

INTRODUCTION:

Rosi Braidotti has been the Foundation Chair in Women's Studies in the Humanities at Utrecht University in the Netherlands since 1988. In 2005, she was appointed Distinguished Professor in the Humanities and founding director of the Centre for the Humanities. She initiated the largest European networks for women's and gender studies in the European Union, notably Athena and NOISE, with the support of the European Commission. Born in Northern Italy, Rosi Braidotti migrated to Melbourne, Australia in 1970 and was educated at the Australian National University in Canberra, where she graduated in Continental philosophy and English literature. She then moved to Paris, where she pursued post-graduate studies and earned a PhD in philosophy at the Sorbonne. Braidotti's most influential books are *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994), *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (2002), and *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (2006).

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This interview took place long-distance, via e-mails and a long telephone discussion while Braidotti was in London as Leverhulme Trust Visiting Professor in the Law School of Birkbeck College in the spring semester 2006.

PL: One of the characteristics that makes your career exceptional is the synergy of political and academic engagement, the fusion of the personally political and the theoretical. Your books on nomadism carry more theoretical weight, while others, such as Women, the Environment, and Sustainable Development and Thinking Differently address feminist political consciousness. How important is this to the way you plan and balance your life?

RB: The synergy between the political and the academic is the pledge I took when I opted for 'the long march through the institutions', as we called it then! I see all my feminist colleagues struggling to combine the political with the theoretical. Without this creative tension, the field of women's studies could never have come into being. Multicultural feminist theory in a European perspective is our answer in Utrecht to so many different questions, the first of course being how post-colonial literature has become an extension of English literature and hence of the English language. There is a quarrel here about how to bring in the language issue, particularly the polylinguism that influences many post-colonial cultures. There is a quarrel about why European Women's Studies has been so slow to bring in ethnicity, race and colonial issues. For instance, the context of the Cold War froze so many intellectuals in the past that they have actually chosen not to look at the complexities that play a role in colonial power and decolonialization in general. Sartre and de Beauvoir are notable exceptions here. But in feminism, it was left to black, migrant, Muslim and refugee feminists, to call attention to issues of ethnicity, race and the invisible privileges of being white.

PL: You mentioned the new relations of power in the world today. Perhaps we could talk about a recent political development in the Netherlands, namely the increasingly complicated case around Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The backlash against her collaboration on the film Submission has put her in such danger that she is moving to the American Enterprise Institute, a notoriously

conservative American think tank. What has been the reaction to this among European feminists?

RB: Hirsi Ali is a right-wing anti-Islam feminist who has not spared criticism left, right and center of the political spectrum. The great weakness of her position, in my eyes, is that she has not tried to link up to the many Muslim women's groups that have been active in the Netherlands for decades. At the same time, she claims to speak on their behalf, which my Muslim students find even more intolerable. Migrant women have been organized and active in the Netherlands for a long time and very few of them support Hirsi Ali's extremist stance against the Muslim religion. Moreover, there have been joint activities between Muslim women and feminist groups at all levels, from our own women's studies program to the Dutch Women's Library, which has provided national coordination of the migrant and refugees' women's groups for years.

PL: And what is your personal take on her?

RB: She is a very intelligent, gorgeous-looking person who is fanatical about secularism. She was the only Dutch person listed in *Time* magazine list of the top 100 people to watch out for in the world and it was known that she wanted to move to Washington for about one year before her announcement. She is controversial, as her alliance with Theo van Gogh has shown, and as the USA will soon find out. Hirsi Ali is a crusader and, in a very Huntingtonian mode, never misses a chance to ridicule the 'feminized and useless' EU and celebrate the muscular retaliatory powers of the USA. I certainly disagree with Hirsi Ali, but I disagree even more with the way her own political party and the government that she was part of treated her – this kind of discrimination has to stop. A further question here is how the Northern European social democracies like the Netherlands and Denmark, known for their tradition of tolerance, have become Islamophobic. But considering this context, it is all the more remarkable that Hirsi Ali, a Muslim who was propelled to the top of the political class, could not and would not address the issue of Islamophobia, but rather fuels Islamophobia with all her might. Hirsi Ali poured out negative criticism of everything and everybody except Voltaire and Condoleezza Rice. I don't find that very helpful!

PL: Could you describe some of the reasons for your passionate interest in the European Union? Will the constitution of the European Union really alleviate problems such as the immigrants continually fighting for visa rights, the endless discussions of the Muslim veil, or the race riots in the Paris suburbs in November 2005, and many other major European problems concerning culture, language, and the colonial past?

RB: For me, this multi-cultural, polylingual, post-colonial project is written into the new European Union's program. For better or for worse. There are complicated issues linked to the project of political union that remains to be implemented. In any case, the idea of the European Union as a post-nationalist project assumes a world and a Europe that has moved on.

PL: You juxtapose “a world and a Europe” in one phrase and are one of the few feminists working specifically on Europe as a theoretical and political topos. What is the theoretical relevance of focusing on Europe as a space, rather than on a mobile world of migration and international cultural mixings? Where are the limits of this Europe and what characterizes them?

RB: The idea of Europe as a place that reelaborated history is absolutely central to this notion. And if we reelaborate on history, then we need to look again at the legacy of cultural diversity, multicultural hybridity and post-colonialism in the cultural formations and modes of literature that we have today. And this is what we are implementing in our European networks with the support of the European Union. I have a PhD at Blaagaard working on whiteness and racism in Scandinavian countries, for instance. We also have a project on hybridity and racism in Holland. Ponzanesi has worked on Italian and African women, and Gloria Wekker collaborates with African Germans as well as many francophone Africans. European feminist multiculturalism is polylingual and multi-located.

PL: In Transpositions, you schematize US-EU oppositions, highlighting Huntington’s description of the EU’s ‘soft’ and ‘feminized’ role in this Western political couple (p.46) and comparing the transitional identity of “post-Europe Europeans” with that of “post-Woman women” (p.71). Could you elaborate on these images of EU politics and US-EU relations? How do you predict the “post-nationalist project” will continue? Is it realizable?

RB: My vision of the EU is pretty much in tune with that of the European Left as a whole, from Etienne Balibar to Toni Negri. It is set against the USA-modeled federation of nations, which is supported by the UK. I see it as one of the great political struggles of today, as Dany Cohn-Bendit also put it recently. Is it realizable? Of course it is! It is a political project so it is perfectly grounded and feasible, provided there is political will to implement it. It requires commitment and energy and the risks are enormous, but the struggle goes on. It is a very negotiable project that builds on the very advanced state of European integration so far.

The European Union is the least studied and least understood governmental space today – everybody talks about it without having a clue of how exactly it works. Post-nationalism is already at work in so many areas of the new European social space: common currency, trade, defense, education, research, and immigration. So many of the problems we are facing today derive from having too little, not too much of a common European political platform. The core issue is the relation between European identity and European subjectivity in the form of citizenship. What I argue is that non-unitary identities are the perfect site for the actualization of post-nationalist and multi-layered practices of European citizenship. We could be moving towards de-linking identity issues from questions of legal citizenship.

PL: Your brief discussion of hope in the Epilogue of Transpositions indicates that hope, “trajectories of becoming,” and utopian ideals are integrally linked (p.277). Do you see utopian elements in current European political developments? How pressing is the real risk of creating a

Fortress Europe or the “danger of recreating a sovereign centre” in the European Union (p.72)?

RB: When I speak of hope, I do not mean utopia, but rather possible futures. Futurity is about sustainability, which means bequeathing to future generations a world and a social environment that is as good as, if not better than, the ones older generations had inherited. Hope is about inter-generational justice and responsibility to those who will come after us. It’s about reconstituting communities and ties of solidarity. I’m with Obama on the importance of affirmative politics and of saying: “yes we can!”. A politically integrated European Union with the legal and procedural mechanisms for multiple belongings well in place is the legacy I would like to contribute to leaving behind.

PL: How does this tie into the current agenda of the European Union? I have read that it was in fact the relatively conservative anti-immigration representatives of several member states that hindered the process toward finalizing the fairly liberal immigration policy finally adopted in The Hague Programme in 2004. What role do you see the cultural or political identities of the individual states playing in a successful post-nationalist European Union?

RB: I see the European Union as the frame of enunciation for all of this discussion about post-coloniality, multi-cultural Europe, flexible citizenship, and nomadic identities. This discussion assumes as a foundation a European *Union*, not the Europe of European Studies. The New Europe is full of contradictions and it may fail, but it is a dramatically different starting point from the Old Europe. The New Europe is not new because it’s radically different from its history, but rather because it posits a different place of enunciation and it looks at its place in history more critically. The European Union is a far more radical organization than most of its member states. Of course September 11th and the War on Terror have set us all back, but the European Union did its best to strike a different note, and had Tony Blair not been there, it would have been able to do so. The Americanization of Britain and its chronic Euro-skepticism play a very big role in preventing this debate from taking off. The context of this war, that is, the Americans in a global war versus the European Union, is one of the discussions that we cannot get going.

Historically, the far left has been against the European Union. Officially, the German far left, in contrast to Dany Cohn-Bendit, for instance, is opposed to the European Union, because it represents capitalism. The French far-left defeated the referendum because for them Europe is synonymous with globalization. Only in the last two years has Toni Negri switched sides; now there is a European Social Forum, which sees the European Union as the antidote to the empire. All the debates on the EU are over-powered by other, mostly very local and national, concerns. The Euro-scepticism is major and I think the political project may well fail. But if so, it’s everybody’s loss.

PL: But at the same time, extremely important and very concrete identity issues are always tied up in this. It always deals with language and nationality, for instance. To some Americans, reading documents published by the European Union often feels like reading futuristic or

utopian government policy. For instance, in the Tampera Agenda, Justice and Home Affairs claims to take into account issues concerning the destination country's capacity of reception, cultural links to countries of origin, and even "brain drain," as well as offering aid to countries of origin. My cynical American mind still asks if these European policies are really culturally feasible.

RB: Look at other modes of governance in the world, for instance the USA., which resists the United Nations. They are in defiance of international law, and of course they hate the European Union because it is a new form of governance. It is a new way of ruling that is not a federation and not a coalition, but a post-nationalist social space with shared political structures.

I think the reporting on the European Union in the US media is truly criminal. It breaks my heart. In our curricula in Utrecht, we are looking at the reality of this multi-linguistic, multi-cultural state with a very long history of co-habitation of Jews, of Muslims, of Roma, and of other groups, from Sarajevo to Spain. We teach this whole patchwork, but we can do this because we are a European Union that proclaims that National States are over. That is what I would call a very good piece of queering, but it is not intellectually sexy for feminists. It is not about who I am today and what degree of sexual indeterminacy I will be performing today., but rather about accountability and community-building It's nitty gritty politics. I am very sad about the feminist disinterest in this project.

PL: A very critical take on the present indeed. Let us look backwards a little. How have your ideas on nomadism changed over the 12 years in which you wrote this trilogy?

RB: It is difficult to name a single event or personality that has affected this long project. The first is my institutional practice. Conversations with selected individual thinkers were certainly a factor. My life in Holland marked a real separation from France, but it allowed me to reconnect to Italy. Thanks to the help of friends like Annamaria Crispino and Annamaria Tagliavini I was able to develop a new and more productive relationship to my home country, which I now inhabit like a nomadic subject in a very happy manner. Another important factor is the intellectual debates and conversations with colleagues and the peer group. My friendships with Haraway and Butler have been real points of reference for me, not only because they are major figures, but also because I actually love them dearly as human beings and enjoy our exchange. This of course does not make me any less critical of the American domination of the gender theoretical agenda.

Most of all, the challenge and the rewards of my life with Anneke Smelik are a factor that has allowed me to explore and modify nomadic ethics – that difficult quest for a balance between belonging and mobility. I owe her a great deal! What really matters is my choice of a life and career in Europe, moving between Italy, Holland, the UK, Australia and at times the USA. Mobility and stability; institutions and activism; writing and networking. These are the main guiding factors for my life and thinking right now.

PL: How would you define the nomadic subjectivity at the core of your philosophical work and, it seems, your personal identity?

RB: Nomadic subjectivity is a strategy to undo the many, localized, 'hard core' identities that continue to be perpetuated also and especially in our globalized world. For me it is connected to the critique of the 'centre', so long as we agree that there is not one, but that there are many scattered locations across the globe. And as you know, in terms of the European location, I connect this strategy to the critique and relocation of whiteness as a dominant category. Because of this, I really cannot accept the opposition nomad/migrant, which ends up making the latter into the site of authentic experience, in alleged opposition to the abstraction of the former. Moreover, being a life-long white immigrant myself, I am very resistant to romanticizing the margins. Women immigrant writers are no more the site of verification of authentic experience for me than Deleuze's philosophy is. I think bell hooks put it very well when she objected to making 'black women' into the compulsory site of voicing reality and unity of the self, in opposition to post-modern critiques of unitary subjects. That is also a form of racism – why would migrant, black or diasporic literature be only about belonging? If anything, it is about multiple ecologies of belonging! What interests me in texts, practices, theories, and spaces are the processes of mutual, dynamic, messy contaminations of theories by practices and vice-versa. Process ontology is the key term here. Countless authors today are celebrating forms of creolized, nomadic and diasporic identities, from Monica Ali to Amelie Nothomb - so it is a very broad and highly diversified field. But for me it is women visual artists who seem to be at the vanguard of reflection on multiple ecologies of belonging and multi-layered European citizenship.

PL: You have mentioned that your newest book, Transpositions, marks the completion of a trilogy. How is this book different from your previous ones?

RB: Because of the multi-layered style I ended up developing, the last book required enormous amounts of research. People have told me that this is one of the strengths of the volume, which became a sort of guide to contemporary critical theory. I like this book because it exemplifies nomadic thought as a style. It is also more poetical in style than some of the previous books.

PL: What theoretical models influence your work?

RB: I see my work as outward-bound, affirmative and looking at the concrete historical realities of today – the actual here and now. Hence the emphasis I place on cartographic accuracy and situated, embodied, and embedded perspectives. I think linguistic mediation does not describe adequately the form of symbolic and social communication we engage in today. Our world is about codes, not signs, as both Haraway and Hayles show: genetic codes and computer codes, which have transmuted language into a system of notation, not of signification in the classical Saussure system. I see language as one of the many relay points, in a far more complex chain of signification that encompasses more than the classical linguistic turn. It mobilizes modes of

codification of the many relations that structure our social existence, our organic being, and our presence on this planet. Auto-poietic chaosmosis comes a lot closer.

PL: Questions of place form the core of your work. Could you comment on the similarities and differences between the concept of the non-place for you and the chora in Irigaray and Kristeva?

RB: From where I stand now, the whole Lacanian enterprise, to which Kristeva's work makes an important contribution, is very much caught in a Hegelian framework of identity and recognition. In my work, I have increasingly taken distance from this and move toward issues of mutual specification and incorporeal becomings. The point about lines of flight and becoming, of course, is that you cannot code them *a priori*: it is impossible to know what form of actualization they will acquire until the process is actually taking place. This is radical immanence, not a dialectical system of signification that is operated by the metaphysics of lack and presence, through metaphor and metonymy. So there's no knowing whether a specific pattern of becoming will enforce or delete feminine specificity. What is *feminist* about this, on the other hand, is much easier to define. Many lines of becoming – if not all of them – take their point of departure from the undoing/de-territorialization/critique of dominant womanhood as it is defined in the gender binary of femininity and masculinity. This point of departure and the exodus from the vision of gender, sexualization and identity it proposes, is absolutely clear and necessary. The arrival point, however, is wide open.

PL: What effect does this then have on feminism?

RB: I find this very useful for feminism in that it accentuates the aspirations and the political radicalism of twentieth and hopefully twenty-first century feminists who have always asserted that women's issues are not confined to the specific half of mankind they seemingly refer to. What is at stake in "women's issues" is, on the contrary, an altogether different way of conceptualizing and representing what it means to be human at all. Irigaray made that point in the 1980's, when she stated that the feminist revolution (this is the way we talked then!) would lead to different concepts of space and time, and not only to equal pay – though that would be nice! – and equal opportunities.

PL: Could you elaborate on what you call the "materialist brand of post-structuralism" you see being taken up by the younger generation of scholars?

RB: What is happening now is a massive Deleuze and Guattari wave. Thirty years after everyone else, the best ones are now coming in. This is the new materialist wave that I had in mind. It is something that does not refer to linguistic mediation, but is instead all about history, material locations in space and time, and the critiques of the structures of capitalism. Philosophical nomad thought is also about structuring the ways in which communities can be rebuilt outside the principles of the Enlightenment definition of liberal individualism and the peculiar theory of the

subject that flows from that view. There is such an enormous wave of New Materialism that I know of at least five books and collections coming out soon with the term in their titles; someone like Karen Barad is emblematic of this trend as well. But basically, what it stands for is the non-linguistic school of post-structuralism and the definite end of the 'postmodern' or of post-anything. We have entered an era of affirmation and active construction of alternatives, with a strong emphasis on relationality and the politics of relation.

PL: Are there political reasons for New Materialism to surface now?

RB: I see two areas of tension where nomadic philosophies and Deleuze have come in: New Media and political theories. And these are of course the places where Lacan and Derrida were never particularly influential. Literature, film theory, and cultural studies are saturated with semiotics and psychoanalysis and are unable to go further. But New Media has had enormous problems doing business with semiotics. This reminds me of Catherine Hayles, who said, "It's about codes, not about signs." Signs and signification processes are not the crucial element. If we are looking at codes and notions of encryption, if we are looking at contemporary science and genetic codes, and if we study the ways in which our embodied selves interact with the meaning-making technologies of today, then we can't come back to the same authorial signs. The terms of the linguistic mediation school do not describe the way we make sense of communication and relate to media today. We have exited that moment of structural historical development. We are living in a different post-Gutenberg world. Our meaning-making system is structured differently today: it is about expression, affect, interactivity and instantaneity.

PL: In the field of German literature studies right now there is a tendency toward examining the scientific nature of texts, not in a formalist sense, but in looking at efforts to archive, document, photographically depict, and search for truth in nature and the body. Is this also a manifestation of New Materialism?

RB: I can't speak too specifically about the German literary field, but I think that there is something about the style of a nomadic text, a kind of text that reads like math or geometry that accounts for Deleuze's current popularity. It reads like some very strange modern science. If you talk to 'Deleuzians' like Brian Massumi, you see that they are now basically reading just science. People are far more interested in science and technology than in cultural studies now, which makes this particular prose more in tune with the sensibilities of today than the more literary flowery metaphorical writings of Derrida or Irigaray, which are pretty much unreadable today. Deleuze is difficult, but there's something more ascetic about it. Another factor is the genderization and remasculinization of Deleuze that my generation was already warning against. But the girls are out there as well. In several locations, I have seen a strong contingent of young Deleuzian she-wolves standing their own ground and not letting themselves be messed with.

PL: I would like to shift gears to talk about your recent thoughts on queer and gender theory. It seems to me that in Transpositions, you often come close to talking about these topics, but seem

to skirt around them. You seem, for instance, to deliberately not choose the queer situation as one of the ‘case studies’ taken up in the book, whose title itself might lead a reader to expect a mention of queer, particularly trans, identity.

RB: You are completely right, but I had a whole chapter on this issue in the previous book – *Metamorphoses*, so I did not want to repeat myself. I have devoted an enormous amount of time to explaining why for me the paradigm of transsexualism is inadequate. There are three main reasons: firstly, this paradigm is culture-specific and it derives from a radical lesbian critique of heteronormativity which runs from Gayle Rubin to Teresa de Lauretis via Monique Wittig. This does not translate back easily into the history and the concepts of European feminisms. Secondly, I do not agree that the aim of the feminist struggle is to undo heterosexuality. And I am saying this as a female lesbian woman married to another like me. Male domination cannot be reduced to compulsory heterosexuality alone. Thirdly, the transsexual paradigm is absolutely endemic to advanced capitalism. This is the kind of crap about degrees of in-between identities and infinite multiple choices of lifestyle that the current social system is selling us. It is an absolute lure, an illusion, a delusion rather.

I am concerned by the many devious ways in which the emphasis on forces and affects, or the politics of ‘life itself’, re-introduce sexual indifferenciation, much as queer theories shuffle in the illusion of going ‘beyond gender’. I see such notions as being flatly contradicted by the brutal power relations in the world today and the new genderized polarizations between cultures, as well as people, which we are all caught in. We are not even close to being beyond gender.

There are a couple of collections coming up about queering Deleuze as well. What exactly does this mean now? Queering has become another term for general critique and deconstruction of identity and for talking about degrees of in-betweenness. It’s almost a panacea for all kinds of acts of subversion. Now we have this rule in Utrecht that whenever we think of queer, like we did with gender, we need a footnote and a bibliography. We always have to answer the question, “According to whom and what do you mean by that term?” We have explicitly forbidden the use of “queer” as if it were a *passe-partout*. That would imply that we all understand what that is.

In many places, the propagation of the unquestioned queer agenda has been nothing short of a religious phenomenon, so that there is only room for one thing, and that is painfully self-replicating.

PL: Many people would argue that performing or embracing queerness is the ultimate act of subversion and that it does exist in dialogue with other subversions, such as subversions of race, class, and ethnicity. You seem to be criticizing the study of queerness as being ungrounded. Do we really need to reject it wholesale – or can some of it be salvaged by performing our study of it more convincingly?

RB: My point all along was that the exercise needs to be regrounded. If by queer, we mean subverting, displacing, deterritorializing any identity at all that logic of deterritorializing and reterritorializing is the logic of advanced capitalism. That system is doing that already, hence my disagreement with singling out heteronormativity as the matrix of power. Heteronormativity is undoubtedly one of the dominant codes of our society, but it is far from being the only or the

most important one; eating meat would be another; and having a perfectly slim, youthful, able and fashionable androgynous body would come next. Moreover, the fact that a code is dominant, however, does not mean that it actually works. It certainly does not mean that heterosexuals are actually mindlessly replicating a heteronormative code. There is nothing funkier, more bizarre, more dysfunctional, more creative than the modes of heterosexuality that we are currently experiencing in our culture. The most radical heterosexuality is far more inventive than the very mainstream parts of the lesbian subculture, which is as global now as some aspects of the old heteronormative code. In other words, I would be very careful in thinking that deconstructing is in itself subversive and dangerous, because that destabilizing force is what advanced capitalism does, mostly because advanced capitalism doesn't give a damn about anything. All that is solid melts into air and we are going simply to make money out of gay marriage, sperm banks for lesbians, new industries that cater to gays and lesbians, media products like "The L Word" (what a pathetic show that one was!). So if queer does the same thing, as I suspect to a very large extent it does, then it's about as subversive as an after dinner mint!

PL: But what do you do with the liberatory potential of queerness? I have many students who have now experienced several years of 'queered' or 'post-gender' feminist education. Telling them this could be like telling Monique Wittig to go home and cook dinner for her husband. They feel liberated in a very real way by what queer ideology has to say. How would you reassure them that a return to feminist phenomenology would not limit their freedom of expression?

RB: Where I see the subversive moment is where we manage to reground some of the modes of deterritorialization into constructive viable alternatives. And how we would do that depends a little on our cartographies, on our material locations. If we don't ground the queer objectives, then they are just caught in a narcissistic logic. The danger of queer theory is that one can be caught up in the illusion of it. Today, I can go out and shave of my hair and dress like a man, or as one of my lesbian students puts it, "When I wear my dildo and walk down the street, I feel like a different person." Well, if that's the case, then I think she needs to review her priorities a little: why would a prosthetic device like a dildo count so much more than any other prosthetic device, say contact lenses, or any artificial limb? Why position sexuality as the ultimate location of both subversion and the truth about ourselves? That is so un-foucauldian! The whole point of Foucault's work is to urge us to liberate ourselves from the sovereignty of sex. This is the line we need to pursue: the de-sexualization of subject positions. We need more self-reflexivity on this issue, to discuss what this has to do with what I, a nomadic lesbian, would call radical politics. Queer does not automatically equate with subversive. There are several issues involved here: issues of identity, sexual subversion, lesbian subcultures, and the general desire for radicalness, which is reduced to the project of destroying the gender system, which is very problematic. What do we do, exactly, when we undo gender? Is it like storming the Bastille or the Winter Palace?

PL: I suppose that will also be one of the main questions that my generation needs to answer. I don't exactly imagine us letting go of queerness, but rather continuing to ground it more convincingly. We are not afraid to queer everything, but perhaps we need to ask more often what the theoretical gain is of each particular "queering."

RB: Exactly. As Donna Haraway put it: which differences are differences that make a positive difference and which differences are part of a world system of domination that dominates by creating quantities of difference? This is precisely the question in *Milles Plateaux*, where Deleuze and Guattari address it in terms of an ethical coding of political passions or aspirations. This is where my work fits in as well. What we really need to have are proper debates where the younger generations look at the options, look at their own situation, and then get on with the agenda, not just this mindless repetition, which we see even in England. That has to stop for the sake of feminist theory, because otherwise we do not have a relay of generations, but clones and the end of critical discourse. I hope the Obama era will open up new perspectives for a robust type of feminist activism, less self-obsessed and more political.

PL: Do you see your work as offering a viable materialist alternative to that?

RB: Yes, I hope so. Judith Butler's seminar here in Utrecht was particularly fruitful in bringing out some significant theoretical issues within post-structuralism. As Judy said in the seminar here, though it did not come up in the book, these are really just two different strands in the post-structuralist family: one more linguistic, to which she belongs, and one more material. In a sense, it is not an either/or question. We can have a kind of discussion on the topics, but somehow the imaginary of queer fits in with the imaginary of our times. There was a moment in *Undoing Gender* when Butler talked about her relationship to femininity. She also mentioned this in the seminar. It was very moving when she said that she *aspired* to femininity. Femininity is something that *other* women have for her. It is not a category that she could ever inhabit with any degree of ease or comfort. And as she was talking about this in the seminar, she slipped into talking about other women as "they". None of this of course came across in the book. And when I was talking to her later, I said it was very strange that she had just done something that I could not ever do. For me, other women will always be "we." And God knows I am critical of that signifier. I am critical of the institution of femininity; I define feminists as post-woman women; but I inhabit the category of femininity with incredible happiness and enormous pride, and that fits into my notion of who a lesbian is.

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