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esire for Change. Ein Gespräch zwischen Eva Bahovec und Rosi Braidotti

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Bahovec: In the recent past, psychoanalysis seemed to be a sort of symptom in processes of establishing Women's studies curriculums. To give a concrete example: as women's studies have been organized in Eastern Europe psychoanalysis strangely emerged as a point of horror, something which has to be eliminated. For us it is important because it was also ruled out and eliminated in the times of socialism, or of what Marcuse has called the Soviet Marxism. On the other hand, psychoanalysis might have a position comparable to feminism, as a subversive knowledge, in the academia.

Braidotti: It's a very difficult question, because it is several questions in one. About the subversive potential of at least the Lacanian psychoanalysis I agree completely, although institutionally that hasn't worked out that way, not for psychoanalysis and not for psychoanalysis in the university. Lacan was not exactly a magnificent example, he didn't exactly practise what he preached. He was as dogmatic and as autocratic and as chaotic as anybody else before. As for the ambition of subverting the discourse of university, it was a flagrant failure - this is a man who fired Luce Irigaray and proclaimed feminism a perversion. But I heartily support an inscription of the psychoanalytic knowledge in the university, if only we can figure out how. The only way that the discussion ever began was through the pedagogic angle - the teacher-student interaction, transference, transmission of knowledge. There was a period in the late seventies at the height of *écriture féminine* and psychoanalytic feminism, as I knew it in France where I was living at the time, where there was this question of the classroom as the laboratory of the forms of transferal knowledge, but it was very short-lived and proved impossible to canonize. Freud in a sense was more right than Lacan - there is a problem of the theorization of psychoanalysis, a real problem of formalizing even something as simple, and terribly complex, as the transference, let alone a code for decrypting and describing the interaction with the analyst or dreamwork. There is a problem in the translation - how do you translate psychoanalytic practice into theory?

I have a very intense link to psychoanalysis, I did it myself. In the eighties, I thought this would be something I would be going on doing in my life, but then I grew very disillusioned, because I couldn't solve this double thing I had in me: on the one hand, the desire for change, for real change and for making a difference, for transformation

in society. On the other hand there is the knowledge that the only real difference you ever make is upon yourself. Consequently, if you want to make a difference, go more deeply into yourself before you go more broadly into society. A meditative life as opposed to an active life: well, the active life won out for the moment. I am forty-three, maybe I can still go back to the other one in time.

But I have both an attachment to psychoanalysis and it is present in the work that I do on desire, the unconscious. It is there as a reminder not to operate a closure in the subject too quickly. For me the unconscious is the guarantee of the non-closure, that there is no coincidence between yourself and your conscious self, there is no coincidence between the consciousness and selfhood. The two things are split and they should be left open. Contradictions are not tragic, contradictions are productive. In my work, in the way that I write, there is a sort of joy in contradictions and in chaos. I don't feel threatened by fluidity of concepts, by things that are internally contradictory. I am not a clarity fetishist, I am not a rationalist by a long shot. On the contrary, I find messy things extremely joyful, while at the same time I try to be very precise and acute in describing them.

Bahovec: You were speaking of the difference between psychoanalysis as a kind of subversive knowledge and what it institutionally meant, with e. g. Lacan, or what happened historically. On the other hand you spoke about what psychoanalysis meant to personal psychology. But it seems to me you left out the whole issue of ideology and how ideology gets hold of you on the level of identity. Was not the most striking part of psychoanalysis related to the critique of ideology?

Braidotti: The two things are connected. The philosophies of difference - Irigaray, Cixous and Julia Kristeva - are the major deconstructions of the way ideology captures you and holds you to certain institutions of gender and sexual difference. The decline of psychoanalyses is relevant, although on the one hand it's still booming on and continuing in some very interesting ways. But the way it was dismissed has everything to do with the rise of American feminist theory. Lacan was completely right in saying that American psychoanalysis is nothing but ego-psychology. And all the American feminism is indebted to that - like Nancy Chodorow or Jessica Benjamin, they are really good, but this is not that practice of the unconscious as I learned it from Althusser and the classical Lacanian move. It's certainly not the critique of the imaginary, let alone the way we move from subjects of desire to consumer fetishism. At one particular point Jackie Rose said in the late seventies that the Anglo-Saxon feminism repudiated the unconscious and braced the strong ego. And that shows in everything that has happened since

I am not surprised that the East-West Network dismisses psychoanalysis. I don't know anybody who works seriously with psychoanalysis, except Teresa de Lauretis, who is Italian anyway, and who is working with Freud, not with Lacan. There is something about the American vs. the European psychoanalysis, the ego-psychology vs. the deconstruction of the self, the undoing of the ego in the Lacanian enterprise, connected with consumer fetishism etc.

Also the attack of lesbians and black women was extremely important, and in both cases very doubtful, this is my feeling about it. But lesbian women say this is heterosexist - mostly very vocal American women with a strong sense they have to assert their identity, their identity as a lesbian - using identity as a noun, not as a verb, which is so fundamental to the psychoanalytic enterprise. This may lead to a disaster, a set of identity politics as a consequence. And a lot of black women saying that the structure of the self in psychoanalysis is completely drawn upon the western industrialized tradition, which doesn't take into account different types of family organization which one can find in black families in the States and in other cultures. To which a lot of African feminists added that psychoanalysis shared with a lot of western philosophy a notion of the individual that is derived from the Enlightenment. And, what do you do when you come from a cultural and religious tradition and belong to a group where you have the notion of the individual collectively defined? And you also have the Asian criticism along those lines. They can even claim that they have a practice of the unconscious of their own - through meditation, through dreamwork, through rituals - and all we have in the West is the practice of the unconscious through psychoanalysis, and that is contaminated by the worst of European metaphysics. These are the reasons why it has been disqualified.

Bahovec: But the same counter-argument would be true also for other domains of knowledge. After all, the whole of modern philosophy and science derives from the Enlightenment.

Braidotti: I am talking about the decline of psychoanalysis as a historical event, I don't at all share this position on it. I think that the insistence on the practices of the unconscious is crucial to prevent, among other things, feminism from asserting the dogmatic essentialized feminine counter-subject. And also to explain our continuing engagement in the very structure we are trying to fight. And I want pleasures and desires to be very central, to have these fluxes of energy, something that makes you want to put wings on your feet, not just to have that heaviness of the negative presence of oppression, of victimization. I want it to be an empowering thing at a very

deep level that gives you back joy in living. Desire at a very ontological level for me is crucial. Whatever practice gets you to reconnect to that is fine. For me psychoanalysis is about how you are connected to that - I believe you may also do it through meditation and other things, I am a pluralist, but for me psychoanalysis remains crucial:

Bahovec: Perhaps you could now move to the category of the nomadic, so central in your recent work, which in a way can also figure out how to cope with the problem of feminism and psychoanalysis. So: the feminist as a nomadic subject, what does this mean?

Braidotti: The metaphors of displacement, whether in space or in time, are very common in all the literature concerning the oppressed, women included. You yourself spoke of Virginia Woolf as an outsider, but you can go back and find metaphors of exile as early as Medea. The woman in exile, the displaced woman is a topos. So in a way there is nothing new in the concept of nomadism, I have rented a concept, I borrowed it and adapted it. What I wanted to do was to address the question of the glocal economy, the glocalization processes, the fact that we are living in a world that is organized through scattered hegemonies, through processes of fluctuation, where a great deal of the institutions that governed the production of both knowledge and wealth in the early part of the twentieth century are over. Family and state being just two, and family and nation-state as principles of economic organization are simply gone. We didn't destroy this, Marxism didn't destroy this, the advanced capitalism did. It's capital itself that has produced these effects.

Here the Deleuzian reading is terribly important, I am talking about 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia'. So if we are living in a world like this, if we are people who travel with technologies, go to our European meetings, who have portable phones and answering machines, fridges and microwaves, if we live this way we'd better start thinking in categories that are adequate. The idea of an adequate representation, thinking with Deleuze who thinks with Spinoza, is absolutely crucial. One of the things that strikes me about feminism, but about other social theories as well, is how antiquated they are, how they are using completely old-fashioned definitions of ourselves - because that's what the university favours, because that's what institutions of science favour - but in reality we live in fluxes of displacement which are quite unique in history, quite new, and we live with them quite well. It's not that we are in a state of perennial schizophrenia, although this is the horizon within which we are moving. So I am denouncing the poverty of our system of representations, where we tend to be threatened by anything that suggests that we are living in a state of displacement and constant flux. So the choice of nomadism was

addressing this problem, the glocal dimension is crucial to it and very much at the center of the new book I am finishing at the moment.

Displacement for women, exile, absence of a certain history - so the connection to feminism is through woman as the outsider, woman as not there, woman as symbolically absent. This has been often related to the images and metaphors of either travelling or moving or wandering - l'errance, as they say in French. Meandering, the labyrinths through which the poor female subject, like Ariadne, is going, and you know what happens when the Minotaur gets you. There is the sense of the symbolic lack, the woman as not there, which has been often rendered through metaphors of travel and displacement. I have made in the new book a whole list, a cartography of different positions one can draw from this type of displacement in the age of the global economy, where among the figures of displacement you have the illegal worker, the war refugee, the sexual slave, the au pair girl that turns out to be a murderer or a victim - you have figures of itinerant workers within the category of women that are quite historically specific, and there are many of them. There has already been a cartography of diaspora, cartography of the split, geographies of differences, it has now become quite a field of research in social and political theory.

By choosing nomadism I am making a specific intervention, I am first of all addressing a certain tradition which is philosophical rather than social theory, I am really going back to the Nietzschean legacy, through Deleuze again, and back to presocratics almost - the idea that the opposition nomadic vs. sedentary is absolutely crucial. I am addressing what the official history of philosophy doesn't want to know. I am also addressing the idea of 'fortress Europe' as something that tends to be very static and not nomadic. I am addressing the notion that philosophy has not been able to theorize the fluxes of desire that I am so attached to and that I think feminism cannot do without.

There is an unamendable internal staticity in philosophy that is really incredible - this discipline cannot take in psychoanalysis, they are mutually exclusive, with the exception of Deleuze who is in my opinion *the* philosopher of desire. But by the time he finished his work there isn't much psychoanalysis left, there is a different theory of subjectivity - but that is a different question. I am addressing these issues by showing that within these disciplines there are alternative traditions which haven't been developed enough, which give us a way of continuing doing philosophy. It doesn't need to be done with Heidegger and Hegel, you can do it with different sources as well.

there are enough foundations there to start a new tradition. So it is not the end of philosophy, the end of theory, there is another way of doing theory, you don't need the attachment to the rationalistic mind, you can do rhizomic philosophy, you can do energetic philosophy, you can do libidinal philosophy.

Bahovec: You were speaking about Deleuze as the main philosophical reference on which you rely. What about Foucault - since you started with him, didn't you?

Braidotti: Yes, I went to Paris to study with him in 1977 with a scholarship, because I was so taken with his work. I was trained fundamentally in the history of philosophy. My teacher in Australia, where I spent a great part of my life, was Genevieve Lloyd who later wrote the famous book *The Man of Reason*. When I knew her she wasn't writing the book yet, she was just a wonderful young teacher, and her passion for the history of philosophy was something that she passed on. She taught Foucault in her classes of the history of philosophy. I was so excited that I took a PhD scholarship to Paris to study with him, although he didn't take students, but I went to his courses at Collège de France. Well, he was not remotely interested in women in any way - he was actually very androcentric and not nice at all, but that didn't matter. I got from him a certain reading of the history of philosophy, and then I got more and more frustrated with his project, which had partly to do with my attachment to psychoanalysis. He is in my opinion somebody with a perverse relationship to psychoanalysis - with the harsh denial of it, although he is constantly addressing it, both as an institution and as a set of concepts. His *History of Sexuality*, although unfinished, is really a point by point dialogue with psychoanalysis - on transference, on the concept of phallus, on the question of pleasure - it is ridiculous, I think there is a fundamental dishonesty in the way he did this.

So already in my second and third year in Paris I started to go to Deleuze's seminar, which was a completely different scene. Deleuze very quickly convinced me that this was the philosophy I was looking for, as opposed to an analytic or a critique which I consider Foucault as having done. But in terms of intellectual caliber, the one who has countered philosophy with desire and subject is definitely Deleuze. I find that Foucault ages rather badly, whereas Deleuze grows better with time. When you read *Différence et répétition* now, you can see it's an incredible text, it's so spot on. Or if you read *Mille plateaux*, which I think is the reading of the global economy in the philosophical key - the power of the vision is just extraordinary. He works with nomadism, I borrowed this from him, but his great achievement is to say - this is not antithetical to philosophy, it's in fact at the heart of it,

it's still the great philosophical tradition, although not the dominant one. (...)

Bahovec: Your statement is 'history rather than anatomy is destiny'. You started with the history of philosophy ...

Braidotti: I am always interested in historicising the concepts that I work with in the sense of knowing where they are coming from and what kind of business you can do with them. But this particular statement is also a strategic one. People who ignore history are condemned to repeat it - you remember that great insight of Nietzsche. I think that the people who are not aware of the history of concepts are condemned to repeat the mistakes that the concepts may contain. And since my favourite concept is difference, which is as loaded, as saturated, as contaminated as any concept can be - if you are going to work with it, you'd better get some genealogical perspective in the picture. I believe in the power of repetition, of going over things, revisiting things, redoing and undoing them, but repetition to engender difference requires memory, retrieving and a commitment to change - retrieving so that you can make a difference. If you don't know the history of the concept you are working with, if you don't know your own location, where you are coming from, you can't engender positive repetition, you only repeat blindly. Then it's the negative mimesis and not the affirmative mimesis, the one that can make a difference.

I am concerned because in the eighties throughout Europe amnesia set in. We are living in an amnesiac society in the West - I don't know how it is in your country. People don't have any memory - my students think that Simone de Beauvoir is a sixteenth century mystique, they think that women had the right of vote with the French revolution etc. There is an acceleration of oblivion that people like Baudrillard and others have talked about. There is a problem with retaining a historic memory of anything, whether it is Marxism or psychoanalysis or feminism or the nation state. Advanced capitalism is committed to erasing and effacing our memory, so the struggle to keep a historical memory is for me a very major one - the memory of the traditions and the movements that we are coming from. The struggle about whose memory counts as *the* memory is the struggle of late post-modernity. So remembering historical locations, revisiting, going back over things, repeating is a strategic move as well as a cognitive one.

Bahovec: On the other hand, you have a tradition in feminism of thinking back through our mothers, as a kind of fantasy through which you might start to build a new tradition. You can think about

'Shakespeare's sister' that Virginia Woolf talked about: perhaps the most important thing is that she didn't exist. So on the one hand we have this digging through history in order to find real women who were important. On the other hand it's perhaps very important to have this fantasy which actually doesn't start with a real person, the emptiness which causes desire to go back.

Braidotti: I agree completely. In order to think back, you've got to have some anchoring point, a positive figuration, whether it is the idea of Shakespeare's sister, or the idea of repossessing Medea, repossessing classical figures. Another well-known feminist strategy is Cassandra. You repossess what is there and give it a different content, you need a sense of belonging to something in order to go back to it, as a productive fiction. It is not the same thing as positing a universal feminine subject, it is quite the opposite - positing the constitutive outside that is suitable to what you are trying to do as a feminist, which is to empower the presence and the intelligence of women. We've worked a lot with productive fictions in feminism. In another way, the cyborg is a productive fiction and the nomad is also a productive fiction. I am not talking about real empirical nomadic people, I am

talking about the visions of the self and the shift within the self.