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ÅÃ³dz, Poland, late August 2006 is the setting for what is the height of an exchange between two of feminism and gender philosophy's most influential writers of the past 10 years: a public exchange that began in the form of interviews (published in *Feminism meets Queer Theory* in 1997) in the early 90s and continued between the books that both women wrote. I am of course referring to Rosi Braidotti, the emphatic and self styled nomadic philosopher and everyone's favourite queer darling, Judith Butler.

The exchange is compelling to say the least - if we amplify the title of Butler's own keynote address to the conference - *Tension and Alliance* - by 1000 levels of intensity, you may gain an idea of what it is like perceiving Braidotti's philosophical attacks on the sovereignty of the Butlerian reign over gender studies, as her speech energised the audience by storming through the terrain of her affirmative ethics in what she described as the post secular mood of the day. Judith Butler, a truly diplomatic thinker is however no bridge burner as she jokingly shrugs off Braidotti's verbosity as a gesture of their dynamic relationship - it is ultimately - a loving antagonism - she asserted to the audience.

Relationships are what are central to both thinkers writing of late, that is why it is so compulsive to see the exchanges in action at what seems like a necessary turning point in the questions of knowledge that feminists are using to understand the world. While Braidotti offers many a creative leap from which the emotionally aware, activated person can interact with and transform the world, Butler remains concerned with grounding her thought within the politics of recognition, namely what counts as a human or grievable life in the world, and a steady commitment to non violence as the forefront of any responsible feminist position in the world today. While Braidotti may be keen to demonstrate that her flows and codes exist within a different part of the post structuralist philosophical possibility, I believe I can discern one obvious site of convergence that their thought shares: namely the time both writers take to focus on the ethical questions of relation or how we relate to the -other- as the most striking ethical problematic of our cultural epoch.

Why is this the most striking philosophical problem in this day and age? That is, how can we relate to each other in the most positive way that allows for the most creative, constructive, sustainable, nurturing interaction and with the least degree of violence as possible, psychically, bodily, socially? At the moment our structures of relation are riddled with tension but remain within a largely static framework. In the most obvious sense we live in a world structured by binary oppositions where the -other- is the alien of the -them- variety, something we need to expurgate from our bodily politic, draw secure borders against so that we can remain pure, unsoiled.

Or our relationship to the other is structured by dehumanising power relations presented to us within the gendered, raced, classed, sexualised, able bodied domain of the global capitalist economy. These structures often preclude any possibility of a transformative relationship to otherness due to the saturation in hierarchical patterns, thus neutering much micro political rupturing that may be entertained by a person aware of her/ his agency to impact on the world around them.

What I am saying is that if we look at the discourses that structure our immediate political reality — most strikingly the discourses that surround T.W.A.T (the war on terror) we can see how this war is a condition of the discursive poverty of erroneous relations that we do not, of course!, have to affirm by perpetuating its reductive logic, but nonetheless these structures hold enormous sway over how we can think of relating to each other.

What Braidotti and Butler, in their different ways, offer the reader are some very different tools from which we may construct, navigate and implement in short think about / but thinking that moves from the mind through the body to a threshold that does not recoil but breaks a little as the body becomes a porous landscape of possibility — our relationship to what may seem terrifyingly different from us: the other.

I will start with Braidotti: she posits, (following Deleuze and Guattari) that the encounter with otherness is one of possibility, a transformative threshold through which new configurations will occur. Throughout her work she presents an ethics of affirmation that continually foregrounds the positivity of such an encounter. Much of Braidotti's latest book *Transpositions* offers a convincing critique of anthropocentric thought — the philosophical habit that places the human at the heart of our cultural organisation and investigations. Once we displace the human — itself an exclusionary category that only admits a privileged number of humans (some people are human, but some are more human than others, as the saying goes) we can begin to think through our relationships differently.

Thus Braidotti's ethical project does not end with one person's encounter with another person, it extends to animals, the environment — the vital life forces she calls *zoe* — as well as the technological machinery of the 21st century. This repositioning of the human in relation to the vital and technological forces in an interconnected, collectively conscious manner will allow for, she argues strongly, more sustainable and mutually affirmative relations between the inhabitants of the earth. If we change how we relate to each other, how we behave to each other, this could change the world for the better. Thinking here is an action and radical changes are possible within this framework of transformative ethics. Without going too deeply into Braidotti's work (I suggest you read *Transpositions* in order to engage further) it is possible to draw a parallel, or — alliance — with the concerns expressed for an awareness of how we relate to each other by Judith Butler's latest books *Undoing Gender*, *Precarious Life* and *Taking an Account of Oneself*, it was also the subject of her keynote address in ÅÃ³dz.

Butler's writings present a different conceptual ethical tactic to Braidotti as her work emerges from the politics of recognition and unlike Braidotti, remains firmly encased within the anthropocentric landscape of the human. That is she is concerned to explore what counts as a human — thus as a viable and properly grieve-able life within our public global consciousness. An American who was keen to stress how her speaking location coloured her ability to make suggestions/ interventions in this field, she used the example of the people the US/ UK state has used reactionary and devastating violence against in the name of liberation, democracy and modernity as people who were not granted admission into this category of worthwhile human life. As a queer theorist/ activist whose consciousness was deeply shaped by the AIDS pandemic in the 80s, she also mentioned the millions who were dying of this disease and how they were also not granted the privilege of the human life.

Like Braidotti, it is this question of how we relate to each other, that is those who are different from us, that she sees as the key ethical, relational moment where we can change a negative relation, that in its extremity can end in devastating violence, into a positive one that Butler suggests could be achieved by rethinking the domain of the human and human-ness, and also by not knowing what form — the human — may take in the future. For people reading this the category of the human may seem like a self-evident thing — right!? But the groups of people the human has excluded is vast and numerous:

black women and men, women, working class people, disabled people, homosexuals, gender deviants and all those that are other to the white middle class male of Descartes, liberal humanist variety. So to include these groups within a terrain of humanity â that is a life worth grieving in Butlerâs terms, a life worth valuing in mine â is the ethical necessity that befalls us a responsible and compassionate global community that is conscious of how our actions impact on everyone and everything that resides here.

Reading Butler alongside Braidotti has a rather humbling effect as Braidottiâs flows may be tempered by the Butlerâs investigations into the ethics of relation. While I am deeply drawn to Braidottiâs presentation of ethical possibility, Butlerâs strength lies in that she explores these issues and presents them in a political language that more people will understand or at least will find palatable â she does not shift the structures as far as Braidotti. Butler uses a political language that is recognisable to people thinking within the current structures of thought, but something is never good just because it is recognisable. However it may provide a useful starting point and as an anchor to transformations as they will have to occur if we are going to in any way change how we relate to each other and turn negative into positive behaviours.

By taking a look at how Braidotti and Butler interact there is a lesson to be learnt both from their writings and from their relationship: the dialogues they have produced on how to build and sustain a creative critical language that develops strategies on how to challenge, and in Braidottiâs case provide alternative frameworks to, our current negative repetitious patterns of relation that result overwhelmingly in war, violence and exploitation. Both writers offer the reader what Braidotti would call âcartographies of hopeâ as hope in their writing becomes not just a fleeting breath or empty wish but an active and empowering force in a political landscape that often seems to be devoid of any hope at all. They offer these strategies as our collective ethical possibility and as our potential too.

Read !!!

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Rosi Braidotti *Metamorphoses*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2002

Judith Butler *Undoing Gender* London: Routledge 2004

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Judith Butler *Giving an Account of Oneself* Fordham: Fordham University Press 2005