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Feminism troubles "category-making"

A conversation with Donna J. Haraway

Patricia Purtschert

About the many futures of gender

The aim of the project is to tell and reflect the different histories of feminist theory. To this end, conversations are held with protagonists who had and have a formative influence on feminist theories. In engaging with these scholars, we wish to delve deeper not only into the ideas and concepts that form the key basis of these theories but also to explore the historical contexts, collective thinking, political practices, and historical controversies that enabled them at the time. The conversations bring forth exigent questions around power, inequality, and violence, intersectionality, the relation of sex, gender, and sexuality, or the critique of binary thinking. We discuss the contributions of feminism to analyzing and challenging significant differences other than gender, such as race, class, nationality, religion, and caste. The project is rooted in oral history and philosophical exchange. It has value for those of us interested in the history of feminist theory and in feminism as a resourceful way of challenging dominant knowledges and creating different ones.

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Feminism troubles "category-making": A conversation with Donna J. Haraway

Patricia Purtschert

Joan Scott offers to introduce me and my oral history project via email to Donna Haraway. She agrees to talk to me, and I read her answer with much excitement: "There really is an important collective history to be narrated, and I also have stakes in future generations having resources like these, warts on what we have done and all. Our stories are waving from a series, whose energies surge way before and long after the so-called 'second wave.' All best, Donna." We meet on Zoom two months later, and after a short moment of introduction, I find myself in the middle of an intense discussion on the scope and politics of the history of feminist theory …

Donna Haraway: I hope you recorded already what we have been discussing.

Patricia Purtschert: I have not! I wanted to ask for your permission first …

Then let me repeat that last part. Setting up an inquiry as the history of gender theory will tend to set it up to foreground already well-known white women in the Euro-axis. It will tend to exclude the internal minorities in Europe, it will tend to exclude most indigenous, Black, and Chicano thinkers in North America. It will tend to exclude Latin American theorists, and it will not look to Asian and the Pacific axes. For example, such a set-up will not be thinking of the ties of gender theory and indigenous sovereignty movements.

You are touching on a question that has bothered me from the start. The term "gender" has such a specific and problematic history. It cannot be told without understanding how it is tied up with whiteness. And for this, it needs to engage with the writing of Black feminists and feminists of color who have pointed this out all along.

My impulse is never to work by forbidding a term, but rather complexifying and adding to it. Vinciane Despret gave me the phrase of "working by addition," not by subtraction. Addition means opening up to what was not there before. Gender is a really important formation, certainly an important term, it animates all kinds of important debates and thinking and actions. To leave it out would be crazy. But to allow it to stand as the universal unmarked category, within which everything must but does not fit, would be a mistake. Think about the way you might have a word cloud. Sometimes the cloud of gender is very big and other times it recedes. From the beginning, the category formation work of the project should not allow a universal term to then collect up all the case studies. Because surely if feminism has accomplished anything, in the domain of whatever counts as theory, it is to trouble category-making. Trouble the way marked and unmarked categories exclude from consideration, exclude from reality even.

We have jumped right into the heart of matters, which is fabulous. Usually, my first question is: Can you say something about how you found out and how you got interested in feminism?

There are two different ways, at least, to answer that question. One is before the language existed, when I was quite certain that I wanted to be a priest and not a nun. I was perfectly content with that. I did not have the language then, I was not gender fluid; that language was not in circulation. But I was quite aware as a small girl about the exclusion of girls from things I wanted to do in the world. I was a very intense little Catholic, and I heard my dolls' confessions in my closet. Further, all my dolls had polio, and I really wanted to be a doctor. And when they did not have polio, they needed emergency operations! There were all sorts of things that I wanted to do in the world that I was quite aware girls could not do. That was a source of frustration from childhood on. But there was no language for that.

But you can still remember your sense of frustration?

Oh yeah! I remember it very much. Wanting to be what I could not be. No language for it. I went to an extremely good Catholic girls' high school, where the nuns were very progressive and interesting intellectually. They were very, very, encouraging of me intellectually. That was a group of women who were instrumental in the reforms of religious life in Vatican II in the 1960s. So I was taught by progressive women within my faith community. These were women who did something in the world. I was also aware of the medical missionaries. I had a very colonial imagination, but it entailed women who traveled and did things in the world as skilled people. I had no language of feminism at this point.

In college, particularly one woman, Jane Cauvel, a philosopher at Colorado College, was instrumental. She invited a philosopher from the University of Colorado to give a lecture on existentialism, Hazel Barnes, who was the first publicly out lesbian I ever knew. She was like the writer Djuna Barnes in self-presentation, outside boundaries that I knew, and both philosopher and writer really shocked me! I had no notion of this. So lesbianism came to be a nameable thing for me, part of my friendship and intellectual network in college. Then came graduate school. That is where feminism, for me, starts having a robust language. For me, that happened after 1968, the years of gay liberation, the women's liberation movement. The post-civil rights social movements, in significant ways enabled by the civil rights movement, interlaced with it in all kinds of ways.

The language of feminism in the women's liberation movement emerged for me in the late 1960s, in the context of being a graduate student in biology at Yale University. The anti-war and civil rights movements were both very important among the biology graduate students. I remember being a teaching assistant in a course taught by a faculty member on chemical and biological warfare, and I remember being a teaching assistant in a class on race and science. I also remember with other women graduate students going to our director of graduate studies and complaining about the double standards for women in the biology department at Yale. The numbers of women who got admitted to the PhD program were limited. The qualifications of the women who were admitted had to be higher than those of the men, and we knew it. We

went to the director of graduate studies and complained, and those same women later founded Women in Cell Biology, a crucial feminist group in professional societies in the following years.

Did you use the term "feminist" for that group?

I am not sure about that. I do not know exactly when the word "feminism" emerged for us; it did not feel like a break or revolution, or a light going on. It feels like it became more and more part of the conversation. In part, because of the way the category of "women" got questioned at the time and foregrounded a more critical category of feminism. This is much later, in the US through works like Joan Scott's "Gender: A useful category of historical analysis"[1] and then Kimberlé Crenshaw's writing on intersectionality.[2] But all the categories, women, gender, lesbian, etc., were always full of contestation. So I do not really know when the word "feminism" becomes part of my vocabulary. Surely women's liberation predates it …

… and your own struggles in life.

Yes, feminism was certainly part of my own struggles. I was educated through the PhD because of the affluence of the United States after World War II, with the abundance of funding, even for kids like me, from lower-middle-class Catholic backgrounds. That someone like me would get that kind of education was unheard of. I knew this and I really valued it a lot. From the late 1960s I was part of gay liberation and women's liberation. Earlier, I was one of the white allies within the civil rights movements, in demonstrations and also some work against segregation in hotels and motels. I was not a key activist by any means, but I was very much animated and changed by the history of Black liberation struggles.

So, feminism felt like an evolution and from the get-go, interconnected with other movements and struggles. I was part of a Marxist feminist collective at Johns Hopkins in the early 1970s, and I think maybe that is where the word "feminism" became central for me. It emerged in *Quest and Women: A Journal of Liberation*. The important feminist standpoint theorist Nancy Hartsock was my friend, colleague, and peer. We played squash together, we organized together. At Johns Hopkins University, we were doing Marxist feminist work together. I was part of David Harvey's group in reading *Capital* in those years. And I was part of "Science for the People" and the radical science movement, which in Britain became the *Radical Science Journal* first, and then *Science as Culture*. I was part of Marxist science studies, even when I was a biology student and in my first jobs at the University of Hawai'i and then Johns Hopkins. During that time, I moved into science studies definitively and did not do biology research anymore. I moved out of doing biology as my practice to history of science, science studies, science politics. From the start, I understood these fields to be enmeshed with the women's health movement, with struggles of women workers, racial inequality among women, women's labor, sexual violation, take-back-the-night, questions of sexual abuse, rape, and so on. From the get-go, the feminist thinking that shaped me was enmeshed in social movements. It never

1 Joan Scott, Gender: A useful category of historical analysis (1986).
2 Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity, and violence against women of color (1991).

felt there was the university over here, and social movements over there. It felt organic in those years. Science studies was part of all that.

And was that just the case for you? Or was it also for the feminists around you?

I do not think it was just for me. In those years, the social movements were strong, and the university was a big part of it for sure. In looking back, I feel like in many ways, the separation of intellectual labor from organizing deepened after that. Ways in which feminism became professionalized in the universities, which was an achievement, in all sorts of ways, but also vulnerable to splits between activists and intellectuals in different communities of practice.

When did you start doing feminist research? Feminist questions were not part of your first book, Crystals, fabrics, and fields: Metaphors of organicism in twentieth-century developmental biology,[3] *which was based on your Yale PhD writing in biology.*

I look back at that book, and I am amazed. Feminist thinking is not explicitly there. It is a little strange in a way, because at that time I was already influenced by the Boston Women's Health Collective book. Jane Oppenheimer, a biologist who helped me a bit with my thesis and book, was certainly aware of sexism in science, and we spoke about it. When I was writing my dissertation, I also was a TA [teaching assistant] for a woman named Grace Pickford, who was, in the language of that period, transvestite. It was only after I started working for her that I realized that she was a woman, not a man. She was an important elder scientist, who had been the wife of my PhD adviser years before, George Evelyn Hutchinson, a naturalist without equal and a theoretical ecologist. He himself was a British feminist of the Bloomsbury era. His lab groups included discussions with readings by Simone Weil, Karen Stephens, and Virginia Woolf, as well as biology papers of the day. At the level of my actual social intellectual life of those years, feminism was present. In the dissertation: Not at all! I do not understand that myself. But it is a fact. The book was committed to process philosophy, it was against binary dualisms, it had a lot of the tools that became part of my feminist toolkit. But it was not explicitly feminist.

You have worked in Yale, in the department of biology, you have written a PhD in that environment. How are the reflections that you later made on the gendered order of knowledge and knowledge production and on the particular and difficult place of women in science grounded in these experiences? Did you relate to your time as a female scientist in Yale when you wrote about these things later?

One of the first experiences in Yale was me going to the director of graduate studies with other women graduate students to complain about the fact that we were too few women. Artificially too few: We were deliberately kept at small numbers in those years. Another example from that same period: There were about a thousand women doctoral students at Yale University

3 Donna Haraway, *Crystals, fabrics, and fields: Metaphors of organicism in twentieth-century developmental biology* (1976).

in those years plus many staff, and not very many faculty, but some. When I was a graduate student, Yale University changed from an all-men's undergraduate institution to admitting undergraduate women. There was this giant announcement that for the first time, women would be students at Yale. At the same time, they hired a gynecologist in the health center. This was the most explicit statement I could imagine that all of us already there were not women. It was a remarkable performance of the fact that we were not *categorically* women. We were honorary men. And the fact that we were female was something of an embarrassment to the institution. And so, before undergraduate women were admitted, if we were going to get birth control or treatments for a sexually transmitted disease or a breast examination, we had to go off to Planned Parenthood in the city, because the university did not provide that. Yale did not have women; they just had us, including all the staff. Think about all the women who worked all over that campus, since forever, plus many prominent women, themselves PhDs who were wives of principal investigators and who were key researchers, ran the labs, often co-authored the papers, but who did not count at Yale! Despite her eminent publications and research program, the woman I taught for, Grace Pickford, for decades was not promoted to full professor or tenured at Yale. She was internationally famous in fish endocrinology. She was only promoted to full professor at Yale the year she retired and left the hallowed halls. She was absolutely not part of the professorate at Yale until then. They deliberately promoted her only then. Of course, I was aware of that.

Another personal example of clear sexism after I married: in graduate school, I married a gay man, a friend of my heart, someone I will treasure till the day I die. Anyway, Jaye Miller and I got married, only the gods of Earth know why. We did not have any categories for what we were doing, besides that one. Wrong category, good friends for life, with a brief period of being lovers.

Were you interested in the ceremony of marriage?

Oh, no. It was way deeper than that. We did not have the language then, but we were caught within the system of compulsory heterosexuality.

Yes.

And compulsory heteronormativity. We had no categories for what we were doing, and language matters. The language came later to explain what were deep experiences without a language in that period. So, a little rebellion, I went again to the director of graduate studies and said, "My name will remain Donna Haraway. I will not be Donna Miller." And he said he would reluctantly agree to that in my professional life, but not in my personal life. He would call me Donna Miller in every regard except in my professional life. And I said, "Well, whatever, I am Donna Haraway!"

He tried to teach you how to obey the law of the father?

Absolutely. It was enforced, it was normative, and compulsory. So yes, I had all these personal experiences. We certainly had the term "sexist" and I recognized these things as sexist. There

were many other experiences that I could narrate like that one. Being physically assaulted on the street walking on the campus—a man coming up and grabbing and twisting my breast. This kind of routine physical violation. I never reported it, like zillions of women, I kept quiet about it. It was degrading. Of course, I knew about all this stuff. And of course it fueled my feminism. I was also protected by significant white privilege, but that did not cancel the sexism.

And when did you start using explicit feminist perspectives in your academic work?

My first book was important to the way I developed as a feminist. It elaborated for me the way I think about biology, as a set of practices, as processual, as full of storytelling, where metaphor is really crucial, not just an addition, not decorative, but a way of shaping thinking and action. All of that is the subject of that book. I did not frame it as feminist, as I would now, but it certainly shaped the way I thought about science. As well as the way I thought about politics and the joint between the two. The whole development of feminist science studies, which is in many ways the stream of feminist work that I have been most part of, was just getting started then. It was rooted in things like biological determinism in relationship to both race and sex. Also class. We would use the term "sex" then, not "gender." "Gender" becomes the term gradually.

"Gender" as a term came up later?

Not much later. Right about that time. But it was unstable then. I think of Susan Leigh Star and Lucy Suchman and their work on women in digital worlds, women in the workforce in secretarial work, women programmers, women in the information industry, in the micro-electronics world as manufacturers of processors in offshore tax havens. From early on, I was aware of all that and teaching about it. Certainly, the teaching I did at the University of Hawai'i, right after graduate school, was explicitly feminist. And it did not feel like a break. It felt like a continuity.

When I was an assistant professor at the University of Hawai'i, I was teaching with a woman named Dorothy Stein, who wrote a beautiful book about Ada, Countess of Lovelace.[4] She was a psychologist, and very inadequately employed, very much the subject of both anti-Semitism and sexism in the university. Together, we developed the first women's studies courses at the University of Hawai'i. We taught a course that I still just smile when I think about it, we had such a good time. I think it was titled "Women in science," but really it was a feminist science studies course, directed at questions of biology and psychology. I loved co-teaching. And the students we had! One of the reasons I loved that course is that we were not teaching science majors. We were teaching kids at the University of Hawai'i who were majoring in everything else, especially tourist industry management in the hospitality industry. They were majoring in the economic fields that ran Hawai'i. These are the same years in which Robert McNamara was developing the electronic battlefield and the Pacific Command in Honolulu in the context of the Vietnam War. These are the years when we are out on the street for gay and lesbian liberation, and also for Hawai'ian land rights. The sugar plantations are already in place, of

4 Dorothy Stein, *Ada: A life and a legacy* (1985).

course, but there is further occupation of the valleys, and gobbling up of land for housing and hotel development, for further mono-crop agriculture, and against indigenous Hawai'ian land rights. All of these struggles were part of those years, and they happened at the same time. We were also demonstrating for abortion rights and reproductive autonomy. All of this became part of our feminist science course.

Can you remember what you taught in this course?

I think I still have the syllabus. We were reading *Our bodies, ourselves* by the Boston Women's Health Collective,[5] first self-published in 1970. We were reading Thelma Rowell's *The social behaviour of monkeys*.[6] We were definitely looking at John Money's gender dysphoria treatments and all the debates emerging around trans experiences.

It is interesting, and important to keep in mind, that the questions around trans were right there from early on, that they were in fact driving the reflections on gender from the start.

Oh yes. Sandy Stone was my graduate student in history of consciousness at the University of California at Santa Cruz in the early 1980s. She tells a very funny story about her own surgical transformation at Stanford. She and everybody else among the patients read the same literature as the doctors. So when they were questioned to see if they were qualified for treatment, they knew what answers to give, because they were reading their literature and giving them the answers they wanted, feeding them back and also educating them about the situation. Sandy was, in those years, Susan Leigh Star's lover. And Sandy was the subject of critique by the Olivia Records, a feminist music collective. A certain narrow segment of radical feminist activists felt Sandy could not be the technical sound engineer for the collective, because according to them she was not really a woman. Those were the years in which Janice Raymond was writing *The transsexual empire*.[7] Sandy wrote against that, with great intelligence and humor. When she was at UC [University of California] Santa Cruz, she wrote "The empire strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto,"[8] which became a very well-known essay. Those things were part of feminist science studies from the get-go. So were the histories of sterilization abuse of indigenous women and women of color and health inequities by race, sex, and class.

When you tell me these stories, one can see very clearly how the social struggles are intertwined with the theoretical concepts that emerged in these years.

From the beginning.

5 Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our bodies, ourselves* (1973).
6 Thelma Rowell, *The social behaviour of monkeys* (1973).
7 Janice Raymond, *The transsexual empire: The making of the she-male* (1979).
8 Sandy Stone, The empire strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto (1991).

Your dissertation came out in 1976. And all your famous texts that we keep reading to this day came out after the mid-80s, the "cyborg manifesto"[9] *in 1985, "Situated knowledges"*[10] *in 1988,* Primate visions *in 1989*[11]*. What happened in the time between …?*

What happened?

There is a stretch of time in between …

You are quite right. *Crystals, fabrics, and fields* was published in 1976, but it was written when I was a graduate student. So it was finished by 1972. Between 1972 and quite a while later, I did not publish much. A little paper called "The transformation of the left in science"[12] that was collectively written with Jaye, my friend-sometimes-husband, and Richard Stith, a leftist pro-life activist and lawyer, who earlier worked in Uruguay. I did not write very much, and part of the reason for that is that my first job was teaching in the general science department at the University of Hawai'i. Which meant: I was not publishing, I was teaching. My job did not require publishing.

Then I was hired at Johns Hopkins. That job did require publishing. So the demands of my professional life radically changed, when I went from the University of Hawai'i as a very junior person without any career prospects, not publishing—reading, thinking, teaching, etc. but not publishing—to Johns Hopkins, where I began a pretty intense research-based life that has continued ever since, with lots and lots and lots of writing! In fact, way too much writing.

Wait, we all know you as a prolific writer. It is puzzling to find out that there was a time when you hardly wrote.

It is not that I did not write; I did not publish. And I did not have any ongoing deep research projects. Also, that was not a very long period of time either. I graduated from Yale in 1972, I left the University of Hawai'i in 1976 and went to Hopkins. So there was a four- or five-year period in there where I did not publish and did not write much. And then, beginning in 1976 at Hopkins, I was engaged in research projects that resulted in the kind of writing that people know. Research requires intense focus and time; publishing comes later. And I remember, with Rusten Hogness, my friend and husband and partner of the last 40 years, thinking … because at Hopkins, I met Rusten. He was a graduate student at Hopkins at the time. And I was a baby assistant professor. Our relationship these days would be called sexual harassment. We became very close, very quickly. We went to his adviser, a colleague in my department, Bill Coleman, and said, "Bill, this is the case—we are together, and we are going to stay together. So you, Bill

9 Donna Haraway, A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s (1985).

10 Donna Haraway, Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective (1988).

11 Donna Haraway, *Primate visions: Gender, race, and nation in the world of modern science* (1989).

12 Donna Haraway, The transformation of the left in science: Radical associations in Britain in the 30's and the U.S.A. in the 60's (1975).

Coleman, have a problem. You need to make sure that nothing bad happens, that there are no abuses of this relationship that hurt anybody." And he just smiled and said, "You realize you are not the first."

I am not advocating faculty–student relationships. Especially not with undergraduates. But I am saying that it is sometimes way more complicated than some of our current ways of talking about it allow. I say that very cautiously because the abuses are real, seriously not okay. I do not for a minute forget the history of abuse and violation rooted in unequal and gendered/raced status, including a kind of authorized plagiarism, where the older recognized researcher, usually a white male, gets all the credit for the work done by the woman graduate student, or the woman spouse, all these kinds of things that are not just sexual in the narrow sense, but are gender violations. But that is a whole other conversation.

Leaving that aside for the moment, I remember with Rusten thinking, "What am I really interested in? What do I really want to write about? What do I want to do? I am interested in animals, I am interested in bodies, not just human ones, I am interested in the processes, the juicy, fleshy processes of living critters in the world … and I want to write about that! I do not want to separate biology and politics, and history and literature—they are all together." And I wrote that little piece for a journal called *Women: A Journal of Liberation*.[13] It was one of my first published essays. I was looking at *Woman on the edge of time* by Marge Piercy,[14] and *Dialectic of sex* by Shulamith Firestone.[15] And I wrote about the history of the Marine Biology Laboratory at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. I had taken the embryology course there as a graduate student in biology, and my passion for understanding developing organisms never stopped. Also, I became much more aware about women in cell and developmental biology. At the same time, I was teaching with Nancy Hartsock, and with others, and we developed women's studies courses at Johns Hopkins.

It is fascinating to see how all these things came together when you were about to find your own voice as an intellectual: the break from writing in Hawai'i, the role that teaching played, the social movements you were involved in, your network of friends and colleagues and the partner whom you could talk to and think with. Because in academia, it is so difficult and crucial to figure out with whom and in relation to whom and what one wants to think, right?

I feel like I had the privilege of being able to ask seriously, "What do I really care about? And how can I develop my work around the things that really matter?" And I had the social support, I had the job … mind you, however, I was fired from that job precisely for doing all this, at Johns Hopkins.

Really? You were?

Oh yeah, seriously. We will get to that in a minute. It is not that I got away with trying to hold everything together!

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13 Donna Haraway, The struggle for a feminist science (1975).
14 Marge Piercy, *Woman on the edge of time* (1976).
15 Shulamith Firestone, *The dialectic of sex: The case for feminist revolution* (1970).

That is an important detail!

Exactly, an important detail. But I had that sense that, if I am going to stay in this work, then I have to do what I care about.

Did you always know that? Or was it at Hopkins that you found out how you wanted to work?

I think it was an organic, non-optional part of my being from very early. I had an example in my father, who was a sports writer who always wanted to write about the games themselves. He never wanted to be a columnist, he never wanted to write the critique of big money in sports. He wanted to write about the game, because he loved the games. And he was a happy man, in fact. I had that example in front of me of a person who lived his full life, making enough money to live and in those years to support a family, doing what he wanted to do. It never dawned on me, not in my deepest self, that I could not do what I cared about. And I think that was given to me by my family first. And by money, by post-World War II United States affluence, the fact that my education as a middle-class white Catholic girl was paid for by Sputnik and the war on cancer. I am the child of imperial US dominance opening up of social spaces for people like me. What do you do with that? I also knew about that from the beginning, the inclusions and exclusions. That even as you are doing something, you know something about what enables you to do it, and how historically complicated that is, and that you are accountable to that in some way. I cannot just forget it. And so you are both the object of discrimination in some respects, and the object of privilege in other respects—at the same time. You are never simply a victim.

Yes. But you still need to figure out what that means, in a particular place, with the means that you have or do not have at hand, to deal with this insight. It is important to hear how you found your own particular way to do this.

I realized early on, I was interested in monkeys and apes, all the other primates besides us. Also in those years, research on primates was everywhere, in the *National Geographic*, in the news, it was popular. I was interested in it both as science and as popular storytelling in the media, and in the animals themselves. And it seemed to me true that women researchers as a whole developed a different perspective on their scientific work with the monkeys and apes than the men did. Not completely separate, but they had some seriously different approaches and points of view. Many of those same women resisted thinking that they did their work as feminists. They worried that it invalidated them as scientists to think like that.

One woman I worked with closely and became good friends with later was Alison Jolly, who worked on the lemurs in Madagascar, and whose daughter, Margaretta Jolly, is a poet and literary person whom I have also worked with over the years. Really wonderful women. They reviewed my book *Primate visions*[16] together, and they deliberately did a division of labor. All of the good things were put in Margaretta's mouth. Alison was much more reserved in her review, much more suspicious, and much more worried as a scientist. She let her literary daughter

16 Donna Haraway, *Primate visions: Gender, race, and nation in the world of modern science* (1989).

speak the other side, and they knew what they were doing. And I felt like, "You cowards!" No, seriously, I appreciated what they were doing, even though I was a bit hurt. But I understood that I was dangerous, literally, professional suicide, for the scientific women I wrote about. Also, they often did not agree with me completely. I do not agree with myself completely, in retrospect. But I became really interested in that work in those years. I started doing the research first at the American Museum of Natural History. The paper that became "Teddy bear patriarchy."[17] That was really the first serious dive into all of that, and of course also a dive into white colonialism in Africa and New York City.

I find "Teddy bear patriarchy" hard to read, very convincing, crucial, and eye-opening, but it is hard to be confronted so directly with the cruelty of colonial science. I remember reading how Carl Akeley discovers a gorilla and shoots him immediately. "Within minutes of his first glimpse of the features of the face of an animal he longed more than anything else to see, Akeley had killed him" (p. 33). The cruelty of this encounter, how desiring and killing cannot be separated in the colonial mind, keeps haunting me.

That research haunts me still. The whole thing. Iain McCalman recently wrote a book about Delia Akeley that really recuperates her much more complex story.[18] She was repudiated, especially after Carl Akeley's death, by his more respectable upper-class wife, Mary Jobe. There was the repudiation of the not-proper wife, Delia, who was a much more interesting character. But the animals … for me, it has been an ongoing, life-changing process. To come to inhabit, to really think with and to care differently about, with, for, the plants and animals of the world, in a non-humanist way. Not anti-humanist, but not humanist, not centering humans as the measure of the world. That kind of multi-species perspective has been transformative for me. And you can find it only a little bit in *Primate visions*, which is really written from the point of view of human beings, overwhelmingly. The multi-species worlding has been at least as fundamental to me as has been the feminist transformation. They are linked.

Thinking of the companion species manifesto[19] *that came out much later, I can see how those perspectives deepened in your work.*

All along it just deepened, progressively, and still. Being anti-vegan at first, coming to be very appreciative of veganism …

Why were you anti-vegan?

I did not take the killing of animals for food super-seriously, for a long time. I took cruelty seriously, and so reform of animal welfare seemed enough. And I thought that veganism, and

17 Donna Haraway, Teddy bear patriarchy: Taxidermy in the garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936 (1984–1985).
18 Iain McCalman, *Delia Akeley and the monkey: A human-animal story of captivity, patriarchy, and nature* (2022).
19 Donna Haraway, *The companion species manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant otherness* (2003).

I still have some of this critique, tended to turn animals into subjects of rescue, turn them into victims. And that it did not respect the ways of life of working with animals, including in farms. I still hold much of that point of view. I am not a vegan, but much more so than before. But I simply came to respect the radicalism and truth of vegan perspectives, in a way I did not in the beginning. I thought of that as narrow, and I no longer think of it this way. That was a transformation over time. Carol Adams and her writing were important in that transformation, *Pornography of meat*[20] and other pieces. But also, writing about chickens with a New Zealand feminist activist and science studies scholar, Annie Potts.[21] Actually working with people, not abstractions, changed me.

Allow me to bring in a different topic at this point: I would like to ask you about the cyborg, if that is okay. It was and continues to be an important and striking text, partly because it took this relieving break from some feminist technophobia, and also from a very troublesome idea of nature that some feminists nurtured. Can you share with me some information about the circumstances that made you write that article?

Actually, that article is what led Joan Scott to invite me to the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton. It enlarged my network in ways I treasure. Let me say first that in that period, which is the early 80s, there are three pieces I wrote that were fundamental to me and to many people in the world. And they continue to be, all three actually. One of them is "Teddy bear patriarchy," the other is the "cyborg manifesto,"[22] and the third is "Situated knowledges."[23]

The "'Gender' for a Marxist dictionary"[24] came a little bit later and is not as widely read. But it was very clarifying for me to write it. However, there were those three. And they each have a root in experience. I was already very unhappy about the divisions of nature and culture, and the technophobia of so much feminism. I was unhappy about the way ecofeminism was portrayed as technophobic, when I knew too many ecofeminists to take that seriously. I knew better. Noël Sturgeon was probably my most important teacher about that, and Karen Warren, and Val Plumwood. I knew that ecological feminism and ecofeminism were considerably more complex than they were being portrayed in a reductive way. I was unhappy about the categories of radical, liberal, Marxist, lesbian feminism—all of them. And that goes back to my early work. Category formation has always been central to my critique. How categories get made, what work they do, what damage they do, what they can achieve in the world, what they can affirm. How to hold your categories lightly and not fetishize them. How to make them trouble each other and redo each other.

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20 Carol Adams, *The pornography of meat* (2003).

21 Annie Potts and Donna Haraway, Kiwi chicken advocate talks with Californian dog companion (2010).

22 Donna Haraway, A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s (1985).

23 Donna Haraway, Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective (1988).

24 Donna Haraway, "Gender" for a Marxist dictionary: The sexual politics of a word (1991).

"Cyborg manifesto" grew out of an invitation from Jeff Escoffier, who was at that time the editor of the *Socialist Review*, previously *Socialist Revolution*, in the Bay area. The Bay area *Socialist Review* Collective was asking me to be the Marxist feminist representative of the collective at a socialist meeting in Cavtat in what was still Yugoslavia. I think it was in 1982. I went as the delegate of the *Socialist Review* Collective. So I wrote a talk about technology in relation to reproductive unfreedom and freedom. I was interested in the technologies of reproduction and not happy about some of the ways the divisions of categories got done. So I arrived. The women there, we bonded with each other rather quickly, Marxist women from many countries and also local Yugoslavian staff. Then there were the men. There were many progressive left men from Western Europe and Yugoslavia, but they also seemed very macho, it must be said. And then were "the suits" from Eastern Europe and "the suits" from North Korea and the Soviet Union, and these men really impressed me. It was my first personal physical experience of that kind of authoritarian masculinist state Marxism. I threw away my paper and instead gave a version of the "cyborg manifesto" at that meeting, not written but spoken.

What do you mean by "throwing away" your paper?

I never read my papers, never ever. If you look at my talks online, I am never reading the paper. I write my papers after a talk, not before. But in this case, because I was afraid of an unknown context and feeling responsible to *Socialist Review*, I actually had a written paper in advance. It is just that after arriving, I knew it was not what I needed to say as a socialist feminist, science studies representative in solidarity with other women at the conference.

All right, I see.

All of the stuff that I have published follows having spoken it several times. I take elaborate notes, I write a few sentences or even paragraphs, in case my mind goes blank and I cannot think. So I have an elaborate apparatus, which is invisible to the audience. I also always have lots of images and visual material; I learned that from being a biologist. And I never, literally never, read a paper.

And why did you say you were "throwing away" your paper?

Well, I had this written thing that I went with, but I got rid of it. And I also did not speak its contents. I did something else, quite different from what was in the paper. Little pieces of it got into the talk. But it changed radically, became the "cyborg manifesto."

So the talk in Cavtat was the embryo of that manifesto. That talk does not exist anywhere. It was not recorded, it was not written. I came back and wrote the "cyborg manifesto" because at that point, the *Socialist Review* asked a number of prominent feminists—this was after the election of Ronald Reagan—to write a few lines about the future of Marxist feminism from now on, in light of the Reagan administration and Thatcher in England and other neoliberal transitions. In that context I wrote the full text of the "cyborg manifesto." Jeff Escoffier edited it and we worked together with each other a bit. The *Socialist Review* published it.

The East Coast *Socialist Review* Collective were scandalized; they hated it. They thought it was not Marxist, they could not understand how the arguments worked. The West Coast Collective, especially Jeff, liked it a lot, and defended it. And things developed from there. It has always been a controversial piece. It was somewhat ecstatic. The writing in that piece flames. I think it was the first time I really let myself go as a writer. There are plenty of places that are quite strictly argued, that are straight-up arguments in the conventional sense. But fundamentally the structure of the paper is ecstatic, aspirational, even erotic.

I think what makes this paper so compelling is that you deal with so many boundaries at the same time, deconstructing them and creating new and unprecedented connections at the same time.

Also, I brought in science fiction prominently. I also brought in the work of Audre Lorde, Chela Sandoval, and bell hooks. I brought in the work of people I was working with in the history of consciousness department at UC Santa Cruz. There is no question that having a job in the history of consciousness program at UC Santa Cruz freed me to write differently. Everything I have written that really mattered was written from there, because I got permission not to be disciplinary. Which was the reason I was fired from Johns Hopkins. Well, fired, I mean not promoted. Which is the same as fired.

You promised to tell this story earlier on. So, how did you not get tenure at Johns Hopkins?

My research and teaching were fine, they said. However, these same colleagues also made me white out, literally erase, two papers from my CV, one from *Women: A Journal of Liberation* and the other from *Studies in the History of Biology*, the principal journal in the field, that they thought was too "radical" or "political." These papers embarrassed them in front of their peers on university committees. They said various positive things, but they thought that, fundamentally, my writing was not going to be at the forefront of the history of science. I was not going to be a leader in the profession. I was too feminist, too political.

That is what they said?!!

That is what they said. Which I find funny now, frankly. I think they might have regretted it. Although had I stayed in Hopkins, their judgment might have been true. Because Hopkins was too disciplinary and conventional. I think in a way, my colleagues were correct that I really was not fundamentally a historian of science. I was learning from history of science. I was using it, I was really happy to work those six years in the field. I learned an incredible amount, but I really was not to be a historian of science.

At UC Santa Cruz, you became the first tenured professor in feminist theory in the United States, right?

In feminist theory, that is right. In the same month I learned Hopkins was not going to keep me, I got offered the job at Santa Cruz. In the same month! It assured me that this was

a historical thing, not especially a personal one. I was historically positioned. And the very reason my future colleagues hired me in history of consciousness is the very reason others did not want me at Hopkins. So everything I wrote that took off, I wrote within the history of consciousness program.

Which means that the institutional conditions that you had there were crucial for your thinking.

They really mattered. Think for a minute of the graduate students in the history of consciousness program: Chela Sandoval and Katie King and Karen Caplan and Sandra Azeredo and Bettina Aptheker and Noël Sturgeon and Lochlann Jain and Paul Edwards and Joe Dumit and John Hartigan and Giovanna DiChiro and many, many others who have become really important voices—for example, Kim TallBear, Joanne Barker, and Kehaulani Kauanui, who are leaders in indigenous sovereignty movements with serious feminist cores. These are all history of consciousness students. Gloria Anzaldúa and bell hooks took seminars with us in history of consciousness. Plus the faculty, people like Hayden White, James Clifford, Angela Davis, Neferti Tadiar, and Barbara Epstein. It really, really mattered. And it still does.

How did you work together at UC Santa Cruz? Did you constantly discuss, meet, share papers, drink coffee together?

I always would write by myself. I am rather conventional in that regard. Graduate students had powerful writing groups, and I had intensely close colleagues as well as students. The literature scholar and psychoanalytic feminist theorist Helene Moglen, who was the Dean of Humanities at UC Santa Cruz in those years, was an institution builder. She built the Institute for Advanced Feminist Research, where we would gather and talk to each other from around the campus. She helped formalize the women's studies program as an undergraduate major. It existed before, but she gave it an institutional solidity. My position as a tenured professor in a doctoral program was significantly the result of activism from students on campus and the demands of Helene Moglen as Dean, who said that she wanted that position as a condition of her being hired from SUNY [State University of New York]. And Bettina Aptheker was the graduate student representative on the search committee that hired me.

And you had not been in touch with these women before?

No, no not at all. There was a really wonderful group of women who applied for that job. And I was lucky enough to get it. In a way, you flip a coin and whoever got that job was just lucky. Evelyn Fox Keller applied for it. Nancy Hartsock and I applied to share the job, originally. And they said no, they did not want to do it that way. Nancy said, "I will stay in political science at Hopkins, I am happy here in Baltimore." Because Nancy and I applied together, everybody thought we were lesbians. Which we were not. We were friends and co-workers. We were feminist allies and co-thinkers. I got all the advantage of being considered lesbian from the community for quite a while. Before they realized that something is weird here. My partner was to be a man. Fair enough, no problem. The lesbian continuum, in spite of all its excessive collapsing of differences and inequalities, was a positive material force in those years!

To go back to your question: What was it about the history of consciousness program that was so liberating? It was the graduate students, overwhelmingly. The structure of the program was such that we as faculty with different graduate students helped them put together non-disciplinary work. It was not interdisciplinary, it was non-disciplinary. We used the disciplines, for sure, but it was about structure and work around your question: What is it that you are trying to do here? And how can we help make it possible? There was a strong commitment to theory, but what theory meant was itself constantly under discussion. And our job as faculty members was not to work with people in our own field, for example science studies or biology for me, but to use whatever it was that we could do to make the students' work possible. That changed all of us.

And in the course of this, the students' work became part of your work as well. It is striking to see how often you cite the work of your students.

Always, always.

It is not something that professors often do.

No, but it was so clear to me that the students' work was crucial to what I was able to think and vice versa.

In academia, we find ourselves in the midst of complicated systems that have colonial and patriarchal histories. There are huge power issues built into these institutions and still, as feminists, we try to deal with them differently. Did you struggle with that? And did you find ways to make it work for you?

It depends. A little of both. The structure of the program was very helpful for the most part. The structure of the university was not always helpful.

Could you separate the two?

Well, it was not simple. Structurally, the program was set up in such a way that I and many others flourished in that context. Including our colleagues who were not in our program, but who were always crucial to what we were doing, and we to what they were doing. It was really important to work with students in such a way that they had a chance of getting a job at the end of the day too. We really had to think strategically about a serious and good-faith understanding of disciplinary requirements. And the students were teaching assistants in courses in all sorts of disciplinary contexts. Some students were easy to work with, and some students were a pain. And I think some students found me a pain. Human relations stuff. And this was a small community. There were all the things that happen in small communities: competition, hurt feelings, the usual things. But there was truly an ethic of drawing from each other, intellectually and emotionally. And it has continued. If you look at the networks of history of consciousness students out in the world now, they remain rich and strong. I think unusually so.

That is a climate that you, as a faculty, have helped to create.

That is right. And deliberately. We thought about it, we talked about it. James Clifford and I have had many conversations over the years. Hayden White always was fierce about not wanting "my" student. He did not like the way of talking about "my" students. He wanted to talk about "our" students, the students in the program, about ways of making it possible for them to do their work. I think we had a very strong collective understanding that the work we were doing was really about the world and not about a discipline. Teresa de Lauretis was part of the program for many years. She was the most fierce about a kind of psychoanalytic feminist theory. She had a much stronger disciplinary focus to her work, and I think she sometimes found the way I worked very problematic. It was an important difference. I think they both needed to be part of the program.

People could work differently and still coexist.

There was conflict. There were times of anger. But at least for a long time, it was not destructive. In later years, things became different. Many of us retired and were not replaced, there were financial constraints of the university, and folks who came on who did not really have that same history. But even now, I have been retired for ten years, and I know some of the history of consciousness graduate students. The small faculty, several from other departments, including a couple of new people, Banu Bargu and Max Tomba, remain very committed to the students. I think they are rebuilding the program significantly.

Allow me to ask you a few questions about gender. In your article "'Gender' for a Marxist dictionary"[25] *you talk about the sex/gender system, and trace it back to Gayle Rubin. I was wondering whether Ann Oakley's distinction of sex and gender, which is older, played a role for you as well?*

No. Gayle Rubin was important to me, "The traffic in women" was transformational. And a little later Joan Scott's work really mattered. Those are two very different ways of thinking about gender, but they both became necessary to me. Rayna Rapp edited *Toward an anthropology of women*,[26] and Gayle's paper appeared in that book.[27] Plus, there was Louise Lamphere and Shelly Rosaldo's book *Woman, culture, and society*.[28] Rayna's and Shelly and Louise's books were both published around the same time, in the mid-1970s. Clearly, feminists like these in anthropology and ethnography were foundational for the work of all of us. Rethinking origin stories was a big piece of what they collectively did, plus refocusing attention of girls and women throughout human cultures and histories. Why did this come from anthropology in the US? I do not know, but I credit on-the-ground practices of ethnography plus the experiences

25 Donna Haraway, "Gender" for a Marxist dictionary: The sexual politics of a word (1991).
26 Rayna Rapp Reiter (Ed.), *Toward an anthropology of women* (1975).
27 Gayle Rubin, The traffic in women: Notes on the "political economy" of sex (1975).
28 Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Eds.), *Woman, culture, and society* (1974).

of an active women's movement that combined to reshape major knowledge practices in the university and wider world.

Gayle's paper is quite a bit older than Joan's.

A decade older or more. Those two kinds of thinking about gender were fundamental. I liked Gayle Rubin's way of doing it better than I liked Adrienne Rich's approach in those same years. Those are contemporary thinkers. It is not either/or, you can have both/and. But I was more drawn to Gayle Rubin's way of thinking. And that shows in the "'Gender' for a Marxist dictionary" paper. I wrote that piece for Frigga Haug, who remains a companion and friend, a Western German Marxist feminist who has remained within those formations. I met her at Cavtat in Yugoslavia when I spoke the first version of the "cyborg manifesto." She is the one who asked me to write the gender piece for the Marxist dictionary. She gave me the word "gender," but said the publication was going to be in six languages: Chinese, Russian, German, English, French, Spanish. Well, gender is already an incredibly complicated word. And then you put it in six languages that do totally different work with the word. I began to think of that time about my method as a thinker and writer: pulling threads from sticky balls and tracking where they lead and where they meet. And these threads lead everywhere. No, they do not lead everywhere. When you follow a thread, it leads to situated histories of certain kinds. They are all together in this particular sticky ball called gender. Later I use the notion of "string figures." I think of it as a theoretical figure like the "sticky ball." The "binary tree" has been recognized as a theoretical figure for hundreds of years; the string figure and the sticky ball are feminist acquisitions and proposals. And they are theoretical figures, tools for thinking, not decorations. The "'Gender' for a Marxist dictionary" tries to do some of that work.

What I find especially remarkable in this paper is how you read Gayle Rubin's critique of exchange and heteronormative marriage systems again critically with the help of Black feminists, Hortense Spillers and others. You point out how enslaved Black women could not become part of the exchange system the way Rubin's work had set it up. This points to another layer of the system that did not find its way into the feminist critique offered by Rubin.

The insight that Hortense Spillers gave me is crucial. It says that white women were conduits for property, they could transfer property. But Black women were property. There is this fundamental difference between the system of patriarchal marriage and the system of chattel slavery in relation to the construction of women, of "woman." This fundamental difference and the way Hortense Spillers developed the theory redid my thinking.

It is important to see that these insights have always already been there, in Hortense Spillers's work, in your work, in the work of many others. The really deep urge to take race seriously. But again and again, we end up having gender theories in which race is nonexistent or marginal. And we have people "discovering" intersectionality again and again. Why are we not somewhere else with these discussions?

Well, I think there are reasons for what you are talking about. One of them is the enforced apparatus of publication, citation, and disciplinary knowledge. That marginalizes the kinds of writing that women of color often tended to do. They were also actively excluded from the university systems of certification and publication. This was not an accident; it is the explicit racist structure of our institutions. This includes publishing and the demand that graduate students and young scholars cite only published sources and only published sources of a certain kind, only things that counted as theory or counted as empirical research or whatever. And the bulk of the writing of women of color did not qualify. It was either fiction, or journalism or activist writing. It might be material for your analysis, but did not count as the analytical apparatus itself. And this remains true. Even recently I have been guilty of failing to cite key people in terms of history of plantation slavery. I forgot, somehow, Sylvia Wynter and Hortense Spillers and failed to read Katherine McKittrick. I did not fundamentally remember what I knew, I structurally forgot it, and my research practice was weak. So I am personally culpable in some recent writing about what I call the Plantationocene.

What writing was this?

It happened in a talk and published conversation a few years ago. It is not like the trouble goes away; whiteness lurks and bites in unexpected ways. It is a structure. It is not something you can just will away. The structure of our institutions practically ensures that white scholarship is cited again and again and other scholarship is marginalized. What counts as theory remains hierarchized. Even Gayatri Spivak would be cited as a minority writer, as opposed to a critical feminist theorist. It is structural, and I and others deliberately tried our best to work against that from the beginning. For example, when I designed a syllabus for undergraduates, I would look at my syllabus and I would say, "Wow, this is heavy on white." And I would de liberately add other readings, other lectures. I would deliberately redo the syllabus, because I would see that I had done it once again. The need for critical self and community scrutiny in the interests of real solidarity rather than appropriation remains acute for life.

I learned that the hard way in the history of consciousness program. Because my very first feminist theory class that I taught there, right that after I was hired, I was so proud of it. And bell hooks, a student in the seminar, got up and said, "This is one of the most racist things I have ever seen," and she pointed out why. And then Chela Sandoval got up and said "Nooo, wait a minute, look at all this good stuff in the syllabus." And they had this fight. And I thought, bell is right, actually. And Chela is right too, but she was being very nice. I was ashamed. My first emotional experience in my very first feminist theory seminar at UC Santa Cruz was shame at the degree to which whiteness had determined what I assigned as theory in that first seminar.

This reminds me of the beginning of our discussion. You asked me who I was going to interview for this project and I told you mostly the names of white feminists even though my list looks quite different, and even though I have given a lot of thought to the question of race since I have been embarking on this project. But when you asked me I came up with these names! This is shocking and frustrating.

I am completely sympathetic. Because I think whiteness surges through us, structurally, historically, and it is a constant struggle. And I think we need a sense of humor, forgiving yourself, forgiving each other, asking for help, apologizing, doing remedial action, making effective restitution or repair. I think there are all kinds of things to do that are part of an ordinary good life. We try our best. And we keep trying.

At times I ask myself whether it makes sense to write a gender history at all. I guess it does, but only one that grapples with whiteness. We need to decolonize gender.

Well, that is one way of saying it. And it is part of what we need to do. But then, what does that mean in the concrete? Postcolonial is not the same as decolonial is not the same as antiracist is not the same as indigenous. I think we need to multiply our categories carefully. Not just add in and stir. I think we always need more than one category at the same time. My rule of thumb is we need at least three at the same time. Because they triangulate and pull against each other, and work with each other in interesting ways. I would probably think: decolonial, indigenous and … a third category, maybe postcolonial.

Queer?

Yes, but you know. All of these are sort of politically correct, and I am thinking of the feminisms that will be forgotten there—which they might be. Joan Scott's transformative paper,[29] which is none of those three things and is really an achievement. I think there is a way in which we try to be innocent, at least I do, we try to get outside of category trouble instead of inhabiting it. I think we need to inhabit category trouble in order to make it do something else, the categories as opposed to get rid of the ones that bother us.

With all the risks that this entails …

Right. It is staying with the trouble, that is the phrase that I wrote that last book about. Staying with the trouble.[30] Do not deny it, do not try to erase it. Stay with it in order to make it do something else. Gender is like that.

Can a history of gender that stays with the trouble start by claiming that gender was a white category in its very beginning?

Well, you already remembered that it was actually a very medical category. And grammatical. Not exactly white. I think gender was constructed as fairly white in feminist theory as a term. In one sense, it was feminists who constructed gender as white.

In the writings of Money and Stoller it was a white category as well, even if they do not name it or exactly because they do not need to name it. Look at who they were working with …

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29 Joan Scott, Gender: A useful category of historical analysis (1986).

30 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene* (2016).

You are right, all of what you said is true, but I do not think that is what one means by saying that gender was a fundamentally white category in feminist theory. You are not talking about Money when you say that. In feminist theory, we are talking about ourselves, our own potent, generative, but deeply flawed categories.

Still, we have to understand and deal with the violence that is part of the psychiatric-medical setting in which these categories emerge. In what ways are we haunted by the kind of violence that is inscribed in the term "gender"? What happened to this violence when feminists took over the category?

It is a feminist acquisition to be able to critique that structure. *Plus* the work of Money and Stoller opened up the possibility of transformation. Both! Both!

That is the trouble, right?

I do not think it is useful as feminist critique to remember only the gender violence of their work. At the same time, their work validated the possibility of trans within medical frameworks. People took it apart and went much further.

… and they made social construction thinkable in new ways.

Absolutely, their work is part of the history of liberation as well as part of the history of oppression. Both/and. I am a both/and kind of girl! It is also about not dividing into good and evil. It is about the struggle to open up things that are more conducive to living and dying well with each other. This has to be an act of peace-making, too. An act of active peace-making, not of making enemies, including enemies in our critical past. Which is not to say that there are not some straight-up enemies. There are!

Another reason why gender was great was because it helped to contest the naturalization of sex differences.

Absolutely.

That was helpful and problematic, because feminism got invested in a dichotomy, which was charged with the nature/culture division. In "'Gender' for a Marxist dictionary," you write that the concept of gender tended to be quarantined from the infections of biological sex. The question that troubles me here is, simply put: What did we gain and what did we lose by separating the two, sex and gender?

I like that question. Clearly, gender as socially constructed was a critique of biological determinism and naturalized sex differences. It was very useful and important. The problem then is freezing social constructionism over and against biological determinism, not as situated critique, but as a way of reinforcing the wall between what we call nature and what we call culture. Well, I love technology and science, I love biology, I love the body, I refuse to let the

processes of what we call biology become the enemy over and against this anemic, evacuated, weak, pallid concept of social constructionism. Nonsense! Rather, somehow we have to implode the categories: so, natureculture. Why should we be afraid that there might be certain kinds of molecular and developmental processes in mammalian and other animal development that resolve in certain probabilities of behavior in situated circumstances? Why should we be afraid of such things? Why should we be always suspicious and become anti-science quickly? Why can we not work by addition and complexification and opening up, rather than identifying the enemy and then fetishizing an opposite category—in this case, society? Our best thinkers do not do that. They insist on reworking categories, reworking ways of thinking and researching.

What you say makes me think of Anne Fausto-Sterling's work.

Exactly, she is a wonderful example. And Scott Gilbert. I can think of more, but these two people, one man, one woman, are really good examples of having done this for many decades. Ruth Bleier is also really important.

And to work like this needs a recognition of situated knowledges. That you know when to use what term in what way, not to use "gender" as a universal or monolithic term for example, as we discussed earlier.

Gender is a really important category. I think we would be crazy not to use gender. By the way, I think it is very funny that feminists have been so successful with gender as a category that quite literally all the biologists these days only talk about gender and almost never use the word "sex." It has almost disappeared from the vocabulary. Gender means a whole lot. It means what sex used to, plus much more. Look at the titles of papers in biology: The word "sex" hardly ever appears. It is really quite funny.

But often it basically means what sex used to mean in the past.

It means more than that, but it also means what sex used to mean. It means sex difference. It is truly very funny. Because it is like sex is a slightly suspect category, a dirty category, and I think the writers are not particularly sure why. But "gender" seems to be the more proper word. It cracks me up, this has been true for quite a while.

That leads me to my final question: What can the futures of gender be?

Gender remains a terrain of struggle. Absolutely. And we need to inhabit that terrain of struggle in situated ways. And situated does not mean in some small place, it means thinking of the threads that matter here, and how they break and connect. What is significant in this situation? The place where the word "gender" shows up most frequently, in my experience right now, is in the term "gender fluid." This is really interesting. There is that effort to take the category gender and the image of flows of liquids, fluidity. It is a very interesting phrase and a terrain of struggle. And frequently, the most important terrains of struggle are the schools. Schools and the law are maybe the two institutional apparatuses that are most important for

struggle over the meanings of gender … Plus medicine, always medicine. Think of gender-affirming care in medicine and the current fights for the right to such care for youth.

When we talk about gender fluidity, we are not talking about terms only, we are talking about ways in which people inhabit bodies that relate differently to the binary. Would you agree with this?

Oh absolutely, it means refusing to end up in one category or the other. It is not just binaries, but the false idea that the end point of the process is to find the right category, whether it is binary or not. Not a route towards somewhere else. Fluidity is where living and dying occur, which is an ongoing process. Gender fluidity is anti-teleological. I say that without denying for a minute the obligatory performance of gender. Gender is real and made up, at the same time. Like all of the important apparatuses, it is both real and made—and making. Gender makes; gender is made.

Is gender fluidity a possible future of gender?

No, I am not really thinking about the future, I am thinking about the present. It is one of the present things. I worry less about the future and more about a thick, non-instantaneous, durational present.

What about a presence pointing to possible futures, a presence that enables us to think what might one day be beyond itself?

I try to think of the present in terms of ongoing as well as being toward what makes sense; a kind of imaginative luring. Future not as a teleological goal, but as an ongoing opening up of living and dying in less deadly ways. I think of small "f" future, I am really not happy about capital-F future thinking. I like to think of ongoing as in luring, in bell hooks' notions of luring, lure toward justice and care that might be but is not yet.

"Gender fluidity" is a present-tense term. I do not know what the term will be ten years from now. There will be other terms, because the struggles will have evolved. Terms like "gender fluidity" and "nonbinary" are very important now, because with those terms you can make demands.

Some children are growing up these days knowing these terms, knowing people who use them and using them for themselves. It is interesting to think in what ways these children differ from us, who have grown up in completely different worlds, having been taught that men and women were different entities.

It is different from the way we grew up. And if their parents acknowledge and support gender exploration, nonbinary, gender fluidity—wow. While in other places you can still be executed, or literally put in prison for that. In many places in the United States, it is not safe, it is physically and emotionally and even legally dangerous. One of the reasons these truly dangerous movements against gender diversity have gained strength all around the world is

because collectively, we have been very successful. And we are not stopping. I think that they recognize that. Before, I have said I do not want to talk about the future, but the future is not theirs, the future is ours ... They understand how truly dangerous we, collectively, are to nationalisms, and ethnicisms, and racisms, and sexisms. They understand how very dangerous our movements are to all of that. But they are also very dangerous to us. We would be fools to underestimate the danger of the authoritarian right-wing movements around the world, on race, on sex, on reproductive freedom, on many things. It would be foolish to underestimate that. But at the same time, I think we would be fools to underestimate the changes we collectively have already made, and are still making.

Maybe that is a nice way to reframe gender. Gender as a term that can help us in these struggles …

Yes. Gender is a constant struggle, remember that slogan, "freedom is a constant struggle"? So is gender! For similar reasons.

Thank you so much, Donna, for thinking through these questions with me.

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