As suggested by the above example, I doubt a clear binary split can be identified between becoming-the-same and becoming-other. Context is crucial in considering the nature of any becoming, and the complexity and becoming of that context itself seems to render simple diagnoses dubious. The practice of invading molar categories such as the family and effecting critical change there cannot be dismissed as simply becoming-the-same. As Gatens argues, '[i]f bodies and their powers and capacities are invested in multiple ways, then accordingly their struggles will be multiple'.²⁵ In any case, I have already argued that cosmetic surgery is no more than a quite arbitrary (though not meaningless) collection of procedures, and as such, I find it untenable to generalise about the effects of each of these procedures.

Imaginary bodies

In purely theoretical terms Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of becoming seems to emphasise a familiar postmodern interest in multiplicity, change and infinite possibilities. Here I place that work alongside Gatens' use of the notion of the sexual imaginary (or imaginary body) as a means of complicating my awareness of the continually shifting nature of cultural phenomena with an understanding of the resources culture provides for informing the directions those shifts may take. Earlier I referred to Deleuze's discussion of Alice and the conclusion drawn from this discussion that identity is infinite. This observation is invaluable in theoretical terms as a means of overcoming the tendency to see identity as static and somehow predictable. At the same time, it is clear that culture provides a range of options through which identity can be established and maintained, options that can also carry the weight of norms. In looking at the concept of imaginary bodies, I want to point towards a primary source and means of becoming, not only in terms of individual subjectivity but also in terms of culture. As Margaret Whitford has noted in relation to Irigaray's sexed imaginary: 'The point is . . . that an anatomical difference is perceived in the light of the conceptual frameworks already available.'²⁶ From this point of view, our

individual and cultural becomings are sexed in ways that draw on existing understandings.

In her book *Imaginary Bodies*, Gatens uses the term 'imaginary' to refer to 'those images, symbols, metaphors and representations which help construct various forms of subjectivity'.²⁷ The term 'imaginary' has been used in a range of ways by Freud, Lacan, Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard amongst others, though Gatens' use cannot be said to follow any of these approaches. In discussing the history of the term Margaret Whitford defines it as the equivalent of unconscious phantasy, though she goes on to say that such a narrow definition denies the term 'all its associative richness'.²⁸ A major departure from this basic definition has been Irigaray's and Castoriadis' view of the imaginary as *social*.

According to Whitford, Castoriadis uses this notion of the social imaginary to examine and understand persistent social formations and to investigate how they may be changed.²⁹ However, Castoriadis' theory fails to specify the sexed nature of the imaginary and it is Irigaray who sees it as necessarily both a social and a sexed phenomenon. Along similar lines, Gatens' definition refers to 'those ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies and which determine, in part, their value, their status and what will be deemed their appropriate treatment'.³⁰ Her definition of the sexual imaginary departs quite distinctly from the earlier psychoanalytic version. In order to identify some of these ready-made images and symbols, and to try to understand why cosmetic surgical procedures are deemed appropriate treatment for the (primarily) female body, this book will undertake an investigation of discursive constructions of cosmetic surgery. Such an investigation, I hope, will shed some light on the ways in which the female body is conceptualised and taken up in culture, and the way gender feeds into and is reformulated by this. In this sense, it is an investigation of the becoming of the lived body and the sexual imaginary, through an analysis of cosmetic surgery as a cultural phenomenon. Certainly, this lived body and this sexual imaginary are historically and culturally specific. The 1999 Health Care Complaints Commission Inquiry into Cosmetic Surgery, discussed in Chapter 6, will highlight this specificity, and map aspects of gender construction (and its implication in the lived experience of femininity) in regulatory discourse around cosmetic surgery.

In her paper 'Power, Bodies and Difference', Gatens uses the work of Foucault to clarify her concept of the imaginary body. As the product, not of genetics, but of power, the body can be understood as an effect of 'socially and historically specific practices'.³¹ From this point of view, the body should not be mistaken for a pre-social body which is then 'shaped' by culture, but is a body that can only be recognised as such *through* these practices. In other words, there is no purely anatomical body, no 'factual' body that has not already been constructed through culture. How cosmetic surgery contributes to this process of construction, this becoming of the always cultural body,

and also to the becoming of gender, is one of the major concerns of this book. As Gatens argues, '[t]he present and future enhancement of the powers and capacities of women must take account of the ways in which their bodies are presently constituted'.³² Along these lines, Gatens suggests that we need to investigate specifically the character of present male and female body morphologies in order to understand how such morphologies make possible and render 'natural' particular practices. Gatens gives the example of rape here,³³ but I find it equally suggestive to investigate cosmetic surgery in this light.

In relation to this, it is important to note that Gatens looks at imaginary bodies in the plural. Part of my task is to avoid a tendency to simplify cultural constructions and interpretations of the body to a single paradigm, which would not only be culturally biased, given that society is made up of a variety of cultural groups and nationalities, but would tend to obscure the complex workings of the sexual imaginary, and of power relations along lines of sex. At the same time, it would tend to erase differences across time and run the risk of homogenising the sexual imaginary. Gatens herself posits 'multiple and historically specific social imaginaries' rather than any single pervasive formulation,³⁴ though not all social imaginaries occupy equal status. As she later argues regarding the 'imaginings' each sex entertains about the other, 'such imaginings have asymmetrical implications given the historical predominance of men as producers of public culture and theory'.³⁵ Similarly, differing or contradictory sexual imaginaries are also configured in relation to each other in terms of access to the production of public culture. While my examination of the sexual imaginary (which is both a resource and a limit for the becoming of gender through the technology of cosmetic surgery) is specific, it cannot assume that the contents of that imaginary are cohesive and non-contradictory. The discussion of the natural body which runs through Chapters 2–6 illustrates clearly the existence of contradictory imaginary bodies.

In her essay 'Power, Ethics and Sexual Imaginaries', Gatens uses the work of Baruch Spinoza to argue that knowledge is not a possession but the basis for a mode of existence. She quotes Yovel, who explains that for Spinoza, knowledge is more a mode of being than of having, not something we possess, but something we *are* or *become*. As Monique Schneider notes, in attaining knowledge we do not gain an acquisition, as if something new were added to the inventory of our possessions, rather we exist differently.³⁶ Gatens uses this to explain why ideas cannot simply be discarded at will, given that they are part of what constructs our mode of existence. This desire to discard ideas sometimes arises out of contact with new ideas, which by this argument, must themselves cause us to 'exist differently'. Perhaps, then, the difference in our existence due to the acceptance of new knowledge does not automatically lead to a clear-cut change in our views, and thus to an entirely different mode of existence, but may mean that our mode of exist-

tence becomes instead characterised by conflict, confusion or struggle over the ideas and concepts we entertain and use. To extend a point made earlier, it may be that the becoming of a concept through the rendering consistent of its components also constitutes *our* becoming as much as its own. From this point of view, we *are* or *become* in relation to the sexual imaginary in an ongoing, complex and often fraught way, as we are implicated in attempts to reconcile its constituent elements. Often this struggle takes place on the level of discourse, involving the discourses I will be examining in forthcoming chapters. Certainly, multiple, contradictory and sometimes troubled accounts appear there. As I noted earlier, becoming bears on a population, through the contact that population has with phenomena such as cosmetic surgery. If knowledge constitutes an important element in our state of existence or becoming, and is not just a possession, then the knowledge individuals gather about cosmetic surgery, whether this gathering is intentional or not and whether it leads to the undertaking of surgical procedures or not, irreversibly impacts on or (partially) constructs the mode of existence of those individuals. As knowledge, it cannot simply be discarded. It has become part of our (sometimes fraught) becoming. At the same time, this knowledge indicates the becoming of the object of knowledge as well. The wasp and the orchid, the subject and the assemblage (of cosmetic surgery) each undergo becoming through mutual contact.

The wet silk dress

I intend to investigate this process of becoming in quite concrete terms using the case of cosmetic surgery. De Lauretis' notion of technologies of gender, which I mentioned briefly earlier, will be used to help theorise the means by which the becoming of gender, in connection with the sexual imaginary, is manifested or enacted. Based on Foucault's work on the technologies of the self and of sex, de Lauretis coined the term 'technology of gender' as a means of working beyond the longstanding binary choice within feminist theory between viewing gender as the reflection or manifestation of biological facts and dismissing it as an entirely superficial imposition of cultural norms upon otherwise quite neutral subjects. De Lauretis quotes Foucault on sexuality, but superimposes the term 'gender' to argue that gender is the 'set of effects produced in bodies, behaviours and social relations' by the deployment of 'a complex political technology'.³⁷ Her project in this chapter is not only to recognise the existence of technologies of gender such as cinema and to understand in some way their function, but also, then, to theorise the implications for questions of agency and the production of subjectivity that this recognition might entail. Here, technologies³⁸ of gender are material and representational institutions and processes that produce gendered subjects, while the sexual imaginary is a realm of

concepts and ideas upon which such technologies draw in taking shape and constructing gendered projects.

De Lauretis poses four propositions at the beginning of the chapter, each of which is later revised to take into account the sense in which technologies of gender are not only imposed, but also taken up in the production of gendered subjectivity. Her first proposition, that gender is a representation, is revised to read, 'the construction of gender is both the product and process of its representation'.³⁹ This is an initial attempt to introduce the idea that gender is continually under construction, both as a result of and during its representation. Her second proposition – that the representation of gender *is* its construction, that gendered representations constitute the becoming of gender – is later revised to argue that this becoming is the result not only of representation but also of self-representation. Here, individuals not only observe gender represented elsewhere, but themselves represent their gender in everyday behaviour. This move is necessary in order to create room for the notion of technologies of gender, where these technologies are seen as not only externally imposed, but also employed by individuals. It is this element of agency to which self-representation refers.

I have already quoted her next proposition, that 'the construction of gender goes on as busily today as it did in earlier times' through conventional institutions and discourses but also through avant-garde art, the academy and, in particular, feminism. This proposition and its successor are perhaps of most interest to me here. Its terms are later revised by de Lauretis to incorporate the possibility that non-hegemonic constructions are possible within the margins, and from the outside, of hegemonic discourses, through resistance and self-representation. Again, the common understanding of power as operating from the top down is challenged at this point, allowing for the possibility of agency. Finally, de Lauretis proposes that, 'Paradoxically, therefore, the construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction'⁴⁰ (such as that conducted by feminism). De Lauretis is referring here to her thesis throughout the chapter that feminists stand in a doubled relationship to femininity: both inside and outside of its bounds; both drawn into and critically distanced from gender. This proposition is ultimately augmented to express the necessity to question the political interests that this 'de-reconstruction' of gender might serve. Here she is referring to the political implications of male theorists arguing for the 'feminine reader', but I think it can equally be posed in relation to the kind of becoming gender undergoes, and the political effects this might have, when feminists discuss women and cosmetic surgery. This issue will be examined closely in Chapter 4, where feminist discourse on cosmetic surgery is discussed.

It is the recognition of the becoming of gender, and of the ways in which deconstructive processes can also produce gender, that most appeal to me

in this piece of work. One of my central premises is that cosmetic surgery, as both a range of medical procedures and a range of discourses, is a technology of gender that is taken up by individuals in the construction and reiteration of their gendered subjectivity, and by institutional and oppositional forces. However, the point at which I part company with de Lauretis involves her conception of the subject as potentially, if only partially, outside of gender, as in the case of the feminist.⁴¹ De Lauretis uses an inside/outside opposition consistently throughout her chapter, to describe not only the movement of feminists, but also the geography of culture in general. This is an inside and outside based upon what she refers to as the 'space-off', after film theory. As such it departs from a traditional formulation of ideological inside and outside by leaning more towards a surface, as opposed to a depth, model. In this formulation, there are both margins in which opposition can occur, and also a clear outside from which change can be envisaged, such as the outside of the heterosexual contract.

I suspect it is this formulation of cultural geography that makes possible de Lauretis' metaphor regarding the ticking of the F box on an application form. She argues that the process of identifying oneself as male or female by this means results in the selected gender, here femininity, '[sticking] to us like a wet silk dress'.⁴² However, I am led to ask, if it is true that there is an 'us' or 'me', at any rate a subject, to which a wet silk dress might stick, what gender is that subject before 'she' ticks the box? In other words, through this metaphor, de Lauretis treats the acquisition of gender as though it is a late addition to an already constructed subject, a subject that is somehow 'outside' gender and therefore discourse, until she has ticked that box, and found that gender has a tendency to cling. What made that subject tick the F box in the first place? In a sense, de Lauretis seems to appeal to one of the two notions of gender that she rejects at the start of her chapter, that is, the alternative that sees gender as laid upon an otherwise neutral subject. Certainly, de Lauretis does not accept her metaphor as entirely adequate, but the questions she poses in response to it – namely, how the representation of gender is constructed and 'how it is *then* accepted and absorbed'⁴³ (my emphasis) – do not get at or seek to remedy the assumption I am identifying here. My question remains: into what is gender absorbed?

Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy does not easily mesh with the inside/outside model deployed here, though there is some shared ground in terms of a preference for surfaces (along the lines of the 'space-off')⁴⁴ as opposed to depth. However, because I want to use some of de Lauretis' insights, I also need to adapt them in order to ensure a degree of compatibility between my different theoretical tools. An alternative notion to the wet dress model might be, following Butler's work on performativity,⁴⁵ that the subject is *(re)constructed precisely through* the process of ticking the box,

and that rather than being something that then adheres (and, one feels, encumbers), gender is something that makes the subject *possible*. In other words, if, indeed, there is a wet silk dress, that dress must be our own skin, where the skin is *part of*, not the *outside of* the body. From this point of view, technologies of gender such as the cosmetic surgery industry can be seen as one of the means *through which* gendered subjectivity is formed, enacted and continually re-established. Technologies of gender are resources for becoming that themselves draw on the historical cultural resource of the sexual imaginary for their form, and thus exert certain normative pressures. Cosmetic surgery can be seen in this light, where notions of appropriate and necessary forms of surgery draw in part from existing sexual imaginaries and are taken up both in discourse (for example, in advertising or fiction)⁴⁶ and in individual practice to become technologies of gender. Similarly, as I have argued earlier, the sexual imaginary, itself a cultural product as well as resource, can also undergo becoming.

De Lauretis offers a feminist subject that is 'at the same time inside *and* outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so'⁴⁷ and argues that for this reason, feminism cannot be seen as entirely outside ideology. At the same time, it may be this maintenance of the split between inside and outside that allows de Lauretis to use the wet dress metaphor; for the outside subject to be 'drawn in' by the process of ticking a box. Butler's model does not make use of a prior subject or prior, non-gendered state; of an outside, but only of elements of the inside: ways of maintaining viability as a subject. In fact, her approach like that of Deleuze and Guattari consciously eschews the agency that de Lauretis wishes to reinstate. Equally, de Lauretis' metaphor may spring from a tendency evident within much of the material I examine towards the (intentional and unintentional) positing of a natural pre-cultural body. This natural body figures consistently throughout magazine, medical, regulatory and even feminist material in a way that (as I will later argue) repositions the body as the logical object of scientific intervention. Does de Lauretis' wet silk dress of gender stick to a somehow ungendered, unacculturated natural body? The implications of this natural body will be drawn out throughout this book.

The argument Gatens builds from the work of Spinoza also seems at odds with the silk dress metaphor. Spinoza's view is that knowledge constitutes being rather than existing merely as a possession. As such, Gatens' employment of this insight to explain why knowledges cannot simply be donned and discarded at will tends to run contrary to the image of a dress that might indeed be put on and taken off, though admittedly, a dress that is wet is more difficult to manoeuvre. In any case, my desire to use the model of technologies of gender is not to look at the ways already constituted human subjects acquire gender, but rather, how 'always already' gendered subjects enact, perform and re-establish gender. As I argued earlier, my interest lies not in questions of agency on an individual level as regards cosmetic surgery

participants, but in the kinds of gendered subjectivity available for a wide range of individuals. I want to map the becoming of that range as an indicator of what Gatens refers to as the ways our bodies are currently constituted and thus what might inform our future possibilities. Women's enactment of a range of femininities within regulatory discourse on silicone breast implants, found in Chapter 6, is a case in point here.

One area of concern I have not yet made explicit are the ways in which imaginary bodies, material bodies, their becoming, and the means of their becoming are not only gendered. In other words, I am aware that bodies are also the site of technologies of age, class and race, amongst many other political locators. These technologies are also of interest in my examination of cosmetic surgery where they can be seen to be in mutually constructive articulations⁴⁸ with gender. However, this book examines *discursive constructions* of cosmetic surgery. Race, age and class are only occasionally treated explicitly in the material I analyse. The discourses often imply a 'generic' surgical participant, drawing on and constructing an imaginary body that is female, white, relatively youthful (perhaps under the age of forty, though this varies according to the procedure under consideration)⁴⁹ and classless in that cost, while sometimes cited as a consideration, is rarely presented as a bar to participating in surgical procedures.⁵⁰ Of course, as post-colonial feminist research has made clear, gender is always produced in relation to other social categories such as race,⁵¹ where gender and race can be seen to be in a process of mutual becoming, and cosmetic surgery discourse is implicated in this process. In this way, cosmetic surgery discourse, in particular that generated in the popular media, represents femininity in familiar terms as white, youthful and substantially beyond economic restrictions. This representation of white femininity does, however, vary when procedures specifically related to conditions understood to be racial markers are discussed, such as eyelid surgery, although such procedures are rarely represented in mainstream women's magazines. In a sense, this book examines what happens to gender in relation to cosmetic surgery beyond these founding definitions of femininity as white, middle-class and usually – certainly preferably – youthful.

In this chapter I have attempted to outline some of the theoretical tools I make use of in examining the discursive field(s) around cosmetic surgery. I see Deleuze and Guattari's account of becoming as shaping many of the decisions I have made regarding the broadest of my theoretical assumptions, and so the general form of my argument, whereas I have found Gatens' and de Lauretis' work to offer theoretical concepts with which to more explicitly make sense of the ways gender circulates. As I have noted above, these theories have been adapted and articulated in ways that may not always reflect the intentions of the authors (they too have undergone a becoming), though I hope I have done this in good faith and with respect for their primary concerns and commitments. My commitment in this section has

been to develop a set of tools suited to a specific project – an examination of the (quickly proliferating) technologies of gender grouped under the term cosmetic surgery, and of the processes of becoming that gender is experiencing in relation to them.

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