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The present book has two main objectives. The first is to provide insight into current debates around Judith Butler’s thought and how it is brought into play in Europe today. The second objective is to use the perspectives developed by Judith Butler about current potential forms of “coalition” in order to consider the theoretical and practical conditions for us to “enter into alliances” or “coalitions”. The feminist question and gender-based approach (with gender considered as power relations) are seminal, and both are actively present in this book. However, as can be seen in the developments of Judith Butler’s work, addressing precarious or dominated sexual groups and forms of life provides an opportunity to open another (or extended) perspective that encompasses, annexes, articulates, goes beyond (and sometimes suspends) the question of gender and sexuality as political issues. Extension and universalization operate in reverse here. The movement that characterizes the deployment of Judith Butler’s thought questions locality and illocality. Through the question of alliance, it makes proposals about commonality and the future.

The various contributions brought together here more or less directly fall under one or the other of those objectives. First, they provide an insight into the diversity and value of the studies carried out throughout Europe, in various languages and disciplines, that put to work Judith Butler’s theoretical proposals in various domains of knowledge and fields of politics. Doors are thus wide open. The objective is to account for the diversity of current research. This book includes proven stabilized proposals by well-established researchers, as well as emerging work, still in the making, by young authors. Rather than empirically or theoretically “entering into an alliance” with Judith Butler’s thought, the objective is to make it bear fruit. More precisely, the goal is to contribute to thinking on the dynamic (theoretical and practical) issue of “coalition”, of its conditions of emergence and possibility. In our mind, “making alliances” and “building coalitions” is as much about cultivating affinity with Judith Butler’s thought as it is about opening and going in depth into the issue of common struggles and solidarities. The idea is to use and go beyond the issue of gender and feminist and queer thought in order to consider the

* Translated from French into English by Cyril Leroy.
current forms and conditions of mobilization and transformative action both on an individual and collective level.

To come back to the initial intent of the project and develop the object and challenges of the present book, I will use a series of action verbs: translating; being invited and hosting; speaking up and forming alliances. These verbs will draw possible paths between time and the issue of hospitality, and time and the issue of coalition.

1 Translating

This book originates from the apparently simple question of translation. Cynthia Kraus and I have experienced what it is to “translate” the works of contemporary American feminist authors into French, respectively Judith Butler (2006) in the case of Cynthia Kraus, and Donna Haraway (2007) in my case. Translating has made us aware of the challenges of this exercise which is more than a simple conversion from one language to another, and includes an active part of appropriation, knowledge production and enabling a common ground for encounter between different cultural contexts. Translating thus becomes one of the first forms of “alliance” between different languages and cultural and social worlds.

Constitutionally multilingual Switzerland seemed to us the ideal place to carry out a reflection on the translation, reception, appropriation, and circulation of texts within the feminist community. Swiss predecessors have already worked on the differences and affinities between “gender”, “genre”, and “Geschlecht”. Language diversity opens a space for creative paradoxes: contingency/universality of meanings; transversality/contextuality of texts. What theoretical pathways lead from French into English and from English into French? What are the theoretical and disciplinary specificities of German-speaking cultural contexts? What are the respective theoretical registers and preferences of the German-, French- and Italian-speaking worlds? Why not use the linguistic and cultural “Babel” of the Swiss territory to shed light on the way Judith Butler’s work is received in Europe?

As hosts to Judith Butler in Geneva, in French, in May 2012, but also as guests of her work, we undertook to define a much broader invitation

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1 In addition and beyond this translation work, see my readings of Donna Haraway (Gardey, 2007; Gardey, 2015).

2 About this experience, and about Judith Butler, see the foreword by Charlotte Nordmann and Jérôme Vidal, “Une provocateur”, in Butler Judith (2004a), pp. 7-19.

3 Interdisziplinäre Zentrum für Geschlechterforschung der Universität Bern (2007).
by giving life to a sort of Butlerian Babel during a two-day conference and a European call for papers. Open to the plurality of native languages and affinities of participants, the conference from which this book is derived had two objectives: to get the time of translation, reception and socialization over with, in order to enter into the discovery of current works; to shift and shake up the everlasting discussion between France and America (and conversely) and to develop productive exchange and circulation within European languages and cultures. The amazing journey of texts and theories, and their differentiated appropriations, since what was historically defined as “French Theory” in North America and up to its return to the challenging “Republican” and “universalist” soil of France, certainly deserve further analysis and comment. This history has shaped and still shapes the political and academic conditions of the reception of many theoretical proposals. Its “locality” is significant in itself and becomes apparent as soon as one changes focus to the circulation of ideas between the German-speaking worlds and the United States, or within the Mediterranean context. We hope to live up to this challenge with the proposal made in this book.

As a means to open up cultural and historical spaces and contexts, linguistic diversity seems highly promising. The circulation of concepts and tools is just as important as knowing as it is as doing. It brings up the issue of alliance formation within national contexts, and beyond, in wider geographic and cultural territories that are indeed redefined by collective action and the transnational character (in both concrete and abstract terms) of mobilizations and advocated causes. Translating relates to effective practices, to current actions, to existing mobilizations and implementation of ideas, to the back-and-forth movement between “thinking”, “knowing” and “doing”.

4 Written in three languages (English, German, French), the call for papers offered the possibility to write papers in four languages (English, German, French or Italian). The members of the conference’s scientific committee were Judith Butler, Delphine Gardey, Cynthia Kraus, Sushila Mesquita, Lorena Parini, and Patricia Purscheit.

5 More specifically on the question of the reception of Judith Butler’s work in France (Fassin, 2007; Vidal, 2006). About the more general issue of the reception of “studies”, see Aixrich, et al. (2005), and about the fact that the concept of “gender” lastingly will not be able to be assimilated in a French context, see Kraus (2005) in the same volume. For another point of view and a particularly rich and stimulating approach to the exchanges between France and America, see Berger (2013).

6 As shows, for example, the organization of the «Printemps international du genre» (International Gender Spring) at the Paris 8-Vincennes-Saint-Denis University, Saint-Denis (France), May 25–26, 2014 by Anne Berger and Eric Fassin, for the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Center for Women’s Studies by Hélène Cixous.
Being invited and hosting

Language is always an issue in the experience of hospitality. As Derrida mentions, quoting Levinas, language is hospitality. Invitation, reception, asylum, and accommodation use language or address the other. In that sense, Judith Butler’s theoretical invitation is primary. As she recalled in her second introduction to Gender Trouble, “Making lives possible” (2005), which is one of the theoretical and political claims of Gender Trouble, could be seen as a means to invite persons who were “unauthorized” up to then to move into a new life space, a new political and theoretical space, which could be defined as common ground (Gardey, 2011). It could be seen as defining a “home” to live and think, a “my place” which could also be “our place”, in a definition “at large”, as Donna Haraway would say (Penley & Ross, 1991). It seems to me that this gesture, which Judith Butler makes beautifully explicit, has been operating for 40 years under the influence of the feminist movement and feminist thought. Increasing the number of subjects, expanding the range of possibilities, redefining “homes” in terms of politics and science, are among the mechanisms and motives of “acting” and “thinking” in feminisms (Gardey, 2011).

Admitting strange objects and subjects as guests (and not as enemies) through the doors of Law, Society, Philosophy, Scientific Knowledge or the University, means transforming the “order of home”, subverting its codes and norms. In the end, it is about redefining what home “is” or could be. Here, the idea of hospitality refers to the diversity of objects, subjects and issues raised by feminist theory (and for example by Judith Butler in her work).

Beyond feminism or queer thinking, in Precarious Life (Butler, 2005), Judith Butler brings up for example the requirement of hospitality in a wider social and political sense. Precarious Life is about the State, War and the Law. It deals with nomad subjects, foreigners and those who are “in exile”. It talks about those who find themselves excluded from protective territoriality (including that of the State, where legitimate violence is also perpetrated). It deals with tolerance and liberality, with the ways of preserving and accepting difference(s); it is about fundamental rights – of “precarious lives” or the “bared life” (Agamben, 1995); it deals with protection and asylum. The fact that this reflection originates from the issue of sexual difference and the “right to live” of “minorities” is significant. It is an unprecedented movement of hospitality in the history of ideas and a reversal between what counts as the stigmata or the norm, the particular or the universal.
While hospitality defines a space and a situation, it also defines a certain type of relationship, in which peoples, cultures, languages, and ideas are mutually obliged. It is the very definition of what occurs that is engaged and made more complex and uncertain. We go back here to Derrida quoting Lévinas: “The hôte who receives (the host), the one who welcomes the invited or received hôte (the guest), the welcoming hôte who considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth an hôte received in his own home (…)” (Derrida, 1999: 41). In the conversation between Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmanteille (2000), hospitality appears as a paradoxical experience. The host becoming the guest, and what defines the “home” evading him/her forever counts as a promise. We could maybe see there the possibility of a “becoming together,” the condition for hospitality “without conditions” (Derrida, 2000).

It certainly is worthwhile to reflect on the history of feminism, on what it has done and what it does to thought and the world, in the problematic yet open setting of hospitality and what it involves in terms of paradoxical relations. It is also one of the means through which it is possible to think about the transformative dimension of the encounter, of the relationship and, therefore, of all forms of relationality. Discussing Carol Gilligan, Judith Butler thus recalls that “relationality is crucial to who we actually ‘are’ and helps to formulate a social ontology that moves us beyond possessive individualism and crude utilitarian calculations” (Butler, 2013, p. 1999).

3 Speaking up and forming alliances

As we have seen, the issue of hospitality raises that of language and law. It does not leave out the issue of violence, which is well developed by Derrida: “The foreigner is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated, the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing, etc. He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own (…) That is where the question of hospitality begins: must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country?” (Derrida, 2000: 15).

Despite the less dramatic character of this observation for the “we” that white Western women represent today, it seems essential to me to maintain its historical, political and epistemic relevance. For the “woman subject”, for the “lesbian” or “queer subject”, for the subaltern subject (immigrant, aspiring migrant, minority with migrant or colonial ancestry), isn’t the question

7 About Donna Haraway’s approach to “relationality” and, in particular, beyond the “society of humans” (Gardey, 2013).
first and foremost that of the language which *helen is asked to speak?* Women and other *others* have been and are “foreigners” in more than one respect. This is what makes Donna Haraway’s use of Sojourner Truth’s soliloquy, of her amazing sermon, so strong (Haraway, 2007). It is about the language that a black female slave can speak. It is about the act of speaking up itself. It is about the radical strangeness of a language that originates from physicality as a strength and as a difference. It is about what emerges and cannot be kept quiet, because of the crushing experience of slavery and beyond that experience, in spite of the *precariousness* of bodies and an almost *bared* life. It is about the conditions of enunciation. Engaging in language, making language take shape, making it emerge and happen in its absolute locality: is that a basic condition? Making that language, that voice, confront the language of law, that of the (white) Fathers and Brothers. Making it, by its existence, strange sound and disruptive syntax, leave its mark and stigmatize the language of the “Home”, reveal the locality of the language of law, highlight the fragility of “neutrality” as a force for law and universality, and highlight the contingency of the domestic space as political space.

Just as Donna Haraway suggests, there is a possibility for a shift, a radical opening. In “Ecce Homo”, Donna Haraway asks the following question about Sojourner Truth: “Why does her question (Ain’t I a Woman?) have more power for feminist theory 150 years later than any number of affirmative and declarative sentences?” (…) (Haraway, 1992: 92). “For me, one answer to that question lies in Sojourner Truth’s power to figure a collective humanity without constructing the cosmic closure of the unmarked category. Quite the opposite, her body, names, and speech -- their forms, contents, and articulations -- may be read to hold promise for a never-settled universal” (Haraway, 1992, p. 230). This “never-settled universal” echoes with the Butlerian suggestion of the universal as “irrealized” (Butler, 2004b).

How to represent humanity? The figure of Christ, as a figure of dislocation and suffering, serves as a point of entry in Ecce Homo. For Donna Haraway, *critique* as blasphemy does not renounce a certain form of expectation (Gardey, 2013). When Haraway asks the question: “How can humanity have a figure outside the narratives of humanism?”; she also asks in parallel what figurations should be invented to represent a “feminist humanity” (Haraway, 2007). Working on the “eccentric and mobile” figures of new “imagined humanity” (De Lauretis, 2007), Haraway rejects the idea of a consistent subject
as origin but seeks, according to her own expressions, a “common language” for new “connections”, or new “coalitions”, as Judith Butler would say?

While hospitality suggests a certain asymmetric of position, it is also a place/space to consider the implicit and explicit aspects of what is happening in it. It is in particular the means or the place to consider the very conditions of any relationship, of any encounter and how these could be transformed. I am in favor of such fruitful experiments of extraterritoriality, as long as they are conscious of the asymmetries that structure the rules of welcome and hence (necessarily) the forms of institutional and symbolic violence that goes with them. If we are to define feminism in the plural, this may not be without contradictions (a thought that does not bother me), nor without risks of new exclusions (which is a lot more problematic politically), as Nacira Guérit-Soullamas reminds in this volume.

As we can see, defining this common space, this _topos_, (this “home”?), means agreeing on the languages that are spoken in it and on what forms an individual (or collective) subject. The questions of subject, law, identity and name are connected by the question of the question (or the “address”). Here it is possible to turn back to Derrida: “Does hospitality consist in interrogating the new arrival? Does it begin with the question addressed to the newcomer? (...) Or else does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double erasure: that of the question and the name? (...) Does one give hospitality to a subject? to an identifiable subject? to a subject identifiable by name? to a legal subject?” (Derrida, 2000: 29).

From language to the address, from welcome to hospitality, from signature to coalition: what are the conceptions of the border? What politics of welcome? What places in which to cohabitation? What conception of that which is common? What ties for alliance? What words to unite? What texts to mobilize? From hospitality to coalition, what are the gains and losses? Where the question of hospitality seems to define a relationship to territory, the question of coalition defines a relationship to time. It refers to agency, to mobilization, to the theoretical and practical critique of norms and institutions. Coalition is both movement and objective, agenda and utopia, a means to avoid re-formulating implicit hierarchies between plural and sometimes opposing causes. The question of coalition comes with and after critical theory; it goes hand in hand with positive and collective action, and cultural and social forms of subversion; it invites practical tools and ways of doing, human and material organization, horizons of meanings and values. Coalition still has to do with individualism and what can result from it; with the transition from “I” to “we”, from the assertion of the individual subject to that of the collective subject.
Coalition presupposes the political nature of the personal and the sexual. What is then the difference between the feminist of queer perspective of “becoming oneself” and this other perspective that would be “becoming ourselves”? Could it be that the desiring subject has been under influence? To what extent have recent emancipatory movements been a reflection or agents of contemporary liberalism? If individual emancipation is compatible with markets and neoliberalism, how can the subject of coalition, a subject to be co-alised, be redefined and thought about? How can promise and alternatives be reconsidered? How can we live in the present? How can we take advantage of differences, becoming, repetition and events? How can we reinvent history?

It is in response to this invitation that the contributors to the present volume bring their numerous experiences. They reveal the territory of multiple alliances, the mobilization of a plurality of individual and collective actors. Some articles are based on current anthropological or sociological studies; others discuss the theoretical aspects associated with the theory of emancipation and social struggles; and others increase the number of theoretical and practical exchanges with those who are in opposition.

The “Experiments” section, which constitutes the first part of the book, provides accounts of concrete cases where “coalition” is a living experiment, here and elsewhere. After reflecting on the “subject” of coalition, Anna Vulic presents the case of Serbia and analyzes in particular the 2011 Belgrade Pride March to provide insight on the resources available for individuals to deconstruct nationalist and family frameworks in a context of violence and exclusion. Her reflection is followed by Eirini Avramopoulou’s study of recent mobilization campaigns of LGBT, feminist and religious organizations in Turkey. Despite existing antagonisms, the idea is to provide an account of the diplomacy used by these groups to work together, of how they deal with the plurality and universalization of rights. The question of coexistence or cohabitation is central to Tal Dor’s proposal on the current political situation in Israel. Coming back to the social movements of the summer of 2011, she gives an analysis of “radical encounters” between antagonist groups and how these enable to resist state violence and colonial relations imposed on Palestinians, and also within Israeli society. Sushila Mesquita and Patricia Purschert focus on campaigns for sexual freedom in Switzerland and question the racist framing and imperialist attitudes that exist within queer communities, as well
as the new dividing lines that are drawn on the basis of sexuality between those who are defined as “us” and those who are rejected as “the others”.

The second part of the book, “Perspectives”, offers a series of more cross-disciplinary proposals that go in greater depth into, shift or supplement the questions previously raised. Sabine Hark focuses on the specific question of individualism (as current condition) and provides an assessment of the opportunities and limitations of identity politics in terms of collective action and emancipation for the future. Coming back to the history of the social movement in its various historical manifestations, Philippe Corcuff proposes an interpretation which, articulated with Judith Butler’s thought, draws new horizons of possibilities for “critical traditions” and “effective struggles”. Examining the context of French coloniality, Nacira Guénif-Souilamas addresses the relevance or irrelevance of the division of the world into two zones (democracy vs. authoritarianism) and calls for the formalization of another dialectics of democratization and emancipation.

Judith Butler’s contribution, which concludes this book whilst opening new perspectives, deals with the possible means to simultaneously consider vulnerability and agency. Questioning the position of apparent invulnerability of those who want and can “subject”, she comes back to the importance of the state and institutions, by denouncing the joint destruction of “economic rights” and “social democratic goods”.

References


