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Our Times Are Always Out of Joint: Feminist Relational Ethics in and of the World Today: An Interview with Rosi Braidotti

Abstract: Rosi Braidotti is a philosopher and distinguished university professor at Utrecht University and the founding director of the Centre for the Humanities in Utrecht. Her first book, Patterns of Dissonance *(1991), undertook the balancing act of connecting the redefinition of the feminine in post-Hegelian philosophy with the demand for feminist subjectivity. For Braidotti, becoming-woman is a qualitative multiplicity that simultaneously unfolds other becomings, including becoming-animal, becoming-minoritarian, becoming-machine, becoming-other and becoming-nomad, all from a politics of location that demands accountability.* Nomadic Subjects *(1994) signalled a new point of departure for feminist thinkers when it was first published, and has now gone into a thoroughly revised second edition (2011).* Metamorphoses *(2002) and* Transpositions *(2006) explore zoe as an affirmative, non-human force of connection, generating groundbreaking insights into the social imaginary and sexual and racial difference, as well as posthumanism, which is further developed in* The Posthuman *(2013). Braidotti has also edited a number of influential volumes on Deleuze, post-secularism and cosmopolitanism, and, most recently, with Paul Gilroy,* Conflicting Humanities *(2016). Her influence and prestige continue to grow and, in March 2017,*

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she gave the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at the Whitney Humanities Center, Yale University—two public lectures and a conversation with Rüdiger Campe (Professor of German and Comparative Literature) and Joanna Radin (Professor of History of Medicine and History) jointly titled 'Posthuman, All Too Human'. This interview took place on 11 October 2016, during Braidotti's time as the Hope Street Writer in Residence with the Department of English and Centre for New and International Writing at the University of Liverpool.

Lisa Regan (L. R.): *Let's start by taking stock of how your nomadic project has evolved over the years. Looking back over your writing, I was struck by how you describe yourself at different stages. At the start of* Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti, *you look back to your previous books, describing your work in* Transpositions *as enacting 'theoretical and musical mutations' and recalling how* Metamorphoses *'ended up on the rope of a bungee jumper' [Braidotti 2011: 22]. And you take us further back to your first book,* Patterns of Dissonance, *where you navigate Derrida and Foucault in a Deleuzian trajectory and describe yourself as 'a tightrope-walker, an acrobat' [Braidotti 1991: 14]. So, I wanted to start by asking whether, at this stage of your career, you ever still feel you're walking a tightrope?*

Rosi Braidotti (R. B.): That's a very interesting question. The short answer is probably no. But I guess my journey has been complex and one defined by its 'loopiness', if you like.

Nomadic theory was a switch to materialism and to monistic or process ontologies in the 1970s and 1980s. I was of the French school of Foucault and Deleuze, and interested in the early Irigaray of bodies—*This Sex Which Is Not One*, for example, is about multiplicities and is very compatible with Deleuzian and bodily materialism. And I was working on this at a time when very few people were doing it. I think we're all very aware now of the kind of hegemony the linguistic turn, that is to say deconstruction, semiotics and psychoanalysis have had over literary and political theory, cultural studies, the trendy left and cultural criticism. Deleuze was offering something quite different, but he didn't pursue intellectual celebrity and institutional power in the same way as some of his peers and hardly even travelled overseas. To follow Deleuze back then was quite a risk, because the rest of the academic world, the Ivy League and the editorial world were preaching a different paradigm.

I finished my doctoral dissertation in French in 1981, while the English, quite different, version, *Patterns of Dissonance*, wasn't published until 1991. For 10 years, working in Europe, I couldn't publish it, but then John Thompson and Anthony Giddens started a brand-new, hip publishing

house called Polity Press, and they recognized that I was doing something new, which they wanted people to read. Meanwhile, my Harvard friend Alice Jardine's *Gynesis*, which is the closest work to mine because we were graduate students together in Paris, had come out 10 years earlier. I say this to give you some idea of how it was to work outside and, to some extent, against the Derridean paradigm.

In terms of neomaterialism, I felt that I was working with a group of friends who were walking in the desert (a very Deleuzian image, by the way) for quite a long time. The first translations of Deleuze came out of Sydney, Australia, and later from Canada, and not from America. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton are the pioneering figures in the 1970s, and a few thinkers from the British left—like Colin Gordon—came out of the margins to take up Deleuze. The bulk of critical theory, however, practised deconstruction, and the linguistic turn was becoming a dominant paradigm, as in the work of Judith Butler. It was touch-and-go whether new materialism would ever take off. *Nomadic Subjects* did fine when it came out in 1994, was reprinted several times and sold well, but did not resonate widely. In 2011, Columbia University Press asked me to redo it, saying that it had been too early before. But at that moment I risked being too late because, meanwhile, the Deleuze wave had taken off. All of a sudden, it seemed, everyone was doing Deleuze: the art world, the new media, the political wing, the accelerationists and even the object ontologists—albeit by denial and erasure. This zig-zagging itinerary tells us that good ideas don't die; they can be delayed but not deleted.

That sense of being out of bounds, working in a void, has disappeared. There is a real community of neo-Spinozist materialist nomads and I feel that my work can now be understood. Part of the reason why I feel that my work has been so 'loopy', as I describe in my article 'The Untimely' [2014], is also because I've put an enormous amount of time and work into institutions. Between 1994 and 2002, when the second volume of my nomadic trilogy, *Metamorphoses*, finally came out, I focused on institution-building.

I was the founding professor of the Women's Studies programme in Utrecht and, at the same time, I set up, together with a group of like-minded academic activists, European Women's Studies. We built, from scratch, the ATHENA Network [Advanced Thematic Network of Women's Studies in Europe], which I directed for almost 10 years. At its height, it had 130 member institutions from all over the EU [European Union] and was successfully funded by the European Commission.[1] That took an enormous amount of work, which delayed my big books—I co-edited, with Gabriele Griffin, an early report on ATHENA's research

1 In 2010, the ATHENA Network was awarded the Erasmus Prize by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme in recognition of its outstanding contribution to fostering social inclusion in and through education and training.

work [Griffin and Braidotti 2002]. I would do it all over again, but it's a loopy sort of temporality. Besides, I'm a European—that is to say, a civil servant. I've taken my job at the university really seriously: we feminists needed to change the curriculum, and we did, also by constructing, in 1995, the first official Ph.D. programmes in women's and gender studies. When I left the direction of the Women's Studies Centre at Utrecht after setting it up and directing it for 17 years, we had a couple of hundred students in the first-year cohort, and it continues to be a massive enterprise.

When the Deleuze vogue exploded, I was in the uncomfortable position of being both too late and too early. But the time of critical thinking is structurally out of joint. The advantage is that now I have a wide array of (mostly younger) companions with whom I can work, though the academic game has completely changed. Currently, I am both a point of origin for neomaterialist feminism and a 'travelling companion' for others, especially those working on the affective turn and process ontologies. In general, however, we are still marginal in the institutions and we don't have major professorships, because of the hostility of philosophy departments that—wrongly—accuse Deleuze of radical anarchism. For me, however, things are changing for the better: I have been honoured with the invitation to deliver the 2017 Tanner Lectures at the University of Yale, which means that Deleuze scholarship finally gets recognized. The signals are there that this philosophy is becoming what I always thought it would be—a vital materialist political philosophy of change for this millennium. Maybe Foucault's prophecy will come true and our century may become Deleuzian yet.

Nomadic thought affirms that 'I am rooted but I flow' (an elegant formulation by Virginia Woolf) and encourages us to recognize the intersections between mobility, multiple identities, and ethical belonging and accountability. In some ways, my destinies are tied to the vicissitudes of a marginal philosophy that I thought was spot on all along and that describes adequately what is happening to us, in this particular phase of advanced capitalism. Does that answer your question?

L. R.: *Yes, it does! And so, from what you're saying, you no longer see yourself on a tightrope, walking a thin line between feminism and philosophy, but you're now able to see your journey through a long lens which reveals its loops and loopiness. And through all that, you still seem comfortable in your role as the 'undutiful daughter' of Deleuze, which is how you've described yourself in the past. Is that right?*

R. B.: Absolutely! Undutifulness is at the core of the *Anti-Oedipus* project. You cannot Oedipalize the pedagogical relationship to someone like Gilles

Deleuze. In fact, you cannot *repeat* Deleuze and, if you do, and there are many Deleuze repetitors, it is poor Deleuzian philosophy. Deleuze explicitly asks you *not* to do that, which puts you in the paradoxical position of being all the more Deleuzian, the more you disobey and refuse to imitate the master's voice, which is precisely the essence of his teaching. What Deleuze does provide is a set of crucially important conceptual tools and an ethics—how to go about the project of critical philosophy. He is not going to solve all your problems. Some people complain that Deleuze doesn't give you a politics, and my answer is: Do you need to be spoon-fed a politics? What do we need? 'Big Daddy' to tell us what to do? The gender is no coincidence, of course. Gloria Steinem put it clearly at the Washington Women's March of January 2017: 'There's no more asking daddy!' [Römkens 2017]

The other struggle, of course, is the deletion of feminist and postcolonial theory in Deleuzian scholarship. As soon as the Deleuze 'specialists' (most of them boys) get into the picture, the erasure is complete. It comes on the back of what some of them may call the return of philosophical 'rigour', but I call it censorship and epistemic violence. You've only to look at the bibliographies of some Deleuzians to see the deletion of feminist philosophy, postcolonial and anti-racist thinking. Fortunately, now feminists have taken them to task, saying that they can't just engage with Bruno Latour, Alain Badiou and the other 'great white old men'. The wider social context does not help the cause. This kind of deletion is a very strong feature of left-wing populism—the return of the primacy of class as the dominant category of analysis and the dismissal of other political subjects and cultures. The struggle is starting all over again with that, and the younger generations are strongly engaging with this.

Though I attended Deleuze's classes and respect his thought immensely, I keep that edge of autonomy and independence. A practical philosophy has to be applied; it cannot be imitated. You have to *do* something. People who choose not to *do* anything with philosophy, but expect it to provide all the answers ready-made, are just intellectually lazy. Some conservative philosophers think the real-life problems they see are not the appropriate problems philosophy should address; they prefer the discipline to be self-referential. But this is the twenty-first century after all; you can crowdsource and be creative in all sorts of ways, so why not extend that freedom to conceptual creativity as well? The institutional process being what it is, it may be inevitable for some authoritative figures to emerge as the mouthpieces of Deleuzian orthodoxy, but that is a contradiction in terms for the philosopher of anti-Oedipal relations. A journal like *Deleuze Studies* is important and useful, and the multiple conferences devoted to this

philosophy function as good dissemination points, but the quality of the pedagogical work around Deleuze is not always the best or the fairest. And then there are the self-important academics who think they *own* the truth of a philosophy because they have studied every footnote in the text. I respect textual and philological accuracy, but Deleuze has to be read *in* the world and *for* the world, as an ethical guide in a highly complicated phase of cognitive capitalism.

Cognitive capitalism is full of loops and contradictions: some parts of it entail amazing technological advances; others enact orchestrated devastation (going back to Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s). In spite of all talks of managerial rigour, improvisation and dysfunctionality are quite common, bullying is part of the protocol and people are rewarded for an a-critical repetition of the status quo. This tendency is alive even in places where we should know better, like the universities. It is the return of the *doxa* or common sense—that is to say, of popular judgement. Populist movements on the left as on the right—because, to me, left- and right-wing populism are the same—do not do any service to feminist political culture. Remember that Žižek came out as a Trump supporter just before the US elections, describing him as 'less dangerous' (for whom, I wonder?) than Hillary Clinton. Moreover, my feminist nomadic subjects are all about engaging with the complexity of our own interaction with human and non-human elements, and our own multiple layers of belonging as subjects-in-process. In the case of feminism, the next wave is up and running already. We've only to look at the way the (nasty) 'woman question' ('lock her up!') exploded during the 2016 US elections to see that this was the return of the repressed. As far as I am concerned, the neo-Marxist left bears as much responsibility on feminist issues as the right. The younger generations—men, women and LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender]—have a big job on their hands to recast the feminist agenda for this millennium. The recent mass demonstrations in India, South Africa and the USA seem promising, but there is just so much to do [see Braidotti 2016].

As Deleuze becomes iconic and takes his place in the history of philosophy as one of the intellectual giants, then feminist critics need to go nomadic with his work. We need to engage with the capitalism and schizophrenia that is inside all of us, not just out there, but inside formatting us.

L. R.: *It strikes me that we're hitting this Deleuze wave just at a point when it feels like other critical tools in the humanities have become blunted or seemingly antiquated, as we slip into a post-theory fatigue, which you mention in your books. And I can't help feeling that the fatigue, particularly with the linguistic turn, is*

dissuading researchers and students from engaging with theoretical concepts in and for the world, as you suggest. I wonder whether that's damaging fresh uptake, say, of feminist theory among students and researchers?

R. B.: That's interesting. I think there's a massive Oedipalization at work which cuts two ways: the younger generations need to work on their relationship with their mothers, fathers and hybrid kin. But the reverse is also true, and mothers have to work on their relationship with their daughters, sons and trans kids. Inventing new kinship systems, alternative kin, may be the real issue today; after all, we already have the three-parent family law, so why continue with the old Oedipal terminology? Let's embrace different kinship ties!

The theory fatigue is essentially deconstruction fatigue. It is generally accepted that the linguistic turn changed the shape of literary theory and critical enquiry in the 1980s. The neomaterialist turn proposed by Deleuze and his critical Spinozism offers, however, a different way forward. Deleuze does not think through the structure of the linguistic sign: his point of reference is the history of Continental philosophy. He pursues conceptually what the early Foucault barely started: exposing the productivity and complexity of the links between power and knowledge. Deleuze goes further into this, creating a counter-history of philosophies of freedom and resistance, through Spinoza, Nietzsche and his own nomadology.

Deleuze's literary taste is typical of a certain generation in France, trained for the *aggrégation* through the classics, up to high modernism, but he does posit the parallelism between philosophy, the arts and science. The reference to literary texts and favoured authors is constant, and he sees literature as a specific type of memory for the virtual. The literary text is a container for forces and intensities that most of us struggle to perceive, store and retrieve. Because writers are tuned into these flows of intensity, for Deleuze, they are both indispensable and dysfunctional. In some ways, Deleuze is completing Freud's unfinished project on the psychopathology of great artists. Deleuze, however, does not share psychoanalysis's Hegelian legacy, in that he does not define desire as lack and dialectical confrontation. Following Spinoza, he posits desire as plenitude—that is to say, as overflowing generosity. Thus, the unconscious is not a black box of unretrievable passions, but a productive mechanism of storage and retrieval of forces beyond the immediate power of sustainability by our embodied brains and embrained bodies. No wonder, then, that the literary texts crack under the strain of formatting such flows of forces. It's a fantastic way of looking at literature as an intensity machine. Édouard Glissant

builds a whole poetics on nomadic relationality, but he writes in French, so who is reading him? We've had decades of postcolonial literature based on the British Empire, but what about the French tradition? From Aimé Césaire to the Fanon school, this tradition is unique and has been crucial for thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and for phenomenology. Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* is an entire reading of literature as a transformative machine—well worth reading.

Hence my disagreement with the mood of mourning and melancholia. It is simply the fatigue and depression of deconstruction. There is no mourning nor melancholia in the Deleuzian field at all: our keywords are affirmation and the transformation of negativity. Let me give you two examples. Take the Xenofeminist Manifesto, which is completely upbeat and the product of 30-something-year-olds coming out of materialism, accelerationism, media and science studies. They embrace contemporary sciences and new writing technology, telling us right to our faces what needs to be done [see 'After Accelerationism' 2015]. Their work is based on apps, on being in the real world. It's based on writing technology, geology, geography, labour relations, travel and space. They show that we need to shift the gaze a little bit, bring in a different repertoire and bibliography, and an affirmative, materialist politics can kickstart. Next example: Maria Alyokhina, of the Pussy Riot collective, after spending two years in Putin's prisons, is now free and has taken up more strongly than ever literature and cultural activism. She is writing literary texts and performing in experimental theatre, also in London. She is an example of what happens when we act in the world and for the world, using the text as a transformer or vector of intensity that conveys your relationship to the outside world, not the inside of the linguistic sign, that is the asphyxiation of the West. In May 2014, I joined a discussion in Oslo with Judith Butler and with Pussy Riot, who had just been released from jail.[2] Butler and I gave two very different papers at that event: I gave one on faces, anonymity and affirmation, and Butler spoke about mourning and violence. I believe that anonymity is a great factor in political movements today: the power of the mask as resistance against facial recognition algorithms recalls the role of 'faciality' in Deleuze. It is precisely about opening up and depersonalizing the political subject, making it nomadic and projecting it into the world. What I'm suggesting, then, is a different direction, towards affirmation. But political resistance doesn't have to be 'either/or', because theoretical approaches can be combined and exchanged. Can we make some room for alternatives, so that we have 'and/and'?

The strength of the literary text is that it can engage with the outside world and all its complexity—linguistic, geological, ethnic, biological,

2 This discussion took place at the First Supper Symposium at the Chateau Neuf Concert Hall, Oslo, 12 May 2014. A video of the talks and the discussion is available at www. thefirstsuppersymposium. org/index.php/en/ symposium-2014/video-2014.

political, technological and zoological. We need to open up and let the world in, starting from human diversity. For the British, with their literary canon and the legacy of empire, which means the global demographics of millions of people speaking and reading English, the task is to delink 'world literature' from English literature. But I would like to see this happening in all the other world languages: French, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese. They should all become nomadic or 'minor' and shed their imperial postures. Glissant would say: they have to embrace creolization and let the nomads in. It's happening a little bit, of course, with the revival of interest in indigenous epistemologies. Take decolonial theory in Latin America, where there's a whole school of critical theory working with Walter Mignolo, Gloria Anzaldúa, land rights and indigenous systems, without looking particularly at the anglophone canon. Even among anglophones, things are changing: Canadians and Australians don't have the same approaches as the British and Americans. I think we have to accept that high theory has had its day—especially in certain Ivy League departments—but this does not mark the death of a discipline. There is a whole world out there: the neomaterialist, the affective, the indigenous, the ontological turns are booming on. People are using new writing technologies, whether it's cartoons or apps, with nomadology's and Spinoza's intensities to make new theoretical frameworks and make new things happen. I find the nomadic 'and/and' approach revitalizing and energizing, and I would say there's no time for a crisis if you are trying to engage with new writing technologies that your era is making available to you. I'm pretty sure Jane Austen would have done the same. She would be blogging today—no question of that! And it wouldn't take much to insert Woolf into digital culture, because she already has the rhythms and the resonances. These literary classics were graphomaniacs—they wrote night and day—and that's why I think they would be active webbers and bloggers today, maybe even programmers. George Eliot is more conceptual, but she would fit in well with the algorithmic networks. Linda Lovelace did show us the way, after all!

So, though I don't want to make the issue of theory fatigue too simple, I think it's important to contextualize it, otherwise we'll miss the chance to reinvent critical theory and the practice of criticism at a time when we need it more than ever. We need to address the big issues of today, such as the Anthropocene, the climate crisis and the rise of illiberal governance. Ecocriticism should be at the heart and we should start from what literature, especially poetry, has to say to the planet today: we should open up. I know that's probably not acceptable to everyone in academia, but it should speak to creative minds and writers, and maybe to poets even more than the

novelists, because poets are immersed in the world. Deryn Rees-Jones is right in saying that poetry is an exploration of 'what it's like to be alive'. Poets condense intensity into as few terms and selected rhythms as possible: they are the mathematicians of everyday reality.

L. R.: *I think what you've mapped there is a whole new way in which nomadology can steer us in new and productive directions for literary studies, and not only for anglophone literatures. The way you talk about literary studies certainly looks outwards from the hermeneutic model in ways which unsettle the canon. So, minor literature can be poetry and high modernism, but also popular literature such as science fiction, which is something you explore in* Metamorphoses. *A nomadic approach to literary studies, then, has the potential to open out texts and make them into intensity machines that create connections between the text and the world, across disciplines and cultures?*

R. B.: Absolutely. We only have to look to Deleuze's *Essays Critical and Clinical* to see how that might work, especially in the ways he treats Melville, Kafka and D. H. Lawrence. He shows how they deal with 'chaosmotic' energy (a neologism borrowed and adapted from James Joyce), with variations of intensity and with the world. He also shows how they crack, if they crack, just a little bit and what it costs them. In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze argues that being slightly wounded, having some intimate experience with pain, helps one's critical intelligence. Cracking 'just a little' defies the bovine health of those whose sense of entitlement is never questioned. Reading literary texts is looking at the world through colliders: they are vectors or navigational tools. In this way, you *do* texts, so to speak. Rather than Melville, I'd *do* an Antonin Artaud to end once and for all with the image of the thinker as judge, to get rid of the judgement of God. You *do* the texts, and it isn't disrespectful, because you let the texts direct and diffract the flows, so that reading becomes an ethics of forces. George Eliot is the introduction to Spinoza; she was the first British translator, but people forget that, I fear. *Middlemarch* is in a way a translation of *The Ethics*; you can see how it's all about relationality for her—a flow of relations in which everything is connected, like a geometry of passions.

We need to introduce different approaches and defy theory fatigue, not because we disrespect current methodologies, but because the world is beaconing at us. In the age of the Anthropocene, we need all the help and inspiration we can get. So, let us move on a little bit and try something else. This would honour the resources of our literary giants. Virginia Woolf is ready to be reread this way.

L. R.: *So, just taking forward what you're suggesting here about going back to Eliot, back to Woolf, and working outwards to do texts in new ways: is this, then, also our cue as academics to begin to write in a different mode that captures that same intensity and effects transformation? I think that the way you write is quite self-consciously intense. You pay homage to Woolf at various points in your work, and I see that Woolfian influence coming through in your prose.*

R. B.: Indeed, and it breaks through more and more now that I'm older, because I can contain it and craft it more. Maybe it's also because now I can take the risks. I'm always very careful to say to my students that you need to read the first book that any of my generation wrote because that first book was the Ph.D. For me, it was *Patterns of Dissonance*; for Butler, it was *Subjects of Desire*; and for Liz Grosz, it was *Three French Feminists*. They are normal books written in a human language. Then come the second and the third books that often reflect the need to go beyond the tenure principle, to balance *potestas* and *potentia* because you can afford to do both. The experiments with philosophical texts go on: I've just put to press with Matthew Fuller a special issue on the posthumanities for *Theory, Culture and Society*, in which we explore the implications of the posthuman turn for the future of the humanities. It would make a great research programme. Let us imagine a fundamental humanities lab devoted to test the following hypothesis: what happens if we start from the premise that the function of a text is to connect us to the intensities that the writers have managed to craft and contain? How can we study texts as cartographies or 'wordsmanship' to contain and format intensities which are a mode of relation to virtual possibilities? How can we code ethically, with Spinoza's machinery, the posthuman subjects with the technologically mediated agency that affects their interaction? That way we study literature to give us terminologies and strategies to cope with what is happening today in advanced capitalism.

L. R.: *What other coping strategies do you think we should be adopting to counter advanced capitalism?*

R. B.: Universities have a great role to play, and I have a sense of trust in the critical and civic mission of the university. I would start with critical cartographies of the ways in which cognitive capitalism intersects with higher education, and of their impact on the humanities, which are the traditional location of critical counteraction. Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, give us the anatomy of global capital as a system that capitalizes on

and overcodes all that lives. The function of philosophy is to make sense of these operations in the real world and in our thought processes. That commitment to the material realities lies at the heart of Deleuze's philosophy of Life. That's quite different from deconstruction, which labours in the shadow of a psychoanalytic view of the symbolic as being unperturbed by the vicissitudes of history, as if we were stuck within the eternity of phallogocentrism. But as Deleuze tells us, this vision of the symbolic itself has a history. It is the result of a system of successive despotic codings and recodifications that stratify over time. The symbolic law has a history and an archaeology; by extension, this means that it will change over time. The unconscious is not outside history; it does not unfold in an immoveable space and frozen time. Deleuze and Guattari read the genesis of capitalism as a despotic or axiomatic regime and assess its impact upon our own subject formation. The fact that capitalism produces its own forms of possessive individualism, narcissism and paranoia, and controlled mobility is significant. Capitalism also engenders the displacement of the centrality of *anthropos*, in order to capitalize on all living systems, not just human labour. This biogenetic power makes it all the more urgent to devise analytic tools to allow us to make ethical and political distinctions between life sciences, a *zoe*-centred philosophy and biopiracy (to quote Vandana Shiva). We need to liberate the production of new life systems from the opportunistic political economy of corporations like Monsanto. By extension, we need to recast the humanities in the mode of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism, without falling along into the profit motive of cognitive capitalism—quite a balancing act.

No wonder, then, that many posthumanists will end up becoming neohumanists in terms of their norms and values. Take Nick Bostrom, for example—analytically a posthumanist, normatively a total humanist, who even claims the legacy of the Enlightenment. That's the winning combination in academic research today. You acknowledge there's a displacement of the human, say in the genome, stem-cell research, synthetic biology, brain research and the new robotics. Next you acknowledge that it's just a question of time before we merge into what the SF [Science Fiction] people call 'singularities', but you submit the process to the rule of a classical notion of scientific rationality.

My question is whether we can bring the new technological developments to bear on a vision of subject formation that respects and reflects complexity, diversity and multiple ways of belonging. Non-unitary subjects of a posthuman networked society are powered by rhizomes, not only by reason. Further, I'd like to bring our own capital of critical theory to play in this recomposition of the humanities today. With regard to the

Anthropocene, for instance, we talk about how we're going to change people's behaviour. How do we imagine that people are going to change their behaviour? How do people even have an apprehension of an abstraction like the Anthropocene? Through representations coming from novels, movies and television, disaster films and video games. It is the job of the humanities to explain that, because we are the cultural engineers and we know how the social imaginary works. The discussion with the sustainability experts is sometimes quite difficult. They tend to dismiss the humanities, and we're not helping our cause by not putting enough work into cooperation. We need to become policy advisors on the grand challenges of today: sustainability, ageing, security. We have a great deal to say on these issues, but often we're not institutionally encouraged to take them on.

In *The Posthuman*, there's my moment of pessimistic reading of what's happened to the humanities, of how we are being confined to a place where we will either become extinct or simply turn into a museum of the old culture. We're being outmanoeuvred into a corner. We're playing no role at all in policymaking. Japan closed down over 20 faculties of the humanities last year [in 2015], while it used to be a bastion of the classics. So, what's happening here? Well, we're all part of what's happening here. There is a paradox in this for me, because I have always been in the margins of academia, through my commitment to women's studies, gender studies and critical theory. We created our own institutions as we went, never really at home in a discipline. Judith Butler and I have written an article together on this, about how philosophy institutionally wouldn't touch us [Braidotti and Butler 2010]. We have more support today, but we've been homeless. So why, in view of that, would I care so much for a field—philosophy as practised in humanities faculties—that has so often been ungiving and even sadistic towards women and LBGT+? I acknowledge this paradox, and yet my heart bleeds when I see the cutbacks in funding and the shutdowns. At the same time, the field is not helping itself by choosing a self-referential approach that replicates a masculinist Eurocentric tradition.

On a more affirmative note, I imagine a redefinition of the posthumanities, the environmental humanities, digital humanities, medical humanities, but with a strong literary and cultural component, with some history there too. Without falling into despair, we need a serious modernization. We need vice chancellors who want to start to make productive changes by investing more in the humanities. That is not always easy, also because in the EU we have such a diversity of languages and cultural traditions. It now looks like disciplines and national literatures can go on as part of an extended museum of national history—a localized kind of

capital. But they would not need more than a couple of professorships per country and that is, I'm afraid, hardly a blueprint for future growth. The problem with English literature is that it is global, carried by the imperial legacy, and consequently it has a different epistemic weight.

I think the new materialism of nomadic thought would do quite an overhauling of it, in a sort of multidirectional spin towards creolized human diversity, on the one hand, and the non-human, the posthuman, the a-human, on the other. What nomadology would bring to it is some firm premises to reinvent the critical task as creativity—that is to say, as the invention of new ways of thinking about what we are in the process of becoming. Resisting firmly the push to be boxed into a nationalist frame of reference, we can reinvent the literary text as a navigational tool to undo notions of 'true' Britishness or reverence for the 'true' canon. To say that cognitive capitalism has no respect for the teaching of literature and culture and is killing the field, and to add to it the awareness that nationalism can be a survival route, however, is a very defensive and reactive reading. The point of my philosophy is to stress the quest for an affirmative approach. We need to hold on to the idea that the canon is a multiplicity and not a fortress that is cracked (just a little!). While the canon remains extraordinary, it is not unitary, as gender studies and postcolonial studies taught us. Moreover, it needs to be ferried across the new divides that advanced capitalism has installed: the Anthropocene divide, the digital divide, the post-democracy divide, the poverty divide, the dispossession divide etc., etc. We need to hold on to our tradition, in a non-Oedipalized manner, in order to renew it. And this at a time when anything too theoretical in culture and the arts has hit the walls of left- and right-wing populisms, which spurn rigorous method in favour of post-truth, post-democracy and neo-nationalist discourses. It is paradoxical to say the least to proclaim faith in the creative powers of critical reason at a time where falsehoods and 'alternative facts' control the political game—from the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent falsification of information exposed by the Chilcot report to Trump's USA, our politicians have lost the sense of even a minimum accountability for their statements.

Our students shouldn't get depressed but set themselves to become word craftsmen, literary engineers who make words matter in a world that liquefies everything because it's in meltdown. In other parts of the world, say in South Africa, the student movements are up and running with their calls: 'Fees Must Fall' and 'Rhodes Must Fall'. There is a whole movement in action there to try to rethink specifically the critical function of the university. It is a perfect model for experimenting with ways of injecting the capital of knowledge of the humanities into the posthuman conditions of

today. It's a concrete project, which I see as an experiment with thinking defined as the invention of new ideas and concepts. It all starts with the composition of a community that acknowledges and recognizes the problem: this is the making of a 'we' that is the subject of ethical and political change. Take a problem, then construct the assemblage, and keep working together.

The new humanities, which I call the 'critical posthumanities', have been instigating all kinds of new conversations between science and literature. Of course, you have the precedent of cultural studies and the Birmingham School, but that was firmly based on Hegelian philosophies of history and Marxist premises. Stuart Hall is an intellectual giant, though not a great friend of Deleuze. But that's a good starting point all the same; you can take it from there, and approach it, for instance, with the work that Gilroy and I accomplished together in the book we co-edited, *Conflicting Humanities* [2016]. We managed to assemble essays from key thinkers dealing with humanity as a species and the humanities as a discipline. This book is an attempt to take us in a new direction and to provide us with the tools for a defence of the humanities on new-materialist grounds. Gilroy takes a firm stand in favour of black humanism, while I go towards the posthumanities.

The legacy of Marxism remains central and quite problematic. Deleuze's analysis of capitalism as schizophrenic control of all that lives breaks from the tradition of fighting for a socialist revolution. Such reliance on a Hegelian philosophy of history is an antiquated reading of capitalism by now, because the twentieth century has shown us that capitalism doesn't break; it bends. And it bends because it's made by us, by our iPhones, by our everyday travel and consumerism: we are part of the problem. As consumers, we are immanent and not external to capitalism. That's why the politics of immanence always irritates the Marxists: it's so much easier to have a cut-off point and feel that you—the critical thinker opposing a certain set of conditions—are external to the problem. The point is that we're all part of it. Universities are in the middle of it as they've become major agents of cognitive capitalism. Our science parks, the patents we devise, and the ways we generate our income and knowledge are all part of it. Everything is research-driven because capital today is knowledge about life forms—codes in biogenetics and in informatics. That puts us, as professors, teachers and researchers, in a very difficult place. Stuart Hall saw the rise of neoliberalism and generated an incredibly incisive analysis, which we can take forward. I visited Welsh Street in Liverpool yesterday, and I couldn't believe my eyes. I didn't know the force of that genocidal devastation. And that's happened here, not only in the colonies. That episode should

be revisited in the light of where we're at today, to see what another type of vital cultural criticism—new materialism, nomadics, new Spinozism, new George Eliot-ism, whatever we want to call it—can do to excite and re-energize cultural critique. We need to open up resources so that we don't sink into this pulp of collective depression.

We need to ask also why we are so scared of monistic ontologies—that is to say, of interrelated material relations. Why do we have to cut things up? When I say 'we', I mean we in the humanities, because the contemporary sciences are not scared of monism at all; there is one matter and they know it. The mind is extended and consciousness is distributed. The life sciences and the information technologies are data-mining matter—its vitality and intelligence. They know there is one matter that is self-organizing and programmable. Right now we are in the human genome 3.0 and 'gene editing' has entered our language, which has some curious resonances with biosemiotics. There are so many levels to this if we take seriously what the life sciences are doing. In the absence of this dialogue between the humanities and the sciences, the life sciences and information technologies are absolutely contemptuous of what we do. To the hard sciences, what we do looks anthropocentric and nationalistic. They believe we shouldn't get the research money because we get it all wrong, as we're still confined by social constructionism. We still really believe that culture constructs nature and that gender constructs sex. Really! This is what I discuss in chapter 4 of *The Posthuman* [2013], where I consider whether we in the humanities are not really harming ourselves by these persistent beliefs. I know at the University of Liverpool you have a hub for the study of literature and science, and I really think that's the direction to take. But probably, with Brexit, you will be funded more to keep up the national heritage and the legacy of empire.

L. R.: *I completely agree with everything you're saying about how we have to be so mindful in the humanities and in literary studies of being co-opted to national isolationism. We're caught between that and between that endlessly adaptable transnational nomad of late capitalism. We're caught, as you say, in a difficult place. How do we navigate between these two? And I wondered, in light of Brexit, what you felt about the work that remains to be done by nomadology for a post-national identity in Europe? Is a post-national identity even something that is still possible?*

R. B.: For Europe—absolutely. Europe is a post-nationalist project; I concur with Habermas on this point. How far it goes into a political federation or not is a political issue. I've always been a federalist, from the age of 13. There's a sizeable political minority today who wants more political

union now that the British are out, because they feel we can do things that Britain has always vetoed. But there is also a militant side to the Brexit idea because Nigel Farage's stated goal—shared by his American buddy Steve Bannon and by Trump's friend Vladimir Putin—is to break up the EU. In Europe, many neo-nationalist movements, such as those headed by Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, scapegoat domestic issues by blaming Europe for everything. It is well known that Putin is funding far-right and far-left groups alike, provided they act against the EU.

There is, unfortunately, a staggering amount of historical amnesia. If you look even briefly at the history of the European Union, you will see that it's absolutely connected to the Second World War and to fascism: it was about disarming Europe and preventing any more Franco-German conflicts, which on two occasions escalated into world wars. But Britain never experienced historical fascism, and won the war. So Britain could not possibly share the main premise of forming the Union, which was to demilitarize and to make sure that European nationalism would never again cause genocide. Thus, Britain does not share the underlying historical and ethical premises of membership in the Union, and this sense of Britain being outside European history has been there all along. Brexit just makes things painfully clear. Where this goes wrong, in my view, is that this exclusion from the EU history prevents the British from seeing what is happening right now to their sociopolitical, but also psychic landscape. I am adopting Félix Guattari's threefold definition of ecology as a psychic, social and environmental term. There has been a lot of hubris since the Thatcher moment and beyond: the UK has built up a social system with great class disparities and a polarized society, much closer to America than to Europe, where we have a large middle class. The British infrastructure is in disrepair, and this disregard for the well-being of the average citizen feeds support for UKIP [the UK Independence Party], which, in turn, blames it on the EU instead of holding Westminster accountable for its policies. And like all fascist movements, UKIP plays the racist card, inciting hatred for foreigners and refugees.

We are seeing parallel but different social pathologies: what is it about the xenophobic neo-nationalists, in the UK as in the EU, and now also in the USA, that makes them unable to provide what Spinoza would call an adequate understanding of their condition? Why do they despise people like us—researchers who have been training all our life to be careful and informed readers of the social and symbolic signs of our condition? Any claim to 'post-truth' states of mind really bothers me. To stay with the UK for a minute: how can the British not see that this is a right-wing turn in policy by a minority yoking the people under a form

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of tyranny? Legally, a referendum is consultative, and a bunch of Tories are really manipulating the result of it to steer the nation as far right as possible. Why is this dismissed? Is it because there is an inadequate reading due to what Paul Gilroy calls 'postcolonial melancholia' [Gilroy 2004]? We see that plainly in those plans to rebuild the Royal Yacht and reinvigorate British imperialism. I think it's also a disavowal of the fact that Great Britain is a small island and that 50% of its trade nowadays is with the EU. People hold on to the heroic narrative of the Battle of Britain and the fact that they defeated Hitler, and think they will never let today's Germans tell them what to do. I think the Germans are taken aback by the animosity. Look at how Martin Roth, the director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, felt Brexit so personally that he had to resign, and Angela Merkel senses genuine dislike in Theresa May's speeches. Most in Europe were shocked. Like many Europeans, I don't want to believe that England is like this. I'm broken-hearted and in disbelief, although I had some insight into the dark side of the British colonial psyche from growing up in Australia.

To come back to the situation in the EU: how can the neo-nativists flatly repeat some of the worst chapters of our history? Let me borrow from Roberto Esposito's notion of 'immunity': we in Europe had the disease of fascism and, having been denounced and punished for it, we had to acknowledge the problem and constructed a first line of defence against it. This does not prevent repetitions, of course—we're in the middle of a wave of xenophobic neo-nationalism in Europe right now—but it puts them in a different frame. At least we can read the signs and call the problem by its name, which allows for the resistance to get organized. UKIP, on the other hand, is openly racist and anti-democratic, and is scape-goating local issues onto the EU, spreading lies and delusional fantasies to conceal Great Britain's deep dependence on the EU. Not having been immunized against fascism, the British are enacting it with almost candour and hardly any resistance: they seem traumatized into paralysis.

Both cases are about self-ignorance: Europe's populists (right and left) conveniently forget the anti-fascist origins of the EU and conceal the fact that the Union is *also* an attempt to construct a social democratic space to protect peoples. Brexit is the product of self-ignorance at some other level, and it lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading of disavowals and denials. By the way, I still have a very strong commitment to psychoanalysis. I practised it for seven years. I think it's an incredible philosophy of desire, and it's a tragedy that Deleuzians read *Anti-Oedipus* without knowing any of Jacques Lacan's basic theories; they don't understand how complexities are inscribed in our deep structures. To stay with affirmative nomadic ethics, we could say that there is a common-sense knowledge among the British that is

inadequate, which leads them to make a major relational mistake, to de-link and cut themselves off, to live under their own illusions. Psychoanalysis would call this delusionality. From a nomadic perspective, if the British confront it, they could open up rather than self-replicate in a shrinking space. That is a perfect example of what Deleuze would call a despotism, or micro-fascism—where a people shuts in on itself and denies the others. You refuse dialogue and issue orders. You emit axioms. I think Brexit is objectionable within the parameters of a nomadic ethics where affirmation means being able to relate and open up, because (it sounds counter-intuitive, but it does come from Spinoza) these are not psychological states, but modes of ethical relation. The key questions here are: how much difference and how much otherness can you take in? How much of the world can you engage with? Why are you simply talking to yourself? It's not about psychology, but about volumes of forces you can take in. If the people of Britain have spoken, then can the 48% who voted 'remain' be taken in or have only 52% really spoken? It's as simple as that. Brexit signals a problematic despotic turn, and in Europe we're really horrified because our populists are bad imitations of historical fascisms, and we can smell them a mile off, but they feel emboldened and legitimated by what is happening in the UK and in Trump's America. We seem to have lost the Atlantic alliance and no one in Britain seems to bat an eyelid at their own illiberal tendencies. Too few of the old Tories are suggesting this may be tyranny, but surely that is stating the obvious? Where is the left in all this? This is where the left-wing Eurosceptics enter the stage and join forces with the right, because for them the European Union is the epitome of neoliberalism. And Great Britain paradoxically isn't, I wonder? Extraordinary collusion of traditionally opposite political forces! It makes it harder to organize the resistance.

Of course, there is a lot of pain involved on all sides: in European populism, it is the pain of the inequalities engendered by neoliberal economics and austerity measures; in Brexit, it is the pain of people—mostly white—feeling socially dispossessed and marginalized. If the streets here in Liverpool are any evidence, then some of these people have been left to rot for decades. They draw some civic pride by embracing their national identity, by being 'truly' British. In both cases, nationalism or neo-nativism becomes a source of self-respect for wounded subjects, but that's an echo of 1930s Europe, so that's no way to go. The question is whether British exceptionalism will triumph and bar it from an adequate understanding of your living conditions, and whether the EU far right will learn from our shared European history. Maybe we should introduce courses on

fascism and postcolonial theory in the schools. What do you think, as someone in the middle of this mistaken national identity?

L. R.: *It seems to me that we keep trying to tell ourselves as a nation that we are multicultural, despite the fact that the majority have exhibited what we can understand as a 'postcolonial melancholia' by opting for Brexit. We're opting for a defensive insularism in times which demand a global outlook, and doing so in a way which makes Europe, as you say, a scapegoat and, at the same time, legitimates xenophobia. I'm thinking of yesterday's report of two men snatching the hijab from a 21-year-old British woman's head as she was walking along Tottenham High Road, North London ['Hijab "Pulling" Victim' 2016]. The media reports this to assert this is not who we are, and we're reporting on this as a symptom of Brexit, but I sense a double bind. These news items are reported almost as if to exonerate or atone for a pervasive and pernicious fear of difference and the now seemingly permitted reactive backlash to sever cross-cultural understanding and cut relations.*

R. B.: It's everywhere. We have this on the continent also, with the rise of xenophobia and fear of the refugees. But because of our historical precedents, there is also widespread resistance to that reaction, also from our politicians, who have to labour in the shadow of the moral and political legacy of historical fascism. Not so in the UK, but, of course, there are colonial precedents of British genocidal violence which new studies are now bringing out—in Kenya, for example—showing that they did not bring enlightenment to other cultures, but also violence, that empire is always a despotic exercise. There are multiple levels of self-understanding and self-knowledge in the critical exercise of thinking through fascism and colonialism. In some ways, all the roads lead back to the Second World War: look at *Dad's Army*—it's been running for practically 50 years. What does that say about the state of the collective imaginary? That we're fixated on exceptionalism. But I think it's worth repeating this idea of positive immunity; we in Europe have been immunized, and that gives us a hermeneutical grid of legibility. We can call its bluff and trigger resistance. It's much more complicated to react when you have a background of denial and 'postcolonial melancholia', because you have to strip several layers. Gloria Wekker is right in pointing to 'white innocence' as a key problem [see Wekker 2016].

Another aspect of the populist mindset is the negative world-view and general pessimism. Whether it is about the invading foreign hordes or the state of the economy or the decline of the West, they paint an apocalyptic picture. This is why more traditional conservatives—for instance, in the Netherlands, Prime Minister Mark Rutte—are making a point of encouraging the citizens, and especially the academics, to inject systematic doses

of optimism into Dutch society. There's a battle for the psyche of the nation, because nihilism is on the rise and should be contested. As an affirmative thinker, I actually agree with this take, but that is not the point; my point is that nowadays governance requires a high level of literacy about the state of the national psyche. This is one of the ways to defend pragmatically the need for an adequate understanding of the conditions of your existence. This is what is missing on the side of the neo-nativists, caught between xenophobic frenzy and flattering delusions.

Of course, populists will not take kindly to any academics telling them that they are reading this situation inadequately and making wrong decisions, but that doesn't stop us from resisting through our critical work. We can tell the Brexiteers that their position, based on mistaken premises, might lead to a Dubai on the Thames, with complete deregulation of wages and dropping living standards. That will be a repeat performance of the enforced devastation I saw on Welsh Street in Liverpool. To the neo-nationalist Europeans, we can point out the economic advantages of cultural and social diversity.

If only we could just balance the negativity and the melancholia—it can be 'and/and' rather than 'either/or'—with a dose of feminist relational ethics. Admittedly, that'd be sobering, like a vaccination or an immunity shot, and probably unwelcome, but it would be what we call critical theory as a clinical practice, detoxing us from negativity. We have to keep in mind that, as academics, we are civil servants balancing *potestas*—managing what we have—with *potentia*—inspiring what's possible. That's the balance everyone has to find for themselves, rather than sink into a listless depression. There is a job to be done here to inject a visionary, imaginative but not utopian energy into the world with words, texts, concepts, festivals and public engagements. We need to send out counter-codes.

My Deleuze seminar this year is on fascism, and I pointed out to the students that not one of them had asked me why I had chosen that topic. They laughed, which was an example of Nietzsche's tragic laughter. It was just too self-evident. We hope to generate work on micro-fascisms, and we've already managed to get people activated. The seminar works as a transformative switch to give students and teachers alike a purpose and a sense of what is possible. We cultivate together an affirmative, transformative ethics, so that it can get injected as an antidote and self-implemented in the world, in response to the successive attempts at devastation.

A nomadic approach demands a great effort of self-analysis, especially when it encounters feminism, which emphasizes the politics of location and immanence. You have to start from where you are at and acknowledge that you're part of the problem, and then read the situation from there to

become part of the solution. The left thinks this feminist politics of locations is cultural and not political, because for them politics is the dialectics of negativity. Too bad that the Marxist subject is still a transcendental entity that coincides with rational consciousness—a subject that knows exactly where history is going, waiting for the revolutionary break. That is completely different from what we're saying in nomad thought. We first need to compose a subject, a missing 'we'. That's why critical Spinozism, read with Deleuze, goes so well with nomadic feminism, with consciousness-raising and with understanding that all ethics is relational and the personal is political. Brexit is personal. It impeaches movement at an ideological and physical level, so we need to start from there and not from the fog of inadequate understanding. It's all there in Spinoza—and in George Eliot!

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