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NEWSLETTER ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

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boys, of having a workaholic for a wife had killed him—or so I surmised. I felt sorry for my two boys who never complained when I missed their school events, or shuttled them off to yet another babysitter, or told them Mommy couldn't play. She had to do work. The boys' clothes were rumpled, their hair was a mess, their schedules were erratic, and their diets were anything but balanced. I was a colossal sinner—a neglectful mother. For my penance, I gave up my job at Williams.

We moved to Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina, for a new start. This time, in the South (the home of "family values"), I would not let my career call the shots. I would be a family woman first of all: a real mother. I would bake cupcakes and drive my boys everywhere. They would visit the doctor and dentist regularly, be in bed by 10:00 p.m., and be fed proper breakfasts before they were sent off to school.

After a month or so, the boys came to me, begging me to give them back our old chaotic life. I obliged. As you might suspect, by then I had started to work really hard at Davidson. Moving South had not changed me at all. I still was not the family type. I built an undergraduate program in Medical Humanities from scratch; I became active in FAB, SWIP, and the APA; I started two new books. My father, a widower, moved from Chicago to North Carolina to help me care for the boys. Five years after my dad arrived on the scene, I met and married my second husband—the director of Davidson's pre-medical program. My second husband, ten years older than I, was not in the mood to father my boys, however. He had been there, done that. So we agreed that he did not have to try to be my boys' dad. After all, no one could replace their old dad, and besides, they had grandpa.

To some degree, I was a bigamist. My first marriage was not really over as I entered my second. Indeed, to this day, I feel that I still have two separate emotional lives: the one I lived in Colorado, New Jersey, and Massachusetts with my first husband, and the one I live now in North Carolina with my second husband. I also have the profound sense that work has consumed too much of me—that the boys have become men in their mid-twenties and early thirties without me having taken the time to really participate in, let alone enjoy, their growing process. My dad was the lucky one: he carved the pumpkins, went to the games, and popped the popcorn. Without my dad helping me during the five years when I was a widow, and then for nearly a decade after that, I could not have accomplished what I did in the professional world of philosophy and my sons would not have had a man to love them. I suppose that is why, when my father grew old and took ill, the boys and I struggled so hard to care for him in his home. We wanted to make it possible for him to keep his beloved dog by his side, to eat his favorite Czech foods, to smoke forbidden cigars, and to drink occasional beers before he totally lost the taste for life, as he eventually did.

The three of us ran ourselves ragged. After about two years, I told the boys they needed to get on with their lives. The older one had passed up a good job so he could live close to grandpa, and the younger one had deferred graduate school to do his share. Minus their help, the burden of care fell directly on my shoulders. In between work and caring for my dad, I spent about four to five hours a day just in commuting time. I drew solace from Eva Kittay's book *Love's Labor*, not because I had a dependency worker to help me but because I was a dependency worker, struggling to maintain some sort of family life for fear that if I did not, no one else would, and then there would be only work—unrelenting work.

My dad died last Thanksgiving. I fear his death was meant as a gift to me—a gift I dare not acknowledge with a thank you, however, for fear of having to confront that part of me that wanted, desperately, even as I cared for him, to be liberated from love's labor. Life is easier now. There is more time for work, but there is also more time to brood as I watch the young women in our profession, struggling to keep family and work together. The structures of our profession—the attitudes prevalent in it—have changed, but not nearly enough to fully accommodate family matters. And, yet, we wonder why there are relatively few women in our profession. My guess is that philosophy's missing women have not been willing to pay the price of trying to have it all. It is a high price. For me the price has been close to the price the spider in *Charlotte's Web* paid. But there is still time left for me. I am not a spider. I do not want to self-immolate like Charlotte: much too ironic a fate for a feminist who wants anything but self-immolation for women.

In July, I will be sixty. I intend to give myself the gift of life and to work only on those projects that I find meaningful—a global feminist ethics of care, for example. I plan to let my family, what is left of it, matter a whole lot; and I plan on doing whatever I still can to make sure that women in our profession pay only their fair share of the dues for membership in it. My hope is to come to a SWIP panel twenty years from now on the topic of "Family Matters" and hear some new tunes being sung, far different from the ones that I have sung today. Afterall, some dreams do come true. There must be ways for women to have it all without paying the ultimate price: themselves. Of this I am convinced.

Nomadic Musings: Living and Thinking Queerly

Shelley M. Park
University of Central Florida

I accepted the invitation to join this panel happily enough, believing that tenured feminist faculty have a responsibility to share with their younger colleagues—and, indeed, with each other—whatever wisdom they have accrued about succeeding in the academy. Nonetheless, I have been fretting about my contribution ever since. My fretting stemmed from two primary sources. First, I panicked that I would have nothing to offer an audience looking for sage advice from a senior female colleague concerning juggling work and home. As a mother of two teenage daughters who holds down a full-time job on the side, I am intimately familiar with the juggling act—indeed, the whole three-ring circus—but I do not feel particularly skilled at it. Moreover, I am still struggling with the whole "senior" colleague thing. It is true that I am (as my daughters consistently remind me) no longer young and I did make it from tenure-earning to tenured faculty member some years ago—by a squeaky margin. I have even posed as an administrator for a brief part of my career, directing the women's studies program and chairing the philosophy department at the University of Central Florida for three years each. But, while I may be getting older and while I may have gained some useful experience along the way, I have not published several groundbreaking books, nor even made it to the rank of "full" professor. Some female faculty manage to attain this rank and prestige while also rearing beautiful, accomplished, well-behaved children. Fair warning: I am not one of them and cannot advise you how to do this. I am still working on my first book and my fifteen-year-old daughter has just told me she has no family and considers her dad and I to be "random strangers."

The second source of my fretting concerned a different variety of "imposter syndrome" centering on issues of identity politics. I was invited to join this panel in order to "diversify" it.

This was and is an odd experience for me. The census bureau would identify me as a white, middle-class, middle-aged, married woman with children. This is hardly the profile of a woman capable of diversifying a feminist philosophical outlook. Indeed, it is precisely the profile of the feminist theorist too long at the center of feminist theorizing. So why was I invited and why did I accept? I believe the invitation resulted from the recommendation of my co-panelist Rebecca Kukla, guest editor for a special issue of *Hypatia* focused on the maternal body.[1] In my contribution to that issue (on adoptive maternal bodies as queer), I described my family as follows:

> My family is decidedly queer. It includes, in addition to myself (a white, middle class woman) and my extended family of origin (Canadian), my former husband with whom I continue to time-share a home, my girlfriend (German), my two daughters (one biracial, one white; one adopted, one birthed by me), my adopted daughter's extended birthfamily (Guyanese Americans of Indian descent), my daughters' adopted grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins (Jewish), in addition to numerous others that my daughters—and the rest of us—embrace and name as family.[2]

All of this is true, except for the part about my "former" husband. I am, in fact, still married to him and will likely remain so until such time as my children are grown. At the same time, I do have a female partner. This is not a lie, nor a dissimulation. I am, I guess you could say, "in between" relationships.[3]

As my title indicates, I want to think here today—in this place and time—about what it means to live and hence think queerly—which, for me, means living in and in between many places and thus thinking in and through ambiguous and transitory spaces. As Judith Halberstam suggests, queerness may be less a matter of sexual identity than it is "an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices."[4] I live in queer configurations of time and space. Since my thinking is thoroughly embodied, queer living is accompanied by queer thinking. I like the term queer because it captures a variety of non-normative ways of living and thinking while avoiding the pitfalls of identity politics.

I am married to a man, but not straight.

I am partnered with a woman, but do not identify as lesbian.

This rejection of a lesbian identity is not an issue of shame or closeting. I am perfectly comfortable engaging in public acts of affection with my girlfriend amidst friends, family, or strangers. I do not shy away from the term "lesbian," nor did I previously when erotically partnered with a man. And yet, I do not identify "as" a lesbian. I am happy to wear birkenstocks and overalls and dig in the dirt. When my girlfriend looks up from gardening to peruse me dressed like this, she teases me about looking like a dyke. As I remind her—and she already knows—I have no personal investment in these categories, nor their performances. I will also unapologetically wear a dress and heels (albeit not very high ones) if going to the theatre or a fancy restaurant. I will wear both forms of drag into the classroom, depending on the gender and class issues I wish to perform on a given day.

If I am to be the token lesbian on this panel, I fear I will disappoint. Dating a lesbian[5] does not make me one, any more than raising a biracial child makes me a woman of color. The diversity I have to offer you is not in who I am, but in how I live and think.

If I have any useful advice to pass on, it would be this: recognize the embodied nature of your thinking and write as you live. In the "publish or perish" world we inhabit, you must write. But such writing will be more interesting, I suspect—both to yourself and to your audience—if there are porous, rather than rigid and impermeable, boundaries between your intellectual and your material homes.

I do not use the term "home" lightly. It is, indeed, a notion that has become increasingly complicated for me over the years. As a Canadian citizen who lived there for the first half of my life and whose family of origin still resides there, I refer to traveling to Canada as "going home." And yet, as a U.S. resident for over twenty years, who lives out of a suitcase when in Canada, I also refer to returning to Orlando as "going home." Orlando is the place where I can unpack my bags and settle into my familiar routine. Or, at least, it was. I now live perpetually out of a suitcase. The reason I refer to my musings here as "nomadic" is that I am a woman without a fixed address. Three years ago, after stepping down from administration, I volunteered to work at a satellite campus and thus now commute between cities and campuses on a regular basis. Around the same time, I chose to separate from my husband and we mutually agreed to a joint custody arrangement wherein we, as co-parents, timeshare a family home (where our children consistently reside) and an apartment (where we each live separately on alternating weeks when we are not with our children in the family home). On some of my noncustodial weeks, I reside not in the apartment but with my girlfriend at her home. Hence, in addition to commuting between two workplaces, I am also regularly commuting between three homes.

My intellectual home is no less complicated. Formally trained as an analytic philosopher, I value the clarity of conceptual analysis and rigorous argument. As a self-trained feminist scholar and former director of a women's studies program, I also value highly the richness of narrative and expository prose and the empirical data of social science. As a feminist philosopher interested in issues of family and memory, I travel back and forth between and among feminist, postmodernist, postcolonial, and queer theories and memoirs. As the member of a humanities program faculty, I struggle to learn about mythology, art history, religious studies, and other intellectual locales previously foreign to me.

In her book, *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti describes herself as "a migrant who turned nomad."[6] I would describe myself as somewhere in between a migrant and a nomad. A migrant, as defined by Braidotti, is "a woman with a clear destination, who goes from one point in space to another for a clear purpose."[7] She is "caught in an in-between state whereby the narrative of origin has the effect of destabililizing the present."[8] Unlike the migrant woman, I am not nostalgic for the past. I was happily married for many years. It was a good and loving relationship and the domestic, nuclear family within which I lived was a simpler place than where I currently find myself, to be sure. However, this is not where I choose to be now, nor do I yearn to go back. As a part-time custodial parent, I enjoy the occasional freedom to live according to a schedule not regulated by children's activities and needs. I have more time to write and engage in other adult-centered activities. At the same time, my origin—both as a child and later as a married woman—in a single and fixed family home does destabilize my present. I worry also that it may destabilize my children's present.

Similarly, I do not regret the time I spent as an integral member of the philosophy department and the main campus of my university. Nor do I regret my decision to step down from administration and move purposefully to a more interdisciplinary intellectual home on the geographical margins of campus life. As a humanities faculty member, teaching in a "Philosophy, Religion, and Popular Culture" program at a regional campus, I can largely do as I please because no one much cares about me or my program, as long as I bring in student credit hours. And I do this, in part, by teaching on the web. Because I have duties on two campuses and also teach online courses, people never know quite where I will be when. And there is something decidedly liberating in the elusiveness that comes with living on the road and in cyberspace. At the same time, my history—both as a former "A" student at the center of campus politics and later as an administrator integrally involved in program building and policy development—does destabilize my current identity. I do not yet know how to live well as a nomad, but I am learning.

The nomad, says Braidotti, is "the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity." Her identity is "made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity."[9] I confess to sometimes desiring greater fixity than my life currently has. The move from a centered to a decentered life is fraught with difficulties, both material and psychic. I often do not have the right color socks or shoes to go with the clothing at my temporary residence. (Thankfully, socks are rarely a necessity in Florida, teaching online does not require a coordinated outfit, and my girlfriend wears the same size shoes as I!) As I move from one residence and one office to another, I have to fill large bags with all of the books and papers I need in the upcoming days for teaching and writing projects and cannot always foresee every tome it might be useful to have handy. (I am grateful here for e-books and articles and the fact that my girlfriend is a queer theorist who frequently has useful books handy.) When family from out of town comes to visit, the "home" I have to offer them may be temporary, requiring them to travel from residence to residence with me and requiring me or a partner to ensure there are clean towels, adequate food, and other amenities for guests in each home. There are multiple homes to be cleaned and maintained and paid for and multiple lawns to mow and gardens to plant and weed. (Thank goodness, one home is a rental apartment without a yard!) Moreover, it is difficult to establish stable communities and a regular routine when "home" is fragmented across several counties. Students and colleagues do not just drop by one's office to chat. Friends do not just stop in at one's home for coffee. Social engagements, as well as doctors appointments and haircuts, must be carefully scheduled with reference to where, as well as when, I am available.

And, yet, despite—or perhaps because of—the multiple complexities of a decentered life, such decenterings provide important challenges to normative material, psychological, and epistemological assumptions, opening up sites of resistance. In her well-known article "Coalition Politics," Bernice Reagon Johnson contrasts the space of a coalition politics to that of a home, noting that the former is not a safe or nurturing space where unsettling differences can be locked out, as they can in a home. Similarly, postcolonial theorist Teresa de Lauretis advocates "leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is 'home'—physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically—for another place that is unknown and risky," depicting family, self, and home as "held together by the exclusions and repression that enable any ideology of the same."[10] Of course, these conceptions of "home" (whether the subject of longing or the subject of critique) as a safe and uncontested space and of the self as a unitary and fixed identity are imaginary. Most homes—and not just my own—are coalitional in structure.[11] As such, they involve conflict and difference and the ability of their inhabitants to shift their perspectives to meet the other. Political scientist Bonnie Honnig, contesting Hobbes' distinction between the private and public spheres, notes that

> as anyone with siblings must know and as spouses in all domestic situations can surely attest, the practice of teaming up with someone who could possibly kill you is not the opposite of home; it perfectly captures on the defining features of family life itself. What children and/or spouses do not establish temporary alliances with and against each other?[12]

To acknowledge the home as a place where differences reside and coalition politics is inevitably learned is helpful in overcoming the theoretical breach between home and work that suggests the former is a refuge from the latter and the latter encroaches on the quality of life residing in the former. Sometimes inhabiting domestic space is work and the work becomes the sought after refuge and solitude. I suspect this is especially true for philosophers who work frequently in silent solitude.

To reconceptualize home as a place of coalition politics is not, however, to denigrate it. As Honnig also notes, the womb, "if deprived of the inspiration—the life-giving breath—of politics," risks becoming a tomb.[13] It is the strategic and temporary alliances of difference that invigorate home. As Reagon notes, the diverse and fractious places of coalition are to be celebrated, because in "places of crisis…you can do wonderful things."[14]

Similar considerations pertain to the philosopher's work. When work becomes a safe place, a refuge from politics, it too becomes lifeless. Braidotti chastises feminist philosohers for inadequate nomadic consciousness, for embodying "the dutiful daughter" or "devoted mistress," who embodies a "corporatist's attachment to the discipline and a strong identification with its masters."[15] Advocating the cultivation of a "healthy disrespect for both academic and intellectual conventions," she encourages us to "combine coherence with mobility…to rethink the unity of the subject, without reference to humanistic beliefs, without dualistic oppositions, linking instead body and mind in a new set of intensive and often intransitive transitions."[16]

This advice, with which I concur, will no doubt sound risky to the tenure-earning faculty member or other faculty member looking for a promotion. Indeed, the typical advice is to be a dutiful daughter and publish in the "right" journals until after you have succeeded in getting that promotion. And I do not blame anyone for following that conservative advice. However, I think it is the wrong advice.

First, as de Lauretis notes, the ex-centric (or what I have been terming nomadic or queer) subject recognizes the "tangle of distinct and variable relations of power and points of resistance" in which she is always already entangled in the forces she opposes.[17] For such subjects, as Honnig indicates, "the question is not whether to become involved in the discourses, practices and institutions of which they are critical, but how? How best to position themselves given their complicity with and resistance to the discourses, practices, and institutions they seek to overcome or transform?" From this perspective, "withdrawal, staying home—in the purest and least complicated sense of that place—is simply not an option."[18]

Second, we are all potentially ex-centric subjects, with a nomadic consciousness. Postcolonial religious studies scholar Leila Ahmed reflects on her identity as an Egyptian national journeying to and from the west as follows:

> I think that we are always plural. Not either this *or* that, but this *and* that. And we always embody in our multiple shifting consciousnesses a convergence of traditions, cultures, histories coming together in this time and this place and moving like rivers through

> us…I know that it is of the nature of being in this place, this place of convergence of histories, cultures, ways of thought, that there will always be new ways to understand what we are living through and that I will never come to a point of rest of finality in my understanding.[19]

We too are always plural. Some of us are Egyptian and American. Some of us are married and queer. Most of us gathered here today are feminist and philosophers. All the women gathered here are women who work and women who care for homes, pets, friends, and/or families. We are scholars and teachers and committee members. We can choose to be paralyzed by these and other lived tensions, or we can use them to push our thinking forward by fostering a nomadic consciousness that never stops at a final resting place. Such an unresting consciousness is the best route to quality teaching and prolific scholarship, which is precisely what one needs to gain promotion.

Thirdly, the epistemological nomadism that Braidotti describes as "sustaining the practice of feminist teaching and research" does not exclude "more 'sedentary' institutionalized practices." As Braidotti suggests, "it also makes us better at playing the institutional game, because we are more critically distanced from it."[20] If we are less settled, less anchored within a particular discipline, we are more easily moved to make important connections with people and scholarship outside our "home" discipline. We are thus better enabled to form the sorts of intellectual and institutional coalitions that result in the building of interdisciplinary programs such as women's studies, postcolonial studies, and queer theory programs. We are also more likely to be better known as engaged colleagues by persons outside of our home departments—and these other colleagues who know us can be instrumental in supporting our promotion applications at college and university levels. And we are less likely to have offended these colleagues from other disciplines through involvement in territorial, disciplinary "turf" wars.

Finally, to return to a point I made earlier, your work is more likely to be engaging if you adopt a nomadic style of thinking that reflects the plurality and tensions of your existence. Nomadism is "an existential condition that…translates into a style of thinking." The precise conditions of your existence will be different than others and in sharing it with others you will provide them, perhaps, with a "shifting landscape" of possibilities. The mode of thinking described by Braidotti as "nomadic" is a "figurative style of thinking, occasionally autobiographical, which may at times strike the reader as epistemological stream-of-consciousness."[21] While the nomadic subject is a political fiction "inspired by the experiences of people or cultures who are literally nomadic," the epistemological nomad, like the queer theorist, has a "critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior."[22] Epistemological thinking that opens up new sites of resistance to sedentary thought is apt to be more meaningful to ourselves as well as to our audiences. And if philosophy is not meaningful to us, there are many other occupations at which we could make an equal or better living.

Endnotes

1. I do not intend here to impute any untoward motives here to Rebecca or others. Rebecca has asserted (in response to my comments) that her interest in inviting me stemmed from my experiences, not my identity, and I believe her. My concerns as indicated here were/are a separate matter from the motives of those issuing the invitation. They are also a separate matter from my own intentions. It is quite possible to be "read" as the token lesbian (or other representative) on a panel, even if this was/is *not* the intent of those forming or participating on the panel.
2. "Adoptive Maternal Bodies," *Hypatia* 21:1 (2006): 201-2.
3. This is not as sordid (nor as exciting, depending on your perspective) as it may sound. The truth is that I remain married to my husband because I care about him and his well-being and he would have no health insurance were we to legally divorce.
4. Judith Halberstam. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 1.
5. Actually, my partner herself cringes upon being labeled a "lesbian" here. She would self-identify as queer.
6. Rosi Braidotti. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 1.
7. *Ibid*., 23.
8. *Ibid*., 24.
9. *Ibid*., 22-23.
10. Teresa De Lauretis. "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness." *Feminist Studies* 16:1 (1990): 22; see also Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century." In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), 356-68.
11. Clearly this is the case in the postmodern family, characterized as it is by commuter relationships, divorce, remarriage, and a variety of fragmented and blended families. From a psychoanalytic perspective, however, nostalgic yearnings for an earlier form of family that was unitary in its needs and concerns is likewise premised on an imaginary version of home, self, and family.
12. Bonnie Honnig. "Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home." *Social Research* 61:3 (1994): 9.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Reagon, "Coalition Politics," 368.
15. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 30.
16. *Ibid*., 30-31.
17. de Lauretis, "Eccentric subjects," 131.
18. Honnig, "Difference," 7.
19. Leila Ahmed. *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America—A Woman's Journey* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 26-27.
20. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 34.
21. *Ibid*., 1.
22. *Ibid*., 5.

BOOK REVIEWS

Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others

Sara Ahmed. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006. 223 pages. $21.95/$74.95. ISBN 0-8223-3914-5/0-8223-3861-0.

Reviewed by Shannon Winnubst
Southwestern University, winnubss@southwestern.edu

Tables, lines, points, directions, orientations—not the first things that come to mind when considering the word "queer." And yet these are the stuff of Sara Ahmed's excellent book, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Writing out of the intersections of several academic fields, Ahmed's book should speak to several audiences: feminist phenomenologists, phenomenologists of race, theorists of geography and space, and queer theory. And it may even speak to philosophers, if they can find their ways out of the deep habitual ruts of the discipline to engage this provocative offering of new paths.