

JORNADAS DE FEMINISMOS 2021

CÁTEDRA ALFONSO REYES

FEMINISMO PARA NUESTROS TIEMPOS: ENTREVISTA CON JUDITH BUTLER

9 DE MARZO | TECNOLÓGICO DE MONTERREY

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Como parte de las actividades académicas realizadas en torno a la Cátedra Alfonso Reyes, tuvimos el placer de entrevistar a Judith Butler, una de las pensadoras más desafiantes, controvertidas, e imprescindibles para comprender el feminismo contemporáneo.

Judith Butler (Ohio, 1956) ha realizado importantes aportes a las teorías sobre la performatividad del género y el sexo, influenciando así parte de la teoría cultural, la teoría *queer*, la filosofía política, la ética y algunas escuelas de feminismo filosófico de finales del siglo XX. Butler teoriza sobre la desnaturalización de la heterosexualidad normativa,¹ que penaliza identidades de género e identidades sexuales. *El género en disputa*, una de sus obras clave, explora temas como la performatividad de género, la identidad sexual y la crítica al esencialismo sexual.

Su presencia se realizó en un fecha especial, en la que una gran cantidad de mujeres se retiraron de los espacios públicos, de las calles, de las escuelas, de las oficinas, de las fábricas, de los sitios de comercio y de las redes sociales en apoyo al movimiento “Un día sin nosotras”, que surgió hace exactamente un año, el 9M, para visibilizar con su ausencia y su silencio las profundas condiciones de desigualdad, injusticia, y violencia en las que sobreviven millones de mexicanas en un país en el que cada día 11 mujeres son asesinadas, y 26 mujeres y niñas son desaparecidas.

Ese día honramos “Un día sin nosotras” y “Ni una menos” conversando con quien nos ha enseñado que el pensamiento académico tiene que salir a la calle y los muros de las universidades deben ser porosos para abrazar las causas sociales.

Ana Laura Santamaría: Thank you very much Judith Butler for so generous acceptance of this invitation. Let's begin this conversation by talking about what feminism is in our times.

1 N. de la C. Judith Butler es no binaria y para referirse a sí misma utiliza los pronombres they/them y she/her, aunque prefiere los primeros. Me parece relevante enfatizar sobre este punto, dada la discusión actual en México sobre las personas no binarias, generada por el asesinato de Jesús Ociel Baena Saucedo, magistrado del Tribunal Electoral del Estado de Aguascalientes, ocurrido el 13 de noviembre de 2023.

Judith Butler (JB): I thought today I might talk to you briefly about feminism, about the feminist movement for our times. I should start with the simple fact that I believe we are lucky to find ways to stay in communication with each other in our worlds, through platforms such as these; that our current isolation is not our permanent state. It is rather a new point of departure for thinking about our relations with one another and the social form that we are building as we expand networks of care. I think indeed we know that care has always been associated with women, with women's work, but now in recent months, and perhaps the entirety of last year, we see that networks of care moved us out of the household, moved us out of the family into the neighborhood, into the city, into the region, that our action in one part of the world affects people's lives in another part of the world.

Perhaps what this pandemic has to offer us is a more expansive sense of our interdependency, an interdependency that belongs to us by virtue of our status as living beings, embodied and living beings: What air do we breathe? We share the air. What surfaces do we share? All of the surfaces. How do we each depend on the earth and the survival and persistence of the earth? Much is now our common responsibility, perhaps also our global responsibility, and we have to think again about how to imagine ourselves as belonging to the same world, to a common world, and to stop the climate change, and the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity. In Mexico you are more acutely and knowledgeable than I am on this matter.

At the same time, I think there is a chance to think about a new form of relationality, an interdependency that exceeds internationalism. I am very aware that in the last years the attacks on feminism have become quite public and quite intense, and on the one hand this is a continuation of the misogyny that has been with patriarchal cultures for the longest time. On the other hand, I think there is something very contemporary about the attacks on feminism. There are attacks on LGBTQI people as well, and trans-people in particular. These attacks have been a response to our success to the various ways we have fought against sexual violence, for equal wages, to give women reproductive freedom. We have also fought for trans-rights and for the right of all people, no matter how gender conforming or gender non-conforming, to walk on the street and to breathe easily in their worlds without fear of violence, stigmatization, or discrimination.

So, when people ask me "Why be a feminist these days? Hasn't everything been accomplished that feminism wants to achieve?" I always, of course, say "no." It cannot be denied that women are disproportionately exposed to violence and hunger, that women are much more likely to be illiterate than men, and to suffer with the threat and reality of sexual violence against them, more than most men do, not all men, but most men. Similarly, some have criticized the movement against ecological destruction, against extractivism, as anti-market, as exaggerated or perhaps as naive. Yet, the various movements that seek to save our planet from environmental destruction, especially those driven by youth, have become undisputedly urgent. If we cannot save the earth from destruction, then we lose the conditions we require to live, to love, to struggle for justice, freedom, and equality. So, I bring up the environmental movement because I believe that all social movements, including feminism, depend upon the movement to combat climate change. If we cannot sustain the planet, we would not have our struggles for justice, or equality, or for freedom.

And of course, feminism is a strong movement, it is an incredible movement, but I think we also have to ask: is it a movement that is just for women? Or is it a movement to change the landscape and to battle all forms of gender discrimination? It is very important to remember that feminism has always thought about gender as a political and historical category. In other words, what it meant to be a woman in 1910 is very different from what it means to be a woman now, and that depends on time and place, culture and language. For example, women were considered not suitable for academic life at one point in time, and now they are suitable and, in fact, in leadership positions everywhere. What happened? Well, the social category, the historical category of women has changed so that it permits different meanings. We have depended on gender to be an open category, subject to redefinition, which is why transwomen are also women, they belong to the category of women, they must belong. Therefore, those who assume that women are only those assigned female at birth, I think, close the category instead of opening it into something that might be hospitable, generous, capacious, and open to the future meanings of what gender can be.

Feminism is, in my view, not just a movement for women, but for all those who want to live in a world of radical equality, where we savor the interdependent character of our lives. And that means changing the life in the family, the workplace, the street, the factory, the field, and the square. Although, we are told that the feminist movement will destroy civilization, the family, or culture. We know that is not a fair conclusion. To demand the transformation of all these sites of living so they embody principles of radical equality, we need to support a wide number of social movements and to show them that it is in their interest to accept the equality of women, the openness of gender, and the interdependency of our lives.

Here I would like to say that academic work is also important: How do we think about these concepts? When we say we are against violence, we must say what is violence, where do we find it, what forms does it take? Is it always physical? Can it be symbolic? Can it be linguistic? When we say we are for gender justice, do we have a concept of justice? From what texts? From what social movements? From what histories? Do we derive our idea of justice? And when we think about equality, are we thinking about the equality of every individual to one another? Or are we, perhaps, saying that we are equally dependent upon each other, that we are equally interdependent, that we are, in fact, characterized by our dependency on a wide range of life systems, environments and ecologies which, without it, our lives would not be possible? Perhaps, now is the time to rethink equality in terms of these fundamental relations. So, to my critics or my skeptics who say: "Why still feminism? Why feminism now?" Well, as we know the struggle is not over. We must ask ourselves: what kind of power do we wield? What power do we want?

Well, I would suggest, perhaps, reflecting briefly on the work of "Ni una menos." The work of Veronica Gago, in particular, proposes the concept of *feminist potencia*. Now, *potencia* in Spanish is not the same as potential in English. It is a difficult word to translate. It is movement, it is force, it is collectivity, and when we speak about potential we are dealing with a form of power or perhaps a form of counterpower that is a process, one that does not come to an end through a specific realization of its aims

in a time or place. It is an open-ended process, and as such it is also *potencia*, a form of desire, yes, but also a form of thought that is linked to bodies in their collectivity. One could say “it’s a life force,” but maybe it is a force that emerges between bodies or in the middle of collectivities as we act together.

We might think “we need to have a force in order to act, we need to have power in order to act,” but sometimes in the very process of collective action we find our force, or we produce it, for one another. It is created by bodies as they act together. This is why Gago writes that desire is a force and already a form of power, one that is generally not included in the typologies of power that we learn in political science classes. Many of the Latin American feminist movements have taught the north, and taught to Europe and other countries. We watch that a feminist movement needs to be linked to the struggle against colonialism and continuing colonial power; it needs to be linked to the struggle against old and new forms of dispossession, including colonial extractivism, the displacement of Indigenous peoples and the extraction of minerals for the marketplace at the expense of the earth.

I would suggest that we also, as a feminist movement, have to be concerned with labor unions. We must have our place in those unions, or to produce forms of solidarity and collectivity that can make sure women are protected in their jobs, that they have rights and entitlement including a pension, that their health is protected, and that they are paid equally to men. Of course, both men and women must make a livable wage, right? It won’t suffice to be paid equally to men if nobody is making a good wage, it must be a livable wage. I want to suggest, maybe, that as feminism becomes involved in the critique of neoliberalism, the long and violent history of colonial dispossession, patriarchal forms of state terrorism, the prison industrial complex... that all of this means that feminism is a way of linking with other groups. The links among all of those movements is feminism. Feminism is a theory of solidarity.

Finally, I would just say that, you know, it has always been the task of women to mourn. After war, women mourn. After the horrible dictatorships and the terrible killing, women mourn. As far back as Greek tragedy, it is women who are mourning. But I don’t believe that it is the natural task of women to mourn. I think that all of us, regardless of gender, must learn to practice a certain kind of mourning. In the United States when the Black Lives Matter movement became so visible and so powerful over the summer months, we saw that everyone on the street was mourning because Black Lives should not be destroyed so quickly and so brutally by the police. We also saw that all of those who were mourning were also demanding justice. So, then the question for us, for feminists, for feminist theory, is: what is the relationship between mourning and justice? How is it that when we know what we have lost — that it was unjust that it was lost — then our ideas of justice can emerge from there? Because a just world would be a world in which all lives would be considered equally valuable. The loss of any life would be, through police violence, absolutely unacceptable, and that radical equality of the living would be expressed both in our mourning and in our calls for justice.

Mariana Gabarrot (MG): I listen to you and there's something we talk with our students about taking concepts seriously: We use these words all the time: justice, gender, women, feminism, right? And then when you actually stop and think "Oh, what does this mean to me? What does this mean to my community?" You struck a very important fiber by saying that we need to open up categories. You are an academic, a very successful academic. To open these institutions that have this patriarchal history, what does this mean when you're an academic?

JB: I would say, you know, sometimes we hear critics complain that all the left has taken over the university, or that the university is filled with all these radical tenured people. They have job security when nobody has job security. They have job security, and they indoctrinate students, or they seem to convert students to their point of view. Now, it seems to me that in a feminist theory class, for instance, when you ask about the question of gender, you open up a number of issues. Is it the same as sex? Is it cultural? Is it historical? How does it appear in different languages? And what about languages that have no place for gender? How do we explain that, right? But also, what is the relationship between anatomy, endocrinology, genetics and a lived sense of gender, or a historically changing sense of gender? Is there a relationship between science and the social sciences, or science and language that we need to think about? Or perhaps we need to think about the language of science itself to see what is built into the hypothesis?

In other words, we open up a set of questions without exactly knowing what the answer will be. And that's a sign that we are practicing open intellectual inquiry. That is what universities are supposed to do. They pose questions even when the posing of questions may be unsettling, may be difficult, may conflict with what we have learned from our family or our religious upbringing. But we do pose the questions and we give people all the time in the world to think about how they want to approach it. We don't say "you must approach it this way." We don't grade a student in a good way because they agree with us. No! In fact, sometimes our students give us our best challenges, right? They're giving us very strong critiques of what we just taught and that is a beautiful thing. We affirm that. Even if it hurts us. We affirm it because that's what open inquiry is.

What is really the case is that we are committed to opening up questions even when they are frightening or dangerous. But the very fact that our practice is called "indoctrination," "conversion," or "left authoritarianism" is because we have, or at least I have, apparently, unsettled certain conventional ideas of what sex is, or what follows from the fact that you might be called a girl at birth. It is supposed to be the case that you stay a girl, that you get married to a man, that you reproduce within the context of marriage and that the marriage is legally and religiously sanctified. And if you depart, does that mean you're not a woman anymore? Or, does that mean that you're expanding the category of "woman" to include other ways of life, of living and of loving, of relating to others that don't fit that mold? Now, there is lots to be said about this.

Dora García (DG): You have spoken about the humanities and the future of the humanities and you have asked whether studying humanities is a fundamental social obligation that should occur in universities. How can we promote the idea that we cannot learn about our world if the humanities are not present? And since universities are the place where the presence of the humanities has its potential, it is fundamental for universities to promote critical reflections on gender studies, and the study of inequality, injustice and violence. How can we ensure that these critical studies, which imply a gender perspective, permeate the disciplinary areas in universities to create a more inclusive and equal world?

JB: That is a very important question and one that deserves a very full answer which I think I cannot give now, but I want to take this very seriously. Technology has a very strong social value and throughout the world technological institutes are supposed to help bring a region, or a city, or a nation into contemporary academic life in an efficient, profitable way. But also, of course, technology serves communications like this one. We are very grateful for your technology. And yet I think when we come to questions of value: what is the ultimate value? Productivity, market value? How do we decide on that? What is the relationship of market value, productivity/profit, to other kinds of value? For example, our community, or the preservation of the earth, or substantive equality rather than gestural or empty equality.

The posing of the very question means we are in the humanities. We have entered, we are there. But when that question is shut down, then the humanities is also shut down. For instance, how many people in the United States believed that Donald Trump did not lose the election and on what basis did they believe that? What resources were they relying on to come to that conclusion? In a classroom, when somebody comes to us with a view like that we say: "So, tell me on what basis did you come to that conclusion?" We don't immediately say that is totally wrong. And then it is our job to ask what that media sources say against other media sources. How would we research this? What are the forms of research that give us a chance to exercise judgment wisely, and to discern what counts as legitimate evidence and to discard what is not legitimate evidence? Thinking critically means not accepting everything that is immediately given to you, including my words, right? Go back and check. "Is this right? Is not right? What would be an alternative?" That kind of open discussion is what universities are meant to do.

Those were the questions of values and evidence. But also, what are we good for? There are debates on social media about what is right and what is not, on how you read a tweet or a message, how to evaluate it. The entire world of evaluation is one that every science needs. Under the pandemic, this includes questions of life and death: whose life, under what conditions does somebody die? How do you decide to deny a bed to somebody and give it to someone else? Medical ethics and narrative medicine are places where the humanities enter into our life and death issues. We also need to make clear that there is strong public support for the humanities. We can ask how many people love poetry, how many people read novels, how many people debate philosophy at the dinner table even though they may not call it that. We have to be able to show that what we do in academia is actually linked, not just to the social movements, but to the common concerns of everyday life. Thus,

having these skills of thought, of writing argumentation, actually illuminate our world to help us establish our ethical and political coordinates or orientation.

MG: The humanities give us questions, but also hope, right? Because you talk a lot about imagining different worlds. It is part of the humanities to do the task of imagination and that has a lot to do with feminism. So, humanities and feminism make sense because feminists are always trying to imagine a different world and, sometimes, like you said, we strike and we become uncomfortable in universities, we are uncomfortable to people.

Going back to your initial words, I was thinking we have mourned students. We have mourned our own friends. It is important to recognize that all lives are worth mourning. And, I definitely agree with you in that it is not the role of women to mourn. If we care for people, we help people to mourn. Nonetheless, in a country like ours, mourning seems to easily turn into despair. Sometimes, when I finish a class, the students say “Oh, I’m depressed.” So, I try to give the class on a different note. But, how to mourn without falling into despair?

JB: Well, the quick answer is to mourn together. In other words, mourning should take place in community and with others. It is one of the terrible features of the pandemic that many people have been left to mourn the loss of loved ones all alone in their apartments or their rooms without being able to travel, without being able to say goodbye. And, you know, we have these technologies that substitute for the gathering, which is really important. Yet, we are learning how much we need each other’s company in order to feel. Some passages happen when we mourn together. We lift each other. We are also alive together as we mourn or as we sing or even as we pray.

What communities can do is embrace people who are mourning: make sure they get fed, that they are sleeping, that they are connected. We don’t let them be alone for too long. This tells us something really crucial about who we are as social creatures. This sense of community or relationality doesn’t have to come from somebody I am deeply close with. They can be the person down the street that has received an eviction notice and who has no place to go. The mutual aid societies that emerged through the pandemic, or the networks of care, even transregional or transnational, are quite amazing. They show that we are interconnected in ways that transcend the idea of the nation or the region, beyond those borders.

DG: Femicides are a reflection of our societies, fossilized by the patriarchal criteria of male domination, and by naturalized structures of violence. They emit an atmosphere of death and injury that reiterates that the victims are dispensable. The logic of terror is not only on public settings, but also on private settings as the pandemic has shown. Given the descriptions that have become established as everyday forms of life, the task of transforming violence is complex. What proposals would you suggest by modifying these structures?

JB: Well, there are several, but I think it is important to start with the family and with domestic violence. In too many countries, in too many legal systems, violence done to women inside the home is permissible to the degree that she is understood to be the property of the man, or because the public believes it has no right to interfere in a family's business. That kind of violence is accepted precisely when we build these barriers against intervention.

My sense is that networks for women who are battered within the home, or who are raped or threatened with violence, or those who are survivors, or who saw other women being battered or killed inside the home, have to become stronger. Only through the strongest networks women can be able to leave homes that are deeply injurious to them. This means having shelter, education, mobility and social support. Governments should be strongly supporting and funding that. But this requires acknowledging something about patriarchal violence in the family, and there will always be religious and heteronormative objections to naming the family or the household as a violent place.

Of course, it is not always the case. Sometimes the home is a beautiful place. Sometimes a family takes care of people in need. But when the family is violent, when murder takes place, rape and battery, then it has to be broken open, quite literally, in order to give refuge, support for women who then can find their way, not as lifelong victims, but as actors, agents in the world. That is very hard. I also think legal systems turn the other way on so-called crimes of passion: "Oh! that was a crime of passion." And then that is treated as if it was a natural disaster: "We can't do anything about that, it is not covered by the insurance." It is not acceptable that a man might kill on occasion when he is jealous or injured or enraged by something. We need to deconstruct this idea of a crime of passion, it should probably be renamed as a hate crime.

MG: You reflected on the role of the state and the legal systems, funding, and the importance of the collective body. This takes me to your discussions on the power of assembly and mobilizing vulnerability. I would like to pose a question in that direction because, when reading you, I see there is hope in our political voice. Dora and I have talked about the assumption that we have a state and that we have institutions to confront. But what happens when those institutions are so fragmented, and sometimes actors, such as organized crime, reconstruct the notion of what is political building? As the Mexican academic Sayak Valencia would say "there is a new macabre, a new monstrous way of expression through cruelty and body mutilation." How can we talk about the power of assembly in these extreme contexts.

JB: Sometimes assemblies, instead of demanding changes to existing structures, can call for and begin to enact a new set of institutions. So, for instance, we talk about mutual aid societies, or informal networks of solidarity that are there for women who suffer violence in the home. Those can be informal, they can also become over time more formal, they can become institutionalized. So, the call that comes from the assembly can be to have an institution that embodies this commitment and does the work of providing refuge and advocacy. Similarly, I look into Argentina, Chile, Colombia or Mexico, places where

there is mass mourning, the mourning for people that disappeared, like the students in Ayotzinapa, a horrible event, or massive femicides. Femicides are a repeated pattern of life and the opposition to it has to slowly institutionalize the demands. We come together and we demand that evidence is shown, that inquiries are made, that the results of the inquiries are transparently available to the public. We are changing institutions so they can embody our values. Sometimes it means producing an institution where there is none.

DG: Faced with the various types of violence experienced in societies like Mexico's you proposed generalized forms of resistance that, on many occasions, become political resistance. Although such resistance seeks to defend our rights, it rounds the risk of being called disorderly, thus complicating the possibility of speaking up against injustice. In your book *Sin miedo: formas de resistencia a la violencia de hoy*, you state that the ways of resisting today's violence always imply the risk of greater injustice. How can we promote actions to stimulate such movements with a force of solidarity in countries like Mexico?

JB: Well, I don't want to fall into that old trap of being the American who tells you what to do. That would be bad. Maybe it is romantic, but I think there was a point when "Ni una menos" had so many women on the streets that they pushed the police off the streets. In other words, it wasn't a confrontation. There were so many women that the police just no longer owned the streets. The women made the street their home. They were so safe on that street for that time, they didn't have men to fear and they also didn't have police to fear.

Now, of course, especially under conditions of pandemic, many authoritarian regimes are saying: "This is a public health risk" or "we need to take emergency measures to make sure that people do not gather inappropriately". But then we have to ask: Which groups does that affect and which groups does that not affect? A certain kind of war is waged through the differential application of an anti-gathering rule.

Of course, one of the hardest issues to face is when you claim public land, or public space or even housing, and the police come and there is a confrontation. You can end up in jail, you can end up accused of a crime even though you are objecting to an injustice. Erdogan in Turkey has just done that. The student protests have been called criminal actions. Students have been called thugs and terrorists because they have peacefully, non-violently, objected to the destruction of academic freedom within the university. They want their university, they want their classrooms not to be propagating political positions from the government, but rather giving them a chance to form their own judgment on matters of common concern.

One has to know how to identify that logic: Where a popular resistance becomes criminalized? We have seen that with trans rights in Eastern Europe. We have seen it against Muslims in France. And we saw Trump trying to do it with migrants from Mexico. If they were interested in crossing the border, they must be "criminals", "It's an invasion." This twisted logic has to be exposed and resisted. A powerful alternative media is required to get the word out when people congregate in the streets. It is never the case that an assembly all by itself can make radical change. That assembly has to

be represented, and its representation must come with an analysis to understand what is truly at stake.

MG: Of course, feminism is one example because it has changed the world in many ways, non-violent, compared to other radical revolutions. When we talk about non-violent collective feminism there is also a process constructing the “us” and “the other.” I know we need to open up categories, yet there is this constant process of the state “othering” us and saying “you are criminals.” How can we approach this construction of community without being exclusionary?

JB: Yes, I am one of those people who believes that social movements have internal antagonisms. We should not imagine that a social movement is a beautiful place where everybody gets along and has the same view. No. People are struggling over fundamental categories, for example whether they stay closed, whether they will be open; with whom to rely or formulate one’s terms and how to get those terms publicized. All of those are enormously important political questions and we differ and we have arguments.

But I also think non-violence as a practice does not necessarily come out of a loving peaceful part of the soul. It is not like we are all just offering love in the face of hate. We are also very angry. We are furious, but we work with our fury. We work with our anger. We cultivate it into a practice that wants to dismantle systems of injustice, but does not want to reproduce the violence that we are posing. That is a very hard line to walk. How can I, in all my rage, seek to dismantle institutions that are pervasively racist, or terribly violent like the US prison system? Abolitionism, as it is called, is about taking an institution down. It is non-violently destroying an institution. In fact, it is the destruction of something that is violent in the name of anti-violence.

We need to be clear about that and we also need to reflect that clarity in our practice. I think we should not be afraid of rage in the same way we should not be afraid of sorrow. We live both passions and our politics emerge from them. But rage is not some immediate impulse that is bound to turn into violence. Aggression and violence are, for me, not quite the same. So, even within the group, we can struggle non-violently. We can be angry without it being violent and that is also true of our oppositional practice. I think that is an art form, a political art form and it does not come easily. We have to work on it as if we were trying to get a symphony or painting pallets.

MG: And it is a beautiful way of saying “this is hard work” to our students that are listening to you. In your collection of essays *Sin miedo: formas de resistencia a la violencia de hoy*, there is this beautiful essay where you talk about laughter and you also talk about joy. In political movements, such as feminism, we find so much joy. You see women confronting policemen with their bodies, but you also see women dancing and singing. Can you talk a little more about that?

JB: Hannah Arendt has a concept of *public happiness*. I think when people are coming together because they have endured terrible loss or they have suffered an outrageous crime or they have a desire to transform the world in a certain way, they share those values. They are not alone with their own sense of fatalism and pessimism. But when you assemble and you are in the grips of a passion like that, you are also creating an event that is joyous. So, you are already entering the world and transforming it. Philosophically, you are enacting the change for which you are calling. Act like it is in the future, but you are also in the moment of bringing that future into being. That is a kind of performativity, if you will, that is there with collective passions.

Nonetheless, collective passions could be terrible. They could be murderous; they could be fascistic. We know this. Nationalists could be white supremacists. We saw that in the Capitol and in the US way too often now. So, I don't mean to say all collective passion is beautiful. It is not. But it can be when it is linked to transformation in the direction of a more complete and radical democracy, when freedom is extended and expanded, when equality is rethought, when justice is still an insistence and a strong ideal that people are living with and sharing. It lifts us from terrible despair. This is why we need each other so badly not to fall into terrible pessimism.

DG: How can we promote the reforms that must be implemented in frameworks that are an anti-authoritarian and anti-fascist, anti-racist, and which oppose oppression and domination based on gender and sexuality? How can we achieve policies that oppose the precarious conditions in which increasingly more people live?

JB: Well, it is a big question and a hard one. We need radical social movements, grassroots activism. We learn most about what needs to be addressed by listening to people who are suffering injustice. At the same time, we need alliances in the government, in international organizations, and solidarities with other groups. So, a transregional and transnational feminism is one that is extremely important, but it has to be constantly in dialogue with the local. That means not imposing its ideals on them. We see how that works sometimes with non-governmental organizations. They decide what feminist issues are relevant and then they go to their countries and say: "These are your issues." No.

Angela Davis and Françoise Verges, and other contemporary feminist theorists are calling for a transnational feminism. I believe that would have to take place in many different levels of institutionalization and non-institutionalization to keep it dynamic and honest. How does that work with "decolonial feminism"? Which is so important throughout Latin America, especially in the Andes, but also in the US and increasingly in the UK and in Africa. It is extremely important to think about that. Does the "decolonial" work in apartheid South Africa? Some people say yes, and some people say no, but then you have a very interesting transregional discussion. So, I can't answer your question concretely and practically, except to say that building the transnational frame would be really important and it will also exemplify both interdependency and radical equality.

MG: I would say that acknowledging that there is more than one way to construct knowledge is a fundamental way to start this dialogue. Of course, coming from the university in our case, learning to value other types of ancestral knowledge is so important in our countries. Communities have been teaching us how to relate to nature and to our bodies in a different way. In Spanish, *descolonizar* means rebuilding the narrative.

There is a question that we have not touched. It goes to the heart of theoretical and activist ideas by recognizing alterity: How can we include the notion of disability, the notion of these bodies that cannot put themselves forward on the street? This question is from a *compañera*, which in Spanish refers to a person whom we walk together with. She is saying when our body does not allow us to go to the street, how can feminists relate to these experiences?

JB: I think that disability studies, and my own relationship with people who are disabled who work in this area, is what led me to think about the concept of interdependency. There is a video of me with Sunaura Taylor who is a wonderful author. She writes on animals and disability, feminism and the Earth. She is incredible. So, Sunny, that is Sanaura, she is in a chair and needs assistance, but also has the capacity to do certain things on her own. By being with her an entire built environment became new to me: This road is not meant for people in a wheelchair; this sidewalk does not have the special “curves top;” drinking and trying on a piece of clothing. All these different moments illuminated whether the world, the structure of our streets and our homes and our stores, was welcoming her or not. It really made me reconsider what are the supports that we need in order to live. None of us live unsupported, but Disability Studies have given us that idea in a very radical way.

For a long-time, feminists have argued that there is not one form for the human body. There is no one form for men, there is no one form for women. We have these ideal forms of the human body as mobile or as looking a certain way, and these are deeply oppressive because the vast majority of people don't conform to the ideals of gender, or the ideals of the body, of human morphology. So, the more we open our minds to that diversity, the more we build environments that are welcoming to people regardless of bodily ability, the better off we would be. Otherwise, we are engaging in forms of exclusion and devaluing those lives, and that cannot be acceptable.

As for going to assemblies, it is also true for people in prison. They cannot go, and yet they protest and have forms of solidarity. This means that advocates are especially important. Some people work with the media to achieve visibility. In my case, I am older and sometimes I can't go because I have an auto-immune issue, but I can write an editorial, or I can call people and arrange for their transportation. So, the visibility of the assembly takes a lot of planning, media and work that is not part of the gathering in itself. We must remember that this requires all kinds of people with different levels of mobility.

DG: Considering that you have said that literature is where utopia is imaginable or feasible, do you believe that it is still pertinent to talk about utopia and hope considering the limitations?

JB: It is true that I think literature can take us out of the space and time in which we live, and put us in a temporary world where we are asked to think differently. From within a literary text, we can look back on our world and say: “Oh, what a strange way it’s organized.” It doesn’t have to be organized this way. We might organize it differently. So, I do think literature can dislocate us in order to relocate us, and that we can be transformed by what we read and bring that greater imagination to the task of reimagining the world, and even possibly repairing it.

I don’t know about utopia. I think if it is a static idea, an image we are supposed to realize, I don’t know about that. I think utopia is something we cannot anticipate. It might be the potential of what cannot be anticipated that gives us joy. I am against realism in general, because when we are told to be realistic, we are usually told to cut back on our expectations: “Don’t expect too much, the world is not going to change.” Of course, it would be a cruelty to say: “Oh, you can do whatever you want in this world” because that is also not true. But I am in favor of what I call “unrealism.” That is not a word in English, but “unrealism” is basically a refusal to accept the terms of reality as they are dictated by those who seek to limit the potential of social transformation.

MG: A dear friend of ours, Margo Echenberg, pointed out that *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* was published in the 1990s. We have followed your work through the years and I think you have imagined the world many times. What have you held on to? What ideas have been crucial to you throughout these years?

JB: My first book was a philosophy book on Hegel which was published 35 years ago, and *Gender Trouble* was published three years later. I wrote my dissertation on Hegel’s notion of desire, and today I talked about desire, and the life force and power. So, I think those ideas have stayed very close to me. The earliest work was on desire and recognition. We need our desire to be recognized by others in order for it to live in the world. Mourning is a way of recognizing loss or recognizing that you have cared about somebody and lost that person. From the very beginning, I have been struggling to make lesbian and gay love and lives recognizable and valued and, when necessary, also mourned.

That idea was, of course, very shaken by the AIDS crisis as it emerged in the United States where I encountered it. I saw that many people lived with shame that they had the illness and the social movement was very radical. It was all about getting rid of shame. It was beautifully done, we did it! They were a little older than me, but they really did change the entire culture and ended up changing the law with the idea of gay marriage. Before, it would have never been imaginable. For me, it is not the ultimate revolutionary position, but it is a significant achievement legally in terms of civil rights.

I suppose that there are also less overt forms of violence acting on us through gender norms that can be very constricting. At the same time, I recognize that some people love their genders, and love nothing more than to conform with their idea of what the norm is. Thus, I have had to adjust myself because some people love the binary. All they want is to live in the binary. Good, they should live in the binary. It is just that not all of us should live in the binary. After some time, I adjusted and now I think in more complicated ways about the relationship between theory and social movements. Also, my exposure to various Latin American feminist thinkers and activists has surely changed me. It gave me new hope for feminism.

DG: You pointed out that an ethic of non-violence cannot be predicated on individualism because we are relational, interdependent and vulnerable. This is a very powerful reason for constructing an argument in favor of non-violence. Yet, at the same time non-violence is very complicated to achieve, especially in contemporary societies in which individualists construct and prevail. How can we transmit the idea that non-violence implies links of interdependence and relationality in increasingly violent places and times?

JB: When we start having those conversations usually somebody asks: "Are you non-violent?." The other person responds: "Yes, I'm non-violent, except when somebody attacks my dog, or if somebody attacks my friend, my lover, or my mother, or me." At that point the person is saying: "I am not violent, but I will defend all those who are related to me, or those who are closest to me violently." So, they are not really non-violent. They are just making a distinction between those who are intimate with them and those who are not.

Now, I think if we are to be non-violent, we include everyone as important relationships, as constitutive of who we are, even those who live very far away, those whose names we do not know and whose languages we do not speak. To do violence to another is to break that relationship. Even if I don't know them, I still have an ethical obligation to them. Living in an interdependent world, my ethical obligation is based upon that interdependency. Thus, if I do violence to somebody, I break my ethical obligation, but I attack myself because I am also my relationship to that person. That is a different way of seeing things than individualism. In individualism we are just separate people. If I do something to you, you do something to me, but we have no relationship, except maybe a legal one once someone has committed a crime or enacted violence. I propose to think about an ethical relationship that is primary.

Now, it does not mean we should not be engaged in acts of physical self-defense when we are attacked. We should. But self-defense, especially feminist self-defense, is a beautiful art form. It is a great art form because we block that blow. You move that body off; you stop the attack through brilliant defense. It is forceful, non-violent. It does not reproduce the terms that they are seeking to impose.

My last point is that this is a question for the humanities, a very basic ethical question which is: What kind of world do we want to live in? And how am I either making that world or failing to make that world, or even destroying it? If I have an idea of the world that I want

to live in, then I have to act in such a way that it helps to bring that world into being, and that is where non-violence comes in. It means even for those of us who are in the throes of ignorant rage and murderous impulse, we don't kill, we don't destroy each other. We find another way to live with and through that rage until it can transform into something else. Sometimes it transforms into sorrow, sometimes into laughter, sometimes it just disappears into the air. But we need to live with our rage so that we have more power over it. To pretend we don't have it is the worst thing we can do, because then we act very stupidly.

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