

“There are always more things going on than you thought!”

Methodologies as Thinking Technologies

INTERVIEW WITH DONNA HARAWAY, PART TWO

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*Bearbejdet for Kvinder, Køn & Forskning
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Donna J. Haraway er professor ved Department of History of Consciousness, University of California, Santa Cruz. Hun er en central teoretiker inden for både feministisk kulturanalyse af teknovidenskab og det tværvidevidenskabelige felt Science and Technology Studies (STS). Donna Haraway har bl.a. publiceret bøgerne *Primate Visions. Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (1989), *Simians, Cyborgs and Women. The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), *Modest Witness[®] Second Millennium. FemaleMan[©]_Meets_OncoMouse[™]. Feminism and Technoscience* (1997). I 2000 kom endvidere bogen *How Like a Leaf*, et interview med Donna Haraway af Thyrsa Nichols Goodeve.

Interviewet til *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* fandt sted, da Donna Haraway besøgte Danmark som en af hovedtalerne ved konferencen “Cyborg Identities – The Humanities in Technical Light”, 21.-22. oktober 1999, arrangeret af Randi Markussen og

Finn Olesen, Institut for Informations- og Medievidenskab, Aarhus Universitet. Konferencen var en del af initiativet “Humaniora ved Årtusindskiftet”, arrangeret af Center for Kulturforskning og Det humanistiske Fakultet, Aarhus Universitet. Interviewet blev lavet som del af en workshop med Donna Haraway, organiseret af FREJA-forskningsprojektet “Kyborger og cyberspace – mellem fortælling og socioteknisk virkelighed”, som de tre interviewere alle er deltagere i.

Første del af interviewet blev bragt i Kvinder, Køn & Forskning nr. 2, 2000.

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*Rosa Braidotti og Donna Haraway
Foto: Cecilie Åsberg*

I would like to start the second part of the interview with a question about your style of writing. When I teach feminist theory, I often advise the students to focus not only on the line of argument of your texts, but also to read them in a literary way, that is to give attention to the metaphors, images, narrative strategies and to study, how you make the literary moves explicit. I think that you, in a very inspiring way, practice your tenet about “scientific practice” as a “story-telling practice” (Haraway 1989: 4). Your deconstructions of the barriers between theory and literature make your texts extremely rich; theoretical content, methodology, style and epistemology go hand in hand. How did you come to this kind of writing?

Donna Haraway: Well, there are lots of ways of talking about this. First of all, it is not altogether intentional. Writing does things. Writing is a very particular and surprising process. When I am writing, I often try to learn something, and I may be using things that I only partly understand, because I may have only recently learned about them from a colleague, a student, a friend. This is not altogether a scholarly proper thing to do. But I do that from time to time.

me, and it affects style. It is like a child in school learning to use a new word in a sentence.

Would you compare this to a literary intuitive way of writing?

Donna Haraway: Yes. My texts are full of arguments, it must be said (laughs jokingly). But my style of writing is also intuitive. It absolutely is. And I like that. I like words. They are work, but they are also pleasurable.

This means that it is possible to keep going back to your texts and still find new inspiring layers of meaning like in literary texts.

Donna Haraway: Yes, in a sense, I do think that they are literary texts.

Your efforts to transgress the barriers between theory and literature make me think of other scholars within the feminist tradition, for example Luce Irigaray, and the ways in which she deliberately links writing strategies and epistemology. Could you tell us, how you look upon these links as far as your own work is concerned?

Donna Haraway: Well, my style is not only intuitive, but also the result of deliberate choice, of course. Sometimes people ask me “Why aren’t you clear?”, and I always feel puzzled, or hurt, when that happens, thinking “God, I do the best I can! It’s not like I’m being deliberately unclear! I’m really trying to be clear!” But, you know, there is the tyranny of clarity and all these analyses of why clarity is politically correct. However, I like layered meanings, and I like to write a sentence in such a way that – by the time you get to the end of it – it has at some level questioned itself. There are ways of blocking the closure of a sentence, or of a whole piece, so that it becomes hard to fix its meanings. I like that, and I am committed politically and epistemologically to

stylistic work that makes it relatively harder to fix the bottom line.

When you ask, how I came to this, I think that it is actually something I inherited out of my theological formation. In an academic sense, I am trained in biology, in literature, and in philosophy. Those are my academic backgrounds – together with history, but that came later. But I am also deeply formed by theology, and particularly by Roman-Catholic theology and practice. I learned it. I studied it. It is deep in my bones. I started reading St. Thomas, when I was about twelve years old, because of the advice of a confessor. It was a way of dealing with doubts about faith. This confessor was a very young priest, a Jesuit, who was ordained with my uncle. He advised me to read St. Thomas. It was a very strange reading for a twelve-year-old girl (laughter). It was very confusing. I did not understand a word (more laughter).

But it was your first meeting with layered meanings?

Donna Haraway: In a way, yes. I had this whole relationship with priests, who themselves were struggling with things. It is a very personal history... Anyway, there was a particular theological frame, which was very powerful for me. Actually, it was not St. Thomas, but more the whole framework and, in particular, the idea that as soon as you name something and believe in a name, there is an act of idolatry involved; the idea that the names of God are always finally deeply suspect; the idea that spirituality has a much more negative quality to it; the idea that if you seriously are trying to deal with something that is infinite, you should not attach a noun to it, because then you have fixed and set limits to that which is limitless, and the whole point of God is about a kind of eternal totality that is not the totality of a system. It is not a systemic totality. It is a different kind of totality. It is an unnameableness. It is the theo-

logical tradition that focus on unnameableness.

Like the Sunni tradition in Islam?

Donna Haraway: Yes, but there are many traditions that have a commitment to this kind of negativity. There is a strong current within Catholicism that has a commitment to this kind of negativity, and within Quaker practice as well. That is the theological formation that I think is strongest for me – also as regards its relationship to the proofs of the existence of God. These are not about design, and not about causality, but about the reality of infinity, about the truth of limitlessness, which, as I see it, is existent. To me, this is an existentialist idea, and not a design idea. Any proof of the existence of God is almost a kind of joke from that point of view.

Well, you know, I am, of course, a committed atheist and anti-Catholic, anyway at some level. You cannot live in Christian US, right-wing US, and not be an anti-Christian. But that theological tradition is a very deep inheritance for me, and I think it effects my style very deeply.

How do you “translate” your epistemological and political commitment to the deconstruction of fixed categories into methodologies? How do we avoid fixations? Whenever we are doing research, we use certain sets of skills, which imply certain kinds of names, classifications, categorizations, standards etc. So isn't there a latent, or even very active danger, or risk, or possibility that we will always reduce whatever we are doing – even when we have the most ambitious intention about avoiding closure of the discursive spaces, in which we theorize, analyze etc.?

Donna Haraway: Well, obviously there is no final answer to that, because it is a permanent paradox, or dilemma. But there are some things that we can say about that dilemma.

First of all, categories are not frozen. We are more inventive than that. The world is more lively than that, including us, and there are always more things going on than you thought; maybe less than there should be, but more than you thought!

Secondly, you can use categories to trouble other categories. Marilyn Strathern formulated this very wonderful aphorism: “It matters which categories you use to think other categories with” (laughter). You can turn up the volume on some categories, and down on others. There are foregrounding and backgrounding operations. You can make categories interrupt each other. All these operations are based on skills, on technologies, on material technologies. They are not merely ideas, but thinking technologies that have materiality and effectivity. These are ways of stabilizing meanings in some forms rather than others, and stabilizing meanings is a very material practice.

Thirdly, I find it important to make it impossible to use philosophical categories transparently. There are many philosophers who use cognitive technologies to increase the transparency of their craft. But I want to use the technologies to increase the opacity, to thicken, to make it impossible to think of thinking technologies transparently. Rather, I will foreground the work practice that thinking is. I will stress that category making is a labor process with its own materiality which is a different kind of materiality than making a sailboat, or raising a dog, or organizing a feminist demonstration. Thinking is involved in all these material practices, but category formation, category manipulation is a different skill. I do not want to throw away the category formation skills I have inherited, but I want to see how we can all do a little re-tooling. This is a kind of modest project, an act of modest witnessing.

To me your article on “The Promises of Monsters” (Haraway 1992) and the way, you use

the semiotic square here, is a very good example. Contrary to making your thinking technology – in casu: the semiotic square – transparent and non-conspicuous, you make it visible as a tool, as an analytical technology, as “an artificial device that generates meanings very noisily” (Haraway 1992 304). I think that this is a very good way of showing, how thinking technologies, categories, models, research designs etc. create the object of study.

Donna Haraway: Yes, I agree with you. I like that reading of “The Promises of Monsters”. Here we have this very clutchy structuralist object, and you march through the square (Donna Haraway laughs and marks a march rhythm with her fingers on the table). It is a kind of serious joke. I think, you can actually do interesting work with these tools, but I want to hear them making noise, I want to feel the friction, I do not want to increase the transparency. Obviously you have to hold the transparency at a certain level, or you cannot get anywhere. But those are tactical decisions about tools. That is a techno-scientific way of thinking.

Your epistemological focus on non-closure and deconstruction of fixed categories has led you beyond the impasse of standpoint-feminism, but it has also been important for you to avoid the traps of relativism and nihilism, in which the rejection of stable political grounds has left some postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers. As part of your commitment to situated knowledges, you emphasize the necessity of political accountability. I think that you here point out a very important third path, so to speak, a way of navigating in-between pure standpoint feminism and pure postmodern relativism. Do you yourself see your position in this way?

Donna Haraway: Yes, that is the way I like to understand it, too. I am not looking for the stable ground of standpoint feminism,

but nor is my position anti-relativist, anti-nihilist. It is not sceptical. It is not cynical. I believe in limitlessness and non-stable grounds, but at the same time I feel very strongly affiliated with standpoint theorists.

In which ways?

Donna Haraway: I feel that important work gets done with this very contaminated tool. There are obvious troubles with adopting the metaphors of perspectivalness, of locations and standpoints, of embodiment and privileged perspective etc. I think the contaminations of these metaphors are obvious. But that should not stop us from understanding the crucial work that feminist standpoint theorists did, inheriting Lukács, on the one hand, and certain kinds of feminist work that we had been in after all, on the other. People like Nancy Hartsock and others understood standpoint-feminism as an achievement. This was an epistemological achievement that came out of a political practice that produced the possibility of understanding the reality beneath the appearances in a specifically Marxist sense, i.e. the possibility of understanding the system of domination that supports the appearance of equality; the appearance of normality, and comfort, and equality, and the market, and all of its sequel; the appearance that men and women can simply have a few equal rights and all will be well; the appearance that race can simply be erased by a little bit of anti-discrimination. Standpoint-theory produced the understanding of the deep materiality of oppression beneath all these appearances. The method of understanding was the metaphor of surface and depth, which is not the same as making the mistake of misplaced concreteness and mistake analytic technology for the world. The world is not surface and depth. Our analytic technology is about surface and depths. But you do not mistake the analytic technology for the world, because then you would have committed an act of idolatry



Donna Haraway
Foto: Cecilie Åsberg

and fetishism (in the bad sense of the word, fetish), an act of reification, and this is not what the standpoint theorists did.

Such a reading of the standpoint theorists acknowledges their work as an epistemological achievement within a particular intellectual tradition. I find that important, and I also think that this is the way, in which the standpoint theorists read themselves. However, the standpoint theorists do not analyse the literary moves of their own texts, because they do not see them as literary moves. But I see them as literary moves, not in a reductive sense. It is not in order to dismiss the texts, but in order to remind myself that this is a set of rhetorical possibilities. This kind of “literary” reading makes the standpoint theorists very suspicious. Actually, I cannot believe the number of people who, in the face of the word, narrative, think that all of a sudden you are “merely” in the realm of culture and entertainment – that all of a sudden you are not talking about what is serious. This is a terrible prejudice, which the standpoint theorists share with most political scientists and a vast majority of philosophers, too.

In a video, “Donna Haraway reads the National Geographic on Primates” (Paper Tiger Television 1987) you visualize your analytical method pedagogically by untangling a ball of yarn. You are pulling out the threads, metaphorically demonstrating a deconstructive move, I guess, – a critically going back to where things are coming from. How would you compare this to the Latour-inspired “follow-the-actors”-approach that I think you are very committed to, as well?

Donna Haraway. Well, I see the “pulling-out-the-threads” on the video and the “follow the actors”-approach as closely related. In my recent book *Modest Witness...* (Haraway 1997), I have this family of entities, these imploded objects: chip, gene, cyborg, foetus, brain, bomb, ecosystem, race. I

think of these as balls of yarn, as gravity wells, as points of intense implosion or as knots. They lead out into worlds, you can explode them, you can untangle them, you can somehow loosen them up. They are densities that can be loosened, that can be pulled out, that can be exploded, and they lead to whole worlds, to universes without stopping points, without ends. Out of the chip you can in fact untangle the entire planet, on which the subjects and objects are sedimented. Similarly, you do not have to stay below the diaphragm of the woman's body, when dealing with the foetus. It leads you into the midst of corporate investment strategies, into the midst of migration patterns in North-Eastern Brazil, into the midst of little girls doing caesarean sections on their dolls, into the midst of compulsory reproductivity and the question: What is it that makes everybody want a child these days? Who is this "everybody"?

How would you describe the relationship between the research subject and the figures that perform in the analysis? How is, for example, your relationship to the figures or imploded knots, chip, gene, cyborg, foetus, brain, bomb, ecosystem, race?

Donna Haraway: Figures are never innocent. The relationship of a subject to a figure is best described as a cathexis of some kind. There is a deep connection between the subject and the figure. It is not just about picking an entity in the world, some kind of interesting academic object. There is a cathexis that needs to be understood here. The analyst is always already bound in a cathetic relationship to the object of analysis, and s/he needs to excavate the implication of this cathexis, of her/his being in the world in this way rather than some other. Articulating the analytical object, figuring, for example, this family or kinship of entities, chip, gene, foetus, bomb etc. (it is an indefinite list) is about location and historical specificity, and it is about a kind of

assemblage, a kind of connectedness of the figure and the subject.

I would like to know about your relationship to science and technology studies, the STS-tradition. There are, for example, some obvious parallels between your work and the work of Bruno Latour, and he is, in a sense, leaving science studies now. What about you? How do you look upon science studies today? And which role does feminism play here?

Donna Haraway: Well, science studies is a kind of indefinite signifier, and that is what has made it a good place to locate oneself. It is professionalized in various ways, and that is useful. I will sometimes use science studies as a signifier for myself, and at other times I will not use it. It is a professional and strategic location, but it is not a life-long identity. Even though in some other ways it is, because there are institutional realities connected to it. But people like Susan Leigh Star, and Bruno Latour, and Andy Pickering, and I, and many others, we read each other. So we end up being both deliberately and unconsciously in conversation. But this conversation and reading of each other's texts do not refer to a kind of shared origin story or genealogy. I have a very different genealogy in science studies than, say, Andy Pickering or Bruno Latour do. People like Susan Leigh Star and I share more of a genealogy in science studies that roots it, for example, in the women's health movement and in technoscientific issues, related to women's labor in the office or to Lucy Suchman's work. You know, we share a genealogy of science studies which, among other things, situates it in relation to the history of the women's movement at least as much as it connects it to a history of a strong program, to a history of actor-network-theory (ANT), or to a history of a rejection of actor-network-theory. You know, all of those end up becoming interesting little events in the neighborhood, but not the main line of

action. So in that sense, I have a kind of annoyed relationship with some of the canonized versions of the history of science studies which go like this: "Well, there was this in Edinburgh, there was that in Paris, and whatever". You know, in that narrative of science studies people like me and my buddies are always hard to incorporate. Even by people of great goodwill, such as Andy Pickering, whom I both admire and read with great pleasure, and like as a human being. None the less, read his preface to *Science as Practice and Culture* (Pickering 1992) and watch the absolute indigestibility of Sharon Traweek and me. We are as the angels with the twelve trumpets. Literally. Every other figure in that introduction got a paragraph or so of analysis, in terms of what was contributed, and what he liked or objected to. But we were like blasts from St. John's Apocalypse (laughter). Literally! That is the figure he used. Because we *are* not part of that other story in that way of telling it, and they do not know our story. They do not know it as an academic story, and they do not know it as a political story. It is a different history. So *after* I was already doing, what I now call feminist techno-science studies, I read people like, for example, Bruno Latour. So Latour and other authors, which figure prominently in the canonized version of the history of STS, were not the origin in my story; they came after other events. And they do not get this! That there is a whole other serious genealogy of techno-science studies. So I remain irritated! (Laughter) Because we do know their genealogies, very well. And they do not know ours, even though they exist in writing; our versions of the story are certainly not inaccessible!

On the other hand, this does not mean that I would call myself an outsider. That would be silly of me. But I think it remains true in most academic locations, including science studies, that most feminists are both insiders and outsiders in the sense that

Patricia Hill Collins theorized this insider/outsider-location. Sometimes we are forced into this location, and sometimes we choose to inhabit it.

And I suppose the reason is the issue of feminism...

Donna Haraway. Yes, we are a little hard to digest. And I think that is a good thing. On the one hand, we are so normalized, and disciplined, and comfortable, you know, and to call ourselves outsiders is a kind of lie. But, you know, from another point of view, we are still outsiders.

I think that the term inappropriate/d others you borrow from Trinh Minh-ha in "The Promises of Monsters" (Haraway 1992) describes this position very well. It is the position of the inappropriate/d other.

Donna Haraway. Yes, you are necessarily inappropriate/d... You know, I am surprised that so few people have used Trinh Minh-ha's term. I agree with you that it is a really good figuration.

When you emphasize that there are other stories about science studies than the canonized ones, I am reminded of the copy of the film poster from "The Matrix" which Don Ihde presented at the conference yesterday as a kind of serious joke, suggesting that the three male figures on the original poster could represent Bruno Latour, Andrew Pickering and himself, while the only female figure could refer to you. This was Don Ihde's way of jokingly creating a metaphor for the matrix of science studies. But when I saw Don Ihde's matrix, a different matrix of science studies immediately came to my mind. Here the three male figures were replaced by three female figures, you, Evelyn Fox Keller and Sandra Harding, while the female figure was replaced by Bruno Latour. This does not mean that I do not recognize the importance of Bruno Latour in the matrix of science studies, but I would

simply consider the three other contributors more important in my feminist version of the story of science studies.

Donna Haraway: Yes, I agree. There are a lot of missing matrices or matricians!

Moreover, I can add to the story that many of us have fought with Bruno Latour about feminism, and he has finally been willing to take on something. But it is never symmetrical. He is a friend and a person for whom I have enormous respect. But the asymmetry is a historical, structural problem. It is almost impossible for folks in those locations to get it, and feminist technoscience work always feels like trouble, like "now you are getting political again".

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