

Interview

Feminism, Politics, Theories and Science

Which New Link?

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ABSTRACT Are women's movement and feminist theories still connected to radical politics and the interest in changing social inequalities, when feminism has been 'institutionalized', for instance in the academia, and has become a mainstreaming issue in social policies? This main question was put to eminent feminist scholars, with the aim of investigating the renewed critical role of international feminism and women's/gender studies in society, science, information, education and research. A reconstruction of the main changes which have occurred to women's movements and feminist theories in the last decades were the core of the interview, stressing differences and disagreement, also in relation to the new sociopolitical claims, supported by younger generations. The conclusion was that feminism has not lost its historical political mission, even though the world scenario and ideologies have dramatically changed. Indeed, feminism has become transcultural and 'glocal', facing new socioeconomic inequities induced by globalization both in western societies and countries in development, confronting with the transformation of collective/gender identities and questioning the increasing importance of (bio)technologies.

KEY WORDS body and technologies ♦ feminist research and theories ♦ gender identities ♦ globalization ♦ history of women's movements ♦ international feminism ♦ politics ♦ science ♦ women and countries in development ♦ women's/gender studies

Q: What does feminist research mean, nowadays? Since its beginning, feminism was meant as a social movement, having political tasks and achievements. Feminism seems now to be more strictly connected to academic research and

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institutions. What does this mean? Is feminism becoming less political and more theoretical? Is it still a social movement with political aims or is it simply becoming a field for university research?

All participants: No! No! No!

Scott: First of all it seems to me that the notion that there isn't any political or social movement is wrong. And it is also wrong to say that academic research isn't attached to it. The example I can offer is in fact the research that I'm currently carrying out on le Mouvement pour la Parité in France, which started up in the late 1980s. It demanded equal representation for men and women in political parties as well as in political office. There is now 'parité' at least in the lists for municipal, regional and European elections: you must have half women and half men, and ensure that women aren't at the bottom of the list, while men are at the top. Therefore, for every six names, three are women. This is an example of feminism as a political movement. Many criticisms have been made against it, but we have to recognize that it was successful in that it increased women's access to politics and political representation. Yet its demands were tied to feminist research issues, which were at stake both in France and elsewhere. For these reasons, I don't think that it's correct to accept the idea of a separation between feminist research and the political movement.

Q: Taking your argument, could we say that feminism as a political movement is also changing in relation to institutions?

Haraway: It depends on one's viewpoint. It is certainly true that liberation movements and social movements of all sorts have gone through periods of crises and deconstruction. Feminism is no exception to that. However, my point of view takes into account a broader diversification, differentiation and interaction among social movements. Feminist movement shapes large segments, for example, of contemporary environmentalism and political work in information-based workplaces. I know about this trend thanks to colleagues working in science studies. In this particular area of academic and professional research, there is for sure a very strong feminist area of work. We can see in the areas of software design companies and the information sciences how feminism has been differentiated. In many ways, feminist politics has matured, but it has also missed out on some of the aspects of the earlier mass social movement. Yet I think that it is a terrible mistake to reduce the sum total of social movements down to just those mass forms which were so prominent in the 1970s. Moreover, I think that the institutionalization of women's and gender studies in the academy is a terribly important area for reproducing and transforming feminism. Indeed, young feminists reinvent feminism continuously in their work, in cultural performances, arts, scholarships, politics. Therefore, I consider it a mistake to consider women's studies –

which became very successful when institutionalized – as a field in opposition to politics and political activism.

Braidotti: I also disagree with the initial question. I live in Holland, in the Netherlands, so I am a European, from the North. Therefore, the way in which I would define, for instance, what is social or what is political is from a distinct perspective. In response to the initial question, I would argue that feminism is not just a field of academic research – it is not *even* a field of academic research. It hardly exists in a great many countries south of the Alps. So, we are talking about something which is still very transgressive, still very interdisciplinary, still hardly institutionalized, certainly in a country like Italy. But even if you go to France, it is not that much better. The same goes for Greece. Maybe it is better in Spain. So, you are looking at something which is still attempting to take shape in an institutional frame, where the university itself also has great difficulty surviving as an institution, simply to justify its own existence. With the Treaty of Bologna and the directive to increase bachelors and masters courses, we were really being asked to turn universities into training centres. Yet there is no money for research. All the money is spent on kinds of contractual obligations. Being a professor in northern Europe means that you bring into your university a third if not a half of the budget required for your programmes. This is no better in the UK. Look at the managerial transformation of the universities. On the one hand, they seem more open to the development of socially oriented interdisciplinary market-wise areas of study, but on the other hand they are a disaster for a medium that would be socially, truly and politically relevant in the old-fashioned sense. Therefore, I would put the issue of younger feminists and the renewal of feminism within a broader institutional crisis, which appears enormous in European universities. Moreover, there are two other points: the crisis also involves the definition of concepts, like the ‘social’ or the ‘political’. I mean, what would we define as social in an age of information, telecommunication, electronic frontiers, post-industrialism and globalization? Is there an explosion or implosion in the field of the social? It does not make it any easier for renewing feminism. This consideration also concerns the political. I see among the students and young women we are training a great desire for the political, but also a huge question forming: ‘What shape could it actually take?’ in an age where so many transformations are taking place.

Q: Has feminism become a global movement?

Scott: Indeed, we have to recognize that in the last few years an institutionalization of the feminist movement across borders has taken place. Therefore, we do not have to only consider women’s studies programmes, but also mention the role of NGOs. They respond to the United Nations proclamations and directives about women’s human rights, which came

out of years of conferences devoted to women. Political concern about women is taking place in the universities, in NGOs, in relation to the UN policies. This concern puts pressure on governments to collect information and promote social policies, to conform to the UN directives. The issue of women is therefore more complicated than we think. And the 'institutionalization' of women's issues, which had before been left outside the institutions, changes possibilities for representation and inclusion.

Tagliavini: I would also add that the way in which 'institutions' are considered here seems to be incomplete. Indeed, starting from the 1970s feminism in southern Europe as well as in other countries of the South of the world has built up its own institutions, centres of documentation, archives and libraries. A recent study (presented at the 'KnowHow' Conference in Amsterdam in 1998) estimated that there are about 170 libraries of this kind throughout the world. These 'places' differ one from the other in their different institutional features and the sociogeographical contexts in which they were constituted. Yet they produce an extraordinary mass of information and documents, promoting all kinds of activities. Furthermore, they play a basic role in encouraging aggregation among different generations of women. And this – as we once used to say – is 'already politics'. However, it is a form of politics which often operates through new communication technologies, which produces research always in strict contact with the civil society and various social actors. So, I believe deeply in the innovative role that these 'mixed' places, created by feminists over years, can play nowadays in society.

Q: How do you think that feminist issues could become central questions for the political agenda in the new millennium? Or do you think that women's topics will become a mainstream question, diffuse and promoted by political institutions?

Haraway: What counts as political subject is very much at stake in real practice. If the image we have of the political subject is only some kind of coherent representative of the working class, if this is somehow our archetype of what counts as a political subject, then we will miss most of what is going on in politics in the century we are living in. But an alternative to that is not simply the dispersed political subject that is anybody, anywhere. Perhaps the geometry we should apply to think about the political subject is much more along the notion of intersectionality or conjunctual subjects, which have been given to us primarily in anti-racist feminist work. The insistence has been put on the analysis of simultaneously lived multiple systems of privilege as well as repression. Subjects produced themselves in their action, in relationship to coalitions, projects and programmes. A political subject does not exist as such; the conjunctual action produces its political subjects, who are

bound in various kinds of network alliances. Therefore, if you start to talk for example with 500 feminists who met for the conference in Bologna today, you can also start to trace the networks they constitute at their workplaces. But you can find also a thick, rhizome-like transnational feminism, which has grown and is conjunctual and layered both in time and space. And what we see is a much better geometry. Subjects are made in their situatedness. I do think therefore that a specific kind of imaginative politics has been one of the most relevant contributions of feminist theory. In particular, anti-racist feminist theory attempts to and tends to point out the different national positioning of subjects and the different ethnic positioning, in relation to lived sexual difference. You cannot have 'woman' as a political subject, because it just won't wash!

Tagliavini: Yet I do think there is still a lot to do. We have to work for including gender issues and perspectives in the political agenda both at the national and international level, as was clearly argued during the World Forum in Beijing in 1995. We cannot forget that women still remain disadvantaged individuals in many ways: it is not only a matter of poverty, but also of health and education. And this problem concerns not only countries in development, but western countries as well. Therefore, we have always to maintain a dual approach in our reasoning: on the one hand feminism has gained a lot over time thanks to its struggles, but on the other a lot of questions still remain open.

Q: Could you please clarify once again the political vision which feminism is going to assume? Are you rejecting a connection between feminism and social democracy? Indeed, the workers' and women's movements have been the most radical sociopolitical transformations in the last century. Could we argue that there is a decline of these two subjects – workers and women – because they have accomplished their main goals, achieved their institutional aims – a better welfare state and a fairer condition for women? Or do you reject this vision?

Haraway: These goals have not all been accomplished. I am thinking about the transnational sex trade, about the condition of women and children working in sweatshop industries all over the world, including Los Angeles and San Francisco without doubt, not just Manila. These goals are far from having been accomplished, whether they be the traditional goals of social democracy or feminism. They have hardly begun to be accomplished and they have only been modestly institutionalized in some areas.

Braidotti: I come from Frilly – in the northeastern corner of Italy – therefore, regarding the question of workers' movement, we can ask: 'What is a worker in the third millennium in the northeast of this country?' It's an interesting question, isn't it? The working class has been conflated with notions of ethnicity, immigration, partial citizenship and flexibility, which means structural insecurity. So, we cannot say that the workers'

movement is not there, because it is – it is the cleaners in McDonald's on zero wages . . .

Scott: I think that the dissociation of the political subject from the historical context in which he/she is working is a big mistake. Therefore, you could say that the 19th-century subject of politics – workers, women and the suffragettes maybe of the 20th century – fulfilled their goals, so that now there is nothing left to do. That leaves out the historical and economic context they worked or are working in. What Braidotti is describing is the transformation of economics and politics, which makes these subjects outdated as a way of making a set of political and social demands. What we have been saying is that we are now in a situation in which traditional forms of political organization and political subjectivity are no longer adequate for addressing the questions of race, ethnicity, global capitalism, new forms of technology, new uses and understandings of the body, and so on. Something else is required, different from what worked in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Q: So, the answer is 'no' because we have a new political agenda at stake.

Braidotti: It's a new world.

Haraway: . . . based on different problems.

Mitchell: I agree with what has been said. However, I think it's also very important to emphasize the specificity of the position of women within the question you asked. Actually, in England the number of women at the lowest level of economic insecurity is increasing; their financial situation is becoming worse. Lone mothers are worse off than the working-class or unemployed groups. A single category of poverty is related to the lone mother. This happens in the first world. Other questions, which we don't think about when we talk about 'globalization', and I find horrific, concern the fact that there is actually an increase in mortality and malnutrition. So, while western countries are getting more prosperous, children are dying and becoming malnourished in increasing ways in other countries – even in those getting richer. I refer to the work of a colleague and friend in Ghana, who is an adviser for women's issues for the ILO. She looked at globalization, considering it in the context of what has happened to women and children. Now if women's children are dying in increasing numbers, as wealth increases, it says something about the condition of women. Studying early industrialization, historians pointed out that the changing patterns of women's work transformed patterns of mortality for children and of the size of families. What is happening now is that women's work is changing; a greater part of them are going into the towns to work, changing also the nature of women's agricultural work; and if they are not at home, they are not there to breast-feed the child. Breast-feeding is going out, Nestlé's milk is coming in. The point is that this is dried. But dried milk uses water, which needs to be purified, which

is not the case, of course, with breast-milk. Purification in these conditions is difficult and dangerous. And there's not enough water. Another factor is that there is no natural contraception going on during breast-feeding, or cultural contraception from no sex while breast-feeding. So births are becoming much more closely spaced and therefore there is much less infant care. These questions are also very related in the first world to the issue of single mothers, lone mothers, while in the developing world they are connected to women's changing work patterns. So there is a link, I think, among women all over the world. Therefore, I agree with opening the issue up to include ethnicity and race, so we can consider and question in a very concrete way the present position of women.

Haraway: I agree with what you say, and would mention a book by Nancy Scheper-Hughes, called *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. She gave this phenomenon a name: the 'modernization of infant mortality'. The usual story is that the improvement of infant and maternal mortality is a particular mark of the spread of democracy, nation-state and social welfare. Yet there is a very specific form of infant death by diarrhoea, which is directly linked to western countries not just the third world. Those are obviously crucial concerns for feminists, but not only for them.

Q: How could we define the new global political agenda of feminism, also in relation to younger generations?

Braidotti: I want to answer that question, but from a different angle. If your question was: 'Are there new political generations, renewing feminism?' 'Is there a new political feminism in the making or happening?' Then the answer is certainly: 'Yes'. There are several generations of new political feminists active today. They are very located, very situated. They are, in this continent, the children of the European Union; they are the children of the global economy in a new type of continent, where they feel very at home with facts that we do not feel the same about: our generation is not at home with hybrid identities. With regard to their sexuality they are also very used to non-definition, refusing labels. They are very critical of labelling, even the radical labelling of previous generations. They are going their own way. They are very aware of the generation gaps; they are five or six generations after early feminism and they are very proud of that. They are also very corporatist about age: age is a political category in Europe today. In a way it was not the same for the people of the '68 or even the '77 revolutions. Age is now a political category in terms of health, looks and employment possibilities; in terms of electoral perspectives. There is more solidarity among age groups than there is within the same gender. Boys and girls of the same age bond more than they would with people of the same sex but from a different generation. In addition, there is a great need and desire for radicalism. See the anti-global movement.

There is a need for direct action. At least, that's what I see in the Netherlands and it really worries me. In fact, if you go and smash a few windows, would you feel better afterwards? A virtual reality has now become too virtual for them and thus there is a great sense of using the institutions mainly for their own means and ends. There is a sort of pragmatism, when you know how to use and exploit the situation for your own goals. They are able to use media resources. They know how to make a presentation, how to sell whatever. They are completely at home with institutional powers, even though they do not fundamentally define themselves in relation to that. They have completely other ways of doing politics and positioning themselves vis-a-vis the social field, certainly in a different way to how I and my generation (now in our mid-forties) did. Let alone what the older generation did.

Tagliavini: It is true that a lot of things have changed quickly and dramatically over the last few years. Yet the processes which have increased the speed of social transformation should not avoid the possibility of understanding and reflecting upon the radical changes in our society, and among feminists as well. This is one of the main reasons why my association organized this conference. There is a necessity to find more adequate means to analyse what is happening in society nowadays and the praxis needed for facing it. We see different generations of women acting in different contexts and ways, people coming from Eastern and Western Europe, two parts that remained separate for years and therefore have different historical and political backgrounds. We see the reality of the Balkan conflicts, the renewal of fundamentalist ideologies in countries that are very close to Italy. We see the controversial but necessary relationship between native and migrant women. All these issues require new approaches to social analysis and the creation of new forms of practices and actions.

Q: We have talked about gender, body and subjectivity, and the connection between politics, theory and praxis at the global level. Yet theories of rationality, ordinary language, experience and knowledge are concepts belonging to the tradition of modernity. Yet feminism has reconceptualized in a very revolutionary way traditional concepts, criticizing metaphysics, politics and theoretical determinations. Therefore, feminism has radicalized epistemological issues in a gendered perception of reality, subjectivity, human relations, environment and animals. However, even though feminism has introduced a revolution in knowledge theory, hasn't it become impossible to indicate homogeneity among feminist scholars, researchers or schools of thought?

Braidotti: It is a very complicated question. We can only start to sketch out the answer. I can try to narrate it in the following way, even though we can employ different narratives. Feminism emancipated itself from 'woman' as the classical, metaphysical 'other'. It happened sometime

between the 1960s and 1970s. Yet there is a fundamental, I would say, epistemological distinction between ‘woman’ and the feminist subject. Some women are feminist subjects, others are not. This epistemological evolution of a feminist subject is really the mark of modern feminism, or rather of the second wave of feminism as opposed to the suffragettes, who claimed the right to vote for women. In a sense, when women liberated themselves, they also liberated themselves from classical femininity. Therefore, you can ask: ‘What is the feminist subject of the year 2000?’ Or you could ask: ‘What was the feminist subject in 1968?’ ‘Was it women?’ Yet women said: ‘*Tremate tremate le streghe son tornate*’ (‘*tremble, tremble, the witches are coming back*’). What came back was the ‘*streghe*’ (witches) not ‘women’. They did not want to be precisely ‘women’. Therefore, there is an epistemological and political distinction, which some people would call a ‘spiritual’ distinction, between femininity, the ‘other’ of the classical subject and a feminist subject, who wants to act, to have a social and political impact, to make thus a difference in society. You can use the same story to say that postmodernity marks the return of the ‘other’ as modernity. The native, the ethnic ‘others’ return with a vengeance, but their return splits the entire fabric of subjectivity. They don’t just return saying: ‘Hey, here we are: put us in!’ Their return cracks the frame of what used to be considered as the subject, claiming for a redistribution of the whole. I would narrate the issue of women and feminism in this way. I think that it was a very positive crisis because it forced the subject – in particular the white and male one – to look at himself. The crisis is a crisis of the centre not of the periphery: the others are doing quite well! It is the centre that needs to interrogate itself. And what has happened, particularly in southern European feminism, is the questioning of different frameworks concerning difference, not only in anthropomorphic terms, but also in terms of animal. Yet the centre is still unable to accept it. This political subject stands in splendid isolation, completely ignorant of his own crisis. I think that the crisis is the crisis of this specific kind of political subject, while the other political subjects are active, are well. The crisis is at the centre and it’s the dead heart of the centre that doesn’t have a clue about what to do with him. So I would put the question back to you: ‘What do you think the political subject of the 21st century is? And what should he do?’ Look at the Left, at its inability to act as such. Look at the ‘debacle’ of the Left throughout Europe, some Left we have. So, the crisis is not of the ‘other’. It is just the crisis of the ‘same’ . . .

Q: Considering these radical changes in politics and in the society, how could we define the differences within feminism as well?

Braidotti: You can see here at least two different feminist generations of feminists. Generation X is older, while generation Y is more radical, angrier. Generation X doesn’t go to anti-globalization demonstrations;

generation Y goes there and they are no older than 20–23 years old. They have had too much Internet, too many modems. Now they want to get some stuff going. So generation X is on the way out, is not packageable; we can't sell it to the media. It is very angry with the media, which exploits generation Y, their bodies: Calvin Klein, anorexics and beautiful bodies. They take care of their bodies, but they are very angry about how the under-thirties have been manufactured, packaged and fed to the media as desirable bodies. Generation Y doesn't even bother to dress and even rejects the aesthetics of generation X: Ulma Thurman is 'passé'. There is a very quick acceleration of intergenerational things and rapid consumption. Generation Y are very savvy consumers: generation X consumed the baby-boomers, while generation Y has already consumed generation X. And who knows what generation W is going to be, or do. Consequently, there is acceleration in terms of fashion, pastiche, collages, media recycling and goods. What, then, gives them their own identity? We are going to find out.

Q: Yet the transformation of gender/sex identity does not only concern women but men also, who are becoming more and more 'feminine'. Could we consider this trend as a crisis of masculinity?

Braidotti: The few men who allowed the process of change to enter their existence were not baby-boomers. They grasped out at it in a time of crisis. Masculinity was in crisis, but it was still masculinity. Crisis became the *modus vivendi* of masculinity for baby-boomers. See, for example, the *pensiero debole* (non-assertive thought) in Italy, postmodernism, Bill Clinton: they are in constant crisis, doing *just* fine. Crisis has become the *modus vivendi* of a generation that was deeply scarred by change. I would be very hard on the generation that did not take up the challenge to change. The generation after that is quite a different story. I love these kids. They are the children of the baby-boomers; they have got very different models of masculinity. They have done a lot more work in undoing some of the stereotypes, trying to invent different ways of being men and they are actually very productive. Some of them go more for androgynous, some of them, undecided and some of them, downright gay. Thus, there are more than renegotiations going on.

Scott: However, you are leaving out, what one might call the avant-garde, at least in the United States, the transgender issue. There are young students, in their early twenties (they are, of course, not the only ones), who refuse a clear gender assignment in either direction. In some cases, they simply cross-dress, in other cases they take drugs and hormones to produce the secondary sex characteristics of the sex they are not. They are actually transforming their bodies in order to refuse simple gender assignments. You have people with beards and vaginas, who are in relationships with others, who do not have a clearly assigned specific male or female

gender position, as we think of it. These people are doing the most radical questioning of standard gender assignments.

Haraway: Those kids attend my classes too. I recognize them. I can't even say they are young men or young women; namely a boy can coexist with young kids of the Arian nation and with kinds of resurgent classical masculinities. You see extraordinary types of muscle-building, facial, head and clothing styles, the physical presence and odours of a kind of young masculinity, which is sometimes very racist, even though there is the extraordinary draw of African and African American culture for white kids. Thus, I think that the gender picture today is very complicated.

Mitchell: I feel like an old reactionary. I think that we have to situate this issue also in the context of the fact that the western world is now approaching a zero growth rate of reproduction. The transgender phenomenon is outside reproduction and outside people having children. So, we can't just celebrate this sort of revolutionary nature because we haven't tested it yet.

Q: What about the 'reproductive body'?

Haraway: I would celebrate the end of excessive reproduction!

Braidotti: I would celebrate the fact that the split between sexuality and reproduction has been socially enforced; at least as far as Freudian psychoanalysis has been registered. What are the implications of this kind of sexuality, in the sense of becoming disembodied? Or what does it mean to get another body that is no longer the reproductive one? There is a gap emerging in this new millennium.

Mitchell: That is precisely what I wanted to bring into this context. It is no longer the reproductive body. This is very much against the reproductive body.

Scott: I think it would be a mistake to overemphasize the determinism of reproduction because for hundreds years, and even before the arrival of a reliable birth control, a separation between sexuality and reproduction existed. Look at what the bourgeois families or even the aristocratic families did: the legitimate family was opposed to the illegitimate family. So, I think what's happening now is another manifestation of the separation between sexuality and reproduction, which has a long history – a much longer history than the recent one.

Mitchell: What I think is different now is that this phenomenon is coming to the centre. The separation of sexuality and reproduction has become the hegemonic form, the central form, and the bourgeois form. It's not marginalized; it does not concern the difference between domestic wife and prostitute. Sexuality without reproduction is now in the centre of the bourgeois family.

Scott: But you know there aren't many bourgeois families anymore.

Haraway: There are few about.

Q: What happens to the body with the increase of information technologies? Why are we talking about 'cyborgs' and no longer about gender–sex difference?

Scott: I think that we do not talk much about the sex–gender distinction because in popular usage this distinction is not maintained. The assumption is partly due to the way gender has been defined, partly due to the fact that you cannot control language. So, it has been difficult to maintain a distinction in any rigorous and serious way. Yet I also think, as Judith Butler has argued, that in the case of the concepts both of sex and gender, we are talking about a specific production of knowledge about the body and social roles. Therefore, any distinction seems hard. It is silly to maintain a distinction if you want to think of both sex and gender as produced through discourses. The body is in itself inscribed by cultural practices. It is not something that stands apart from social constructions. The inability to control linguistic usage and the philosophical lack of clarity about the distinction between sex and gender has led to abandoning – for me, at least – the attempt to maintain a sex–gender distinction.

Haraway: I think that there is another set of issues going on: the reformulation of bodies, which are not going to be reproducing biologically. It is not the same thing to say, 'these folks don't want to be taking care of children', or they don't want to be involved in various kinds of making and provision of children. Indeed, I think that the question of children is separate from the issue of reproduction. In some ways it is maybe hyped in the various debates about cloning, genetic engineering or in vitro variously assisted reproduction. They function as both real and hyped, but they both function as a kind of paradigmatic metaphor, even though they are real practices. I also see among my students, and many others, new forms of relationships with children, not only in terms of having children but also of taking care of them. Therefore, it is not clear to me that these forms of radical re-embodiment are going to be child-free due to the fact that they are reproduction-free.

Braidotti: It's not clear to me that these new forms of embodiment would necessarily or exclusively be coding a transsexual imaginary. I think that there is a fascination in the transsexual imaginary because it comes from a different number of sources. It seems to me – among others – that it can be considered as the last wave of a gothic imagining that we have received through postmodernism. It is a fascination with various types of Frankensteinian in-betweenness, monstrosity, techno-teratologies of postmodernity, as I called it in my last book. But it's only one of the imageries. There are also imageries of fusion, confusions; there are imageries of being angelically outside the whole game, imageries of becoming insect, of imitating machines. We can find all kinds of imageries, but there is hegemony of the transsexual imagery at the moment in feminism, which I cannot share in. It is just my genealogy, my being very embodied, very female. It bothers me: why could *this* be the paradigm for the

redistribution of sexual identity? Why would *this* be the model and not that of becoming insect, which is stepping out of the human? This is a bit provocative, but I would put it as one of the imageries. There is a struggle about the meaning of sexual imagery and the kind of existing connection between these radical forms of new embodiment.

Mitchell: Don't you think that people have always imagined changes in this way? I mean, sex and reproduction have always been separated. But there is a new way in which we are now crossing these boundaries. People have always imagined androgynous figures and gargoyles. In Kafka, Gregor is a beetle. As you know, there is a long history about the ways of imagining social changes. What is now different, in a sense, is that we have the technological means to accomplish some of it, to cross boundaries between genders and species. In her presentation, Donna talked about this issue in terms of the canine genome and dog/woman. These questions are actually now technologically possible.

Q: What is the new link between body, health and technologies?

Haraway: Health is a major source of new wealth. It's not just the technological issue, even though there is a lot of money interested in this. The reformulation of the biomatter as a form of wealth is a very big issue, which is going to get bigger. That means that it is not only a matter of technological possibility; there is also very serious interest in this, from the point of view of new forms of capital accumulation.

Braidotti: I would say that we have new technologies but we are grafting upon them the wrong representations. The problem is that we don't have suitable figurations for the kind of embodiments that we already inhabit and the kind of technologies we have already invented: these technologies come in fact from us. So there is a delay in our representations and figurations and with the laws on this. We need to rewrite the imaginary script because our embodied material reality has changed. Our whole world is not an alien world. So, why do we have to employ a 19th-century imaginary for a 21st-century situation? Why did we not invent new paradigms? This has been a crucial question in philosophy for the last 50 years: we are not representing these realities to ourselves, within our creativity. Consequently, we are coming out with old scripts. So it is always the same 19th-century gothic story, when we are on the verge of the verge of something completely other. We just don't have the repertoire.

Mitchell: I want to come back to this issue with reference to my clinical work as a consultant in a hospital in England. In this department there are a lot of referrals for transsexual operations. There's an absolute need for opposition to what people are doing. Thus you have simply to rethink what sort of context we are in, in relation to these changes.

Braidotti: So, what you are arguing is that the transsexual imaginary may not actually be the transsexual body?

Mitchell: Well that is what I meant. But it is also the other way round. Our imaginary may be there, but in a sense technology limits that imaginary by making it possible and real. It confines the imaginary in itself.

Braidotti: So, do you think that the reality principle is within the technology?

Mitchell: Yes.

Q: Do you think that visionary imaginary is useful now and why?

Haraway: Imaginations of hope are useful. I don't actually think utopias are necessary now. I think instead we have some kind of lively sense of how things might be otherwise. People can configure that for us, in performance, in practice. I think we do need it as a part of our conjunctual working, lively imaginations of the way in which the world need not to be. We need imaginations outside determinations. Is it not the same thing as needing a utopia? I'm very weary of transgressiveness for its own sake . . .

Scott: We are historically at a point where the possibility of imagining whole utopias or transformations that are redemptive, that are going to change everything for the better, are gone. I agree here very much with American political theorist Wendy Brown, who argues that the notion belonging to the 19th-century vision of history, in which the ever forward progressive movement of history towards something better is going to save us, is gone. And it's gone for a number of reasons, among them the failure of the communist possibility as an alternative to capitalism. Therefore, the ordinary belief of people about history as progress is gone. And that raises the question: how one can imagine the future? If you don't have a picture of a future certainty (which has been very negative as well as very positive in its ability to mobilize people politically), what do you do? How do you understand what you're moving towards? How do you understand changes, if you don't think they have a necessary historical direction and vision? I think that is the dilemma for politics in the 21st century.

Q. How do you see the present interconnection between politics, science, technologies and the critical role of feminism?

Haraway: I want to say a little more on the periphery of this question by taking a particular example from biology, medicine and related sciences in relationship to the affirmation of information sciences. If you look at inter-digitation, we can also consider the collapse of biology and information into each other, in genetic medicine, in the conversion of biodiversity into investment strategies, in the banking and accumulation of diversity. It has not to do with the cyborg or the Cold War, but with the neoliberal provocation of molecular millennialism, a kind of molecular difference that is very dangerous but also very promising. We are living through a moment

of incredible proliferation of new forms of wealth, property, mutated and morphed bodies of various kinds, various scales of the molecules of the DNA. There is the interconversion of different forms of materiality so that we're living through these kinds of extraordinary reformulations of modes of life concerning the biotechnologies and information systems. Feminists are very active in these domains; they are extremely active. Sometimes they call themselves feminists, in other cases not. For example, in the movements of various indigenous peoples around whether you are a population or a people, whether you're defined by the genetic frequencies of interest to a pharmaceutical prospecting company, or in relationship to mutated kinds of sovereignty, which challenge various kind of patriarchal forms of indignity; there are all sorts of issues going on. We will frequently have to deal with whether or not to co-operate with a blood-sampling project for the study of a particular disease or the questions surrounding what kinds of ethnicities and sexualities are going to be read out of comparative genomics. We are going to have niche-designed drugs, not just boutique clothing but boutique medicines, highly individualized, rationally oriented therapeutic strategies. Groups will get rich on therapies and at what cost. The question is also what kinds of knowledge, banking and distribution will there be. Feminists are very active in these issues; they are very active in genomics, medicine, in cancer politics. These are areas of new bodies and new wealth, I think, where the political subject of feminism has meaning as well as other political formulations.

Q: How is this trend related to women's struggles and history?

Haraway: It is part of women's struggles. It's a part of the fabric; there is not just the women's struggle.

Q: Don't you think that talking about the possibility to conjugate animals, mixing organisms, machineries, cyborgs and things like that seems to be visionary stuff, a fantasy more than a reality?

Haraway: This is the everyday work of many laboratories all over the world! It is a very real fantasy. I think we have overestimated the imaginary, while underestimating the material, mundane practice. Practices of splicing bits of one organism onto another for specific purposes have become quite ordinary. There were bits of a yeast genome transplanted into a part of a sheep in order to produce a certain immunoglobulin for selling to a particular niche market related to a certain metabolic disease. This is the production of this particular project, but this is ordinary work. It really involves interesting kinds of new disciplines, labour practices and marketing issues. If we think of this phenomenon as a kind of fantasy, that's a huge mistake! What I'm trying to argue for is the necessity to insist on the mundane and the ordinary. It is the need to get a grip on the

ordinary. We are overestimating the nature of the fantastic in our world, underestimating the real. This is already the name of the game and it's neither all bad nor all good: it requires our best imaginative and physical effort and intellectual interest to deal with it. Do you see what I'm doing? I'm trying to de-apocalypsize these works and researches.

Q: I would like to come back to the questions relating to imagination, reality and utopia, reframing these issues from a political perspective. In particular, what could the end of a teleological vision of history mean for feminism, where the realization of the future was assured by the action of a specific political subject? Is feminism going through the same crisis that the workers' movement has already experienced? We cannot talk any longer about feminism but about feminisms. We have various traditions of political feminism, different schools of thought, differentiated histories and national cultures. Feminism is no longer a matter concerning Europe or America but also countries in transition and in development. At the beginning of our interview we started saying that beside cultural and inter-generational differences feminist thought and movement still remains a cross-borders, transnational and transcultural issue. Yet feminism is not only a specific political praxis and critical thought, but also a theoretical and epistemological framework, able to reformulate traditional knowledge theories and to reframe the use of new technologies. How could we conclude this interview? Perhaps by just asking: what's next?

Braidotti: No way. It would be impossible to conclude an interview in this way, drawing the line. What we hope to reach is to offer a good cartography of current trends, on what is going on, what forces are at stake. There is certainly a generation of renewal; there is certainly the end of a certain teleological, progressive way of looking at the social movement of feminism. Certainly, there is the end of the essentialized sexual difference of femininity, which in Italy, for example, has had an enormous impact. Certainly, there is a new relationship with technologies. But we do hope that a new dialogue with American feminists could start. And this is an important trans-Atlantic, transnational alliance. However, it's very unfair to take Joan Scott and Donna Haraway as 'the Americans': they are so close to us and in tune with us; it is really a kind of labelling that we should avoid. Our aim was to give a mapping out, a sort of a reading, or a snapshot of a situation, knowing that it is like a weather map, that it would change tomorrow because it's all going very, very fast. If we could make it clear through the media that there is a lot that is going on; if we could indicate what is going on among younger women, who are still considering themselves as feminists. If this message could go across the borders of this conference, then we can say that it has been successful. During the conference, a group of feminists called 'Next/Generation', composed of younger women, made this point 'We want that label, we want that category, but we are then redefining it in such a way that you

may not even recognize it.' Feminism is going on, and the more different it is, the better it can be.

NOTES

The forum was organized by the Italian magazine *Reset* during the Fourth European Feminist Research Conference on 'Body, Gender, Subjectivity', held in Bologna in September 2000 and organized by the Biblioteca e Centro di Documentazione delle Donne of Bologna, AOIFE and Athena.

Questions were put by: Giancarlo Bosetti, director of *Reset*; Marina Calloni, professor of social and political philosophy, University of Milano-Bicocca; Nina Fürstenberg, journalist and script-writer; and Teresa Dagenhardt, journalist.

The participants were: Rosi Braidotti, director of the Research School of Women's Studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands; Donna Haraway, professor at the University of Santa Cruz; Juliet Mitchell, professor at Jesus College, University of Cambridge, UK; Joan Scott, professor at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton University; and Annamaria Tagliavini, director of the Biblioteca e Centro di Documentazione delle Donne in Bologna.

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