

Gender Studies in Europe *Studi di genere in Europa*

Edited by

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

UNIVERSITÀ DI FIRENZE
Dipartimento di Filologia moderna
in association with
ATHENA

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Studi di genere in Europa

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Introduction to conference proceedings: Gender Studies in Europe

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This initiative was the result of a joint effort between the newly established Gender Studies Programme at the Robert Schuman Centre of the EUI¹, the Dipartimento di Filologia Moderna, Università di Firenze and ATHENA (EU-funded Socrates Thematic Network Project for Women's Studies in Europe). The conference took place in a context where the two formerly-mentioned organisers are in the process of creating new forms of gender studies; since both are in Florence, the conference is the first outcome of a desire to establish forms of co-operation and to create programmes of gender studies which are mutually complementary. However, this joint effort would not have been sufficient had it not been for the experience and knowledge of the ATHENA network.

The location of the conference is therefore doubly relevant: Florence, for the reasons just stated, as an instance of collaboration between a national and an international institution (a very rare fact, for those who know the history of the EUI in Florence); and Italy, which is significant for various reasons. This country, which has had an extensive and important women's movement, has developed an institutional network of women's and gender studies to a much lesser extent than the countries of Northern Europe, with the exception of a few outstanding examples. However, in recent years, many efforts have been made in this direction, and the time was ripe for taking stock of the situation. This reflection might be significant at different levels: not only for one country, but also for the

¹ Gender studies as an activity at the EUI has been sustained over many years largely through the voluntary efforts of a number of women students, visitors, fellows and professors. We should also like to thank Yves Mény who, as director of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the EUI (now President of the EUI), supported the establishment of gender studies as a formal programme of the RSCAS in October 2000. The Gender Studies Programme comprises a seminar series, the Ursula Hirschmann Annual Lecture on Gender and Europe, and an EC-funded research project. The programme's aims are to support and to help develop the scholarly work of research students, fellows, academic staff and visitors in the study of gender, across the departments of the EUI; and to stimulate interdisciplinary work. The programme is directed by Professor Luisa Passerini, and co-ordinated by Dawn Lyon.

general understanding of the state of gender studies in Southern Europe and for the analysis of the specific combination of patterns (institutional, cultural, etc.) which variously characterises Europe today. Therefore an effort was made—within the limits of the available resources—to include among the participants in the conference people from countries of various areas of Europe; and to provide translation, at least partial, in order to facilitate the exchange between people of different countries and languages. This collection includes some papers in English and others in Italian.

For the EUI, this event was part of a series on ‘Gender Studies: The State of the Art’, intended as a space for reflection on the current state of gender studies across Europe². A crucial point for consideration was the relationship between the institutional level and the social and cultural reality of gender relations and the study of them, which takes different forms across Europe. Our attention to this relationship explains the format of the conference and its themes. In addition, we sought to learn from the experience of other gender studies initiatives in our effort to create the new programmes. Furthermore, we do not wish to envisage gender studies in isolation. We are aware that they have become a focus of many expectations which were formerly channelled towards politics, including movement politics; whilst we accept this extra-dimension of gender studies, we believe there are limits beyond which they cannot be stretched. Therefore we sought to pose the question of gender studies within a network of relationships and articulations between various types of institutions, such as academic and governmental ones, but also women’s centres and women’s networks of various kinds. In this multifarious and complex situation, we decided that a starting point for the conference should be an inventory of what has already been done, hence we devoted the morning of the meeting to this task. The two first interventions are intended to present and stress the European dimension of the approach. As for the second part of the morning, we have deliberately chosen two very different case studies—Scandinavia and Italy—in order to provide a contrast of approaches.

The morning sessions were introduced and chaired by Luisa Passerini, EUI, and Liana Borghi, Università di Firenze. Gabriele Griffin, Kingston

² The first session of this series took place in December 2000, with a “Dialogue on Gender Studies” between Terry Lovell, Warwick University, and Juliet Mitchell, University of Cambridge, UK. It continued in April 2002 with a discussion of “The Future of Gender Studies: the case of Italy and Hungary” in which Chiara Saraceno, Università di Torino and Andrea Pető, ELTE, Budapest participated.

University (now University of Hull), gave the first paper of the day, 'Gender Studies in Europe – Current Directions'. The conference organisers requested that she speak under this title, and she started by examining the implications of these terms, e.g. gender (not women), and used this to draw attention to the trend in the UK where few of the major 'women's' studies programmes have made the move to the appellation, 'gender'. Whilst not rehearsing the extensive debates here, she signalled the dangers associated with the term gender, inferring a greater recognition of women's rights than is the case in practice, an important reminder if the goal of gender scholarship includes "transformative analysis". Gabriele Griffin went on to address five issues pertinent to current trends. 1) In the question of institutionalisation she pointed out the variety and range of infrastructural arrangements across Europe, from individual modules in women's studies, named degree routes, to mainstreaming, i.e. reintegrating women's/gender studies into the traditional disciplines, and discussed the specific opportunities and difficulties associated with them. 2) Regarding course curricula, she noted a move towards specialisation in women's studies degree programmes. 3) Gender research tends to be conducted individually or in small groups; and is often regionally specific, rather than pan-European. 4) In NW Europe in particular, former links between political activism and feminist scholarship have "loosened"; in Eastern European countries, the relationship is "under scrutiny and unresolved". 5) With some variation across Europe, gender/women's studies do not significantly engage with some important current socio-political issues (e.g. democracy, citizenship and political participation).

Rosi Braidotti, ATHENA Scientific Director, took up a number of the issues raised by Gabriele Griffin in her presentation on 'ATHENA and Gender Studies', initially exploring the tricky questions of terminology, and stressing how the naming of 'women's studies' was never more than a "compromise solution" in a context of high political and intellectual stakes. Her paper was organised around a discussion of various traditions of gender research—empiricism, standpoint theory, and deconstructive gender research. Within this, she talked of the operation of gender at multiple levels—as personal identity, as a principle of social organisation, as the basis for normative values—and she discussed the implications of different thinking about gender, "the agenda and content of the field", for structures of institutionalisation. Her comments on the "advantages of networking" drew on the experience of ATHENA and the Women's Studies programme at Utrecht University, in which she explored what it means to make these activities 'European' projects.

The second session of the morning exposed two very different cases of practices of gender studies within Europe. First, Bente Rosenbeck, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, presented the experience of the Nordic countries with respect to women's studies and gender research; a paper to which Nina Lykke, University of Southern Denmark, acted as discussant. Bente Rosenbeck gave an overall picture of the remarkable success of women's studies in the Nordic countries, across various disciplines. Whilst she acknowledged differences between Nordic countries, in this contribution she chose to focus rather more on connections and similarity. Collaboration in women's studies built on a long-standing tradition of co-operation in the Nordic countries, including in networks between women. Bente Rosenbeck traced the historical development of women's studies and Nordic co-operation, through for example, the Nordic Summer University in the 1970s, the Nordic Forum for Research on Women in the Nordic Countries in 1981, to the establishment of NIKK (the Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research) in 1995, as well as numerous other projects and networks. There are now more than 20 women's studies centres in Nordic universities which interact with the state-level women's studies secretariats. Although criticised, there is indeed a close interrelationship between equal rights and women's studies in the Nordic countries. To the question of whether there is a Nordic feminism, she responds both no and yes. No, "there is no one Nordic feminism, no unitary focus... in the Nordic countries' feminist scholarship". However, there are some significant connections in "the organisation of everyday life, on dialogical or interactive individuality, and on ontological realism"³.

Nina Lykke emphasised differences between the Nordic countries, and pointed to some limits of the overall success story. 1) Welfare state and purportedly sensitive equal opportunities policies "do not automatically pave the way for the smooth institutionalisation of women's studies". The lack of full professorships and postdoctoral opportunities in women's studies in Denmark (in contrast to Finland, Norway and Sweden) is a case in point. 2) To the question, Is there a Nordic feminism? Nina Lykke argued that the collaborative projects funded by Nordic agencies, have been very discipline-specific, or very Nordic-specific, a profile into which her own research, as one example, does not fit, an imagined community to which she does not belong. Furthermore,

³ von der Fehr, Drude, Anna Jonasdottir and Bente Rosenbeck, 1998, *Is there a Nordic Feminism? Nordic feminist thought on culture and society*, London: UCL Press, p. 18.

she is sceptical about the word Nordic. Whilst important for a recognition of the situatedness of knowledge, this has been taken too literally by some. She therefore seeks to shift the discussion to: “How can we [in short, feminist researchers in North European welfare states] ... enter into much more productive dialogues with other feminist researchers in the bigger region, Europe, in which we are also situated?”

The case of women’s/gender studies in Italy is a rather different story. Francesca Cantù, Dipartimento di Studi Storici Geografici Antropologici and Commissione MURST “Donne e Scienza”, outlined the radical changes which have and are taking place in universities in Italy⁴. From a situation in which academic teaching and research in gender was contingent on the efforts of individual women, the main shift is to some degree of institutionalisation. This can be dated to Laura Balbo’s appointment to the government in 1996, as Minister for Equal Opportunities. She attempted to empower women in various spheres and set up a number of important working groups, e.g. on new professions, research, recruitment, career competencies, education (pedagogy, training, etc). She was specifically concerned with the gender imbalance in university teaching and the resistance to EU recommendations on equal opportunities. Gender studies has since been included in training and evaluation priorities in universities as well as in regional state administration, schools etc. With respect to the powerful Conferenza dei Rettori (Committee of University Chancellors), each university is now entitled to elect an Equal Opportunities delegate to participate. Ahead of the election in Italy, Francesca Cantù warned that if the centre-left coalition government were ousted, some of these initiatives would suffer; she encouraged the use of networks as a strong base to fall back on.

Following this, Anna Scattigno, Università di Firenze and Società Italiana delle Storiche (elected President in 2002), presented an account oriented in particular to the University of Florence, and from the perspective of the activities of women historians. From fragmented attempts to teach women’s history in the 1970s, there is now a three-year degree course in ‘women’s history and gender studies’ established at the University of Florence, achieved in the face of considerable difficulty and through sustained efforts. Of particular significance for women’s history in Florence from around the second half of the 1980s, are the interconnections and exchanges between university-based research, and productions and communications from other cultural institutions, and

⁴ Regrettably, this paper was not available to include in this volume.

women's groups and associations (Libreria delle donne, Giardino dei ciliegi, Laboratorio sul genere...). In the 1990s, the Società italiana delle Storiche has been especially important for the continued development of women's history, including the Scuola Estiva di storia delle donne at Pontignano. Related initiatives are also strong in the department of Philosophy at the University of Florence, and through the Società delle Letterate, as well as the Progetto Donna sponsored by the Comune di Firenze, and of course the ATHENA network. Bianca Beccalli, Centro di studio e ricerca "Donne e Differenze di Genere", Università di Milano, as discussant to the two papers then made some more general comments⁵. She noted: 1) The cultural/social/political tradition in relation to which gender theory developed, including connections to other social movements; 2) How Italian culture is not a favourable terrain for the discussion of gender; 3) She added an additional stream to Rosi Braidotti's characterisation (empirical, standpoint, deconstruction)—that of "doppia presenza" (i.e. double presence, both in the academy—and community-based or political initiatives).

Having established a vision of European-wide and 'European' practices in gender studies, with some contradictions and similarities exposed, we then moved to a discussion of topics which we believe are of central importance today. The two roundtables of the afternoon session included participants of different ages, experiences and countries. The first panel was chaired by Laura Balbo, President of Italian Sociological Association and former Minister for Equal Opportunities, Italy. The participants were: Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium and Next GENDERation; Paola Pallavicini, Rete30something and CIRSDe (Centro Interdipartimentale Ricerche e Studi delle Donne), Università di Torino, Italy; Nicky Le Feuvre, Sociology and Gender Studies and Director of Simone-SAGESSE Doctoral Research Centre, Université de Toulouse – Le Mirail, France; and Sara Goodman, Director of undergraduate Gender Studies, Lund University, Sweden.

In this panel, entitled **Transitions and Transmissions**, the question of transmission and communication between interlocutors located in uneven positions including the location induced by age and generation, as well as that associated with roles such as learner and teacher, was discussed in an exchange characterised as 'two-way traffic'. Maria Puig's paper powerfully addressed this theme which she took to mean both exchanges

⁵ Regrettably, this paper was not available to include in this volume.

between gen(d)erations, and as a metaphor of multidirectional flows of time, power and meaning in the contemporary world. Puig takes the working conditions within academia as the motivation for her intervention and her comments in the section on ‘corridor talk’ and other hidden communications expose familiar tensions out in the open. Notably, the individualised experience of stress and overwork, intellectual and employment insecurity, the effects of which limit the scope for politicisation and action against the conditions which produce them. Discourses of labour flexibility reify social conditions—“it is reality, we have to adapt to it” as Puig sums it up. This ‘temporal axe’ has also contributed to increased academicism of feminists scholars, to which all gen(d)erations are subject. Puig stresses the importance of resisting assimilation in discourses of flexibility with their emancipatory vocabulary. Accountability is a good example, something for which feminists have argued: however, knowledge that counts gets reduced, in managerial-capitalism, to its contribution to economic competition.

The second theme of the roundtable was explicitly concerned with women’s studies qualifications and trajectories. Nicky Le Feuvre’s contribution drew on work carried out within ATHENA which itself led to an EC-funded project on the impact of women’s studies training in employment across Europe (co-ordinated by Gabrielle Griffin and Jalna Hamner). Her paper here discusses some of the methodological and analytical difficulties of such comparative analysis, notably given the variety in forms of women’s studies education and in educational systems per se across Europe. This is extended to the ‘markets’ for women’s studies graduates—in teaching and research, and in equal opportunities. She also picks up on similar themes to Maria Puig in discussing the dangers of market-driven degrees in relation to the goal of broadening women’s studies education. However, whilst being critical of the rationalisation of education, there may be scope to use these political trends strategically. On the basis of the French experience, a context in which the institutionalisation of women’s studies has been notoriously difficult, Le Feuvre argues that there is indeed some room for manoeuvre in the present climate, and the possibility to make new gains.

Paola Pallavicini returned to the theme of intergenerational relations. She takes as her focus the process through which these relations are made, and their “condizioni di realtà”. She speaks of the how and the why of the lack of inter-generational connections (*rapporto*) in Italian feminism: a radical rupture from the 1970s; and the centrality of the principle of experience in Italian neo-feminism. The next part of her paper deals with

the experience of the Italian *Rete 30something*⁶. Framed in terms of the ‘could be’ but ‘not yet is’, her discussion spans the activities of the network to date and the openness of possibilities. Finally, Sara Goodman addressed the third theme of this panel—the cybernetic/ informatic revolution—through her account of the work of ATHENA panels in building a database in European women’s studies courses, and on the use of information and communication technologies⁷.

The second panel on **Cultural Resources** was chaired by Annamaria Tagliavini, Centro di documentazione delle donne, Bologna, Italy; and the participants were Eva D. Bahovec, Ljubljana University, Slovenia; Ulla Wischermann, Faculty of Sociology and Cornelia Goethe Centre for Women’s Studies, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University, Germany; Mario Corona, University of Bergamo and founder of the Centro Studi sui linguaggi dell’identità, Italy; and Anastasia Lada, Faculty of Architecture, Aristotle University, Greece.

The double-sided character of feminist knowledge—the critique of other knowledge and the construction of new knowledge—is at the centre of Eva Bahovec’s paper on feminist theory and philosophy. Questions of what counts as feminist theory, the links between knowledge and power, and relationships to different philosophical traditions are discussed in her preliminary reflections. The paper then focuses on the work of Simone de Beauvoir, starting from the problem of its positioning—wrongly, she argues—as the founding text of contemporary feminist theory. She goes on to discuss how to better incorporate de Beauvoir’s work, in feminist theory, and how to counter its notorious neglect in philosophy.

From this more theoretical reflection, the next paper, by Ulla Wischermann, is oriented around the pedagogic dimension of women’s studies. The reference context of this paper—Germany—is especially interesting in relation to some of the other accounts of the processes of (non-) institutionalisation in this collection. For instance, the 70+ women’s studies professorships in Germany starkly contrast to the hard-won five in France, and in Denmark, despite some research fellowships, the total absence of full professorships. To discuss teaching materials,

⁶ *Rete 30something* is a network which facilitates contact between scholars in Italy around the age of 30 who are involved in gender studies within and beyond the academy.

⁷ Regrettably, this paper was not available to include in this volume. However, for further information on this topic, contact the ATHENA network: <<http://www.let.uu.nl/womensstudies/athena/index.html>>; <athena@let.uu.nl>.

Wischermann draws on the evaluation conducted by ATHENA, which is telling of the tensions (mentioned above by Bahovec) in producing feminist knowledge. There was widespread criticism by survey respondents of the available teaching books; and in the context of the diversity of institutional arrangements and teaching practices, there is some hesitation towards the idea of developing a single European textbook, a project which risks universalising existing knowledge. However, the ambivalent status of experience in feminist theory does not appear to be taken into account in publications on pedagogy, Wischermann found.

The conference also sought to take note of developments in ‘men’s studies’. Mario Corona’s remarks in this volume trace this sphere of study in Italy—a context of humanism, catholicism and marxism, according to Corona—and the process of these developments in relation to feminist scholars and associations, as well as through an engagement with writings from the US. The final theme the panel was asked to discuss was the question of the spaces, past, present and future, physical and metaphorical—perhaps “political”—for enacting the ideas and aims emerging from these discussions. Anastasia Lada’s contribution thought the question of spaces through architecture “as buildings, images and written scripts, as well as designs, theories and histories and their various intersections” and shows how the recognition of architecture as constituted through its occupation, which is important in the construction of subjectivity, intersects with feminist interest here. In particular she discusses “places through the body”, “the body in space” and how we live through specific places and bodies.

This meeting confirmed the need and the usefulness of a European dimension to the discussion on Gender Studies. Whilst the national dimension is certainly insufficient, and we don’t want to deny the importance of our connections with gender studies with many other countries and continents of the world, we nevertheless recognize a particular importance of establishing strong links within this continent and constructing a European specificity of gender, outside and against any Eurocentrism.

As the papers illustrate, the conference was intended as a point to pause for reflection on all the questions mentioned here. It was attended by 140 people, the majority from Italy but many also from other countries of Europe and beyond. It was a very productive exchange between speakers and participants from many different locations. The range of the

contributions here gives some sense of this, and the state of practices at this point. We would like to thank all the speakers, the chairs of the roundtables, and all others who took part in this occasion. We hope very much that in the future the exchange of ideas and experiences will continue in all possible forms.

PART ONE: KEY PAPERS

Gender Studies in Europe: Current Directions¹

Gabriele Griffin

University of Hull, UK

INTRODUCTION

Gender Studies or Women's Studies in Europe is, I think, rather like the internet: there's a lot of it out there, if you search for it you come across some wonderful sites, but it can also be endlessly frustrating as sites come and go, connections are down, rogue webmasters appear and hyperlinks, masquerading as pathways to sites you might be interested in that turn out to be sites for car sales or porn or money you don't want. There is an endless uncertainty about the relationship between the parts and the whole, and this uncertainty or ambiguity is something that we find not only in the relationship between individual sites on the net and the world wide web but also between Women's or Gender Studies as practised in one European country compared to another.

NAMING THE DISCIPLINE

The phrase 'Gender Studies' itself signals something of a trend or current direction in its emphasis on 'gender' rather than on women, and whilst I do not want to rehearse the arguments which certainly raged in the UK over the pros and cons of using 'gender studies' instead of 'women's studies' (see Evans), I want to make the point that there has been, over time, an increasing tendency in some of the northern European countries to substitute 'gender studies' for 'women's studies'. The appearance of gender studies is in part associated with the different ways in which the word 'gender'²—as opposed to 'women'³—functions in various European languages but it is also associated with questions about the treatment of masculinity within the subject,⁴ for example, and so on.

¹ For a useful comparison see Zmroczek and Duchon 1991.

² See the Athena volumes I and II (both 2000) *The Making of European Women's Studies*, edited by Rosi Braidotti and Esther Vonk, for details.

³ The dematerialization of 'women' under pressure from both critiques of patriarchy (see Wittig 1981; Frye 1990) and from postmodernism (eg Butler 1990), with its roots in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), has a well-established tradition in Anglo-American (lesbian) feminist writing.

⁴ It is, perhaps, worth noting that the anxieties expressed by many women that 'men' would invade the pitch of Women's Studies and re-appropriate it if given the

However, in an article sent to me by a Portuguese colleague about the emergence of Women's Studies in Portugal it became evident that she regarded the notion of Women's Studies as an independent discipline as an expression of a pathological position. The kind of heteropatriarchal investment which such a position indicates is in some respects no surprise given the cultural context in which that statement was made. In the UK the trend towards the substitution of Women's Studies by Gender Studies has been very limited indeed; very few of the major Women's Studies centres, and that includes Lancaster, York, Kent and Warwick which are among the universities with the oldest and longest-running Women's Studies programmes have moved toward using 'Gender Studies' though LSE, the London School of Economics, for example, does. For me the main issue regarding this trend is that in its obliteration of 'women' it can suggest that women have got further along the road of having their rights recognized than they actually do. We all know—indeed experience on a daily basis—that women in all European countries still do most of the unpaid labour, still are under-represented in decision-making positions (Griffiths 1996), still earn significantly less than men (see Grimshaw and Rubery 2001), still are the majority victims of sexual violence, and so on. I think this is an important point to keep in mind if we continue to consider as we once did that Women's or Gender Studies is not just about investigation and description but about a transformative analysis, about the need for change. Throughout this paper I shall therefore use the phrase Women's Studies rather than, and to encompass, Gender Studies to describe what seems to me to be happening.

There are five key issues which are pertinent to the question of current trends in Women's Studies in Europe:

1. the institutionalization (mainstreaming⁵) of Women's Studies and its infrastructural positioning;
2. courses/curricula
3. research
4. the relation of Women's Studies to feminist work outside the academy
5. current socio-political issues for women

opportunity has not materialized. Few men work on men's studies or masculinity, and few women do in any direct way.

⁵ That mainstreaming is evident in a whole string of publications which have emerged over the last five years from debates in the NIKK newsletter to the ETAN report (2000).

INFRASTRUCTURAL POSITIONING: THE RISES AND FALLS OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

Women's Studies as a discipline is at very different levels of infrastructural positioning within higher education institutions in Europe (see the SIGMA Report 1995; Braidotti and Vonk 2000a; Braidotti and Vonk 2000b for further details). In all European countries there are now individual scholars working on feminist and/or women's issues but that individual endeavour—whilst it has been the key to establishing Women's and Gender Studies in many European countries—is nonetheless distinct from the infrastructural integration of Women's Studies into higher education. There one might distinguish four different levels of infrastructural positioning:

1. an absence or near absence of Women's Studies in higher education institutions which is the case in Greece and Portugal, for example;
2. the existence of individual Women's Studies modules and courses within traditional disciplines which is probably universal in Europe now but without those modules coalescing into a Women's or Gender Studies degree;
3. named degree routes for Women's Studies or Gender Studies, either at undergraduate, or at postgraduate level, or both—this is the case in many of the so-called north European countries but less likely to be the case in southern European countries; and
4. the withdrawal from named degree routes into a position of 'mainstreaming', i.e. of 're-integrating' Women's or Gender Studies into other, traditional disciplines, as is beginning to be the case both in the UK⁶ and in some Scandinavian countries such as Norway.

Implicit in the notion of "mainstreaming" is the idea that as Women's or Gender Studies degrees, Women's and Gender Studies never were part of the mainstream, always retained a marginal position, and in some respects this is clearly true, partly because—where Women's Studies courses were established—the interdisciplinary nature of full-blown Women's Studies led people to ask the question whether or not Women's Studies can be an academic discipline as other disciplines are (and I personally would argue, it can and that it is important to recognize that the notion of 'academic discipline' is itself not static but dynamic and

⁶ In the UK this has also gone hand in hand with a focus on research centres and postgraduate provision. Thus Manchester University decided to focus its women's Studies provision on the research and postgraduate front in 2000, and Roehampton Institute, now part of the University of Surrey and once the only named Women's Studies department in the UK, is poised to do the same as I write.

has changed over time) but that question, whether Women's Studies is an academic discipline or not has never been resolved within the subject itself (see Aaron and Walby 1991), thus weakening its position within the academy through intra-disciplinary disagreements, though not just through those. One might argue that Women's Studies was never part of the mainstream of higher education in some countries and that includes the UK, not only because of its potentially radical political agendas, but also, more prosaically, because the subject failed to lobby effectively for the governmental recognition it needed in order to receive funding, a key issue since university administrations these days more than ever are concerned with the financial viability of academic courses and degrees. It may also be that women, the virtually exclusive teachers of Women's Studies, lack the institutional clout or power and position to force those issues necessary to the establishment of an academic discipline within their institutions. In her trenchant critique of feminists' engagement with the academy, tellingly entitled *Failing the Future*, Annette Kolodny (1998) argues that an important failing of many feminists has been to work in the academy as teachers but to fail to move into managerial positions, thus reducing the possibility of effecting the institutional changes necessary to improve women's situation in the academy and beyond. In many European countries, women continue to occupy the lower ranks of the professional ladder: even in the UK only 7% of professors are women. This professional situation places women in roles of dependency to men higher up in the hierarchy, or to women who have made it to the top but who often defend the system within which they have achieved, sometimes because they are powerfully heterosexually invested and feel that they cannot, for personal as much as professional reasons, afford to lose favour with the men who promoted them. In a European country that I recently visited, and which shall remain nameless, it became clear to me that higher education there was effectively ruled in a quasi-feudalistic and paternalistic fashion, with clear and generally accepted, even if sometimes resented, systems of preferment that were not in the least meretricious but based virtually entirely on connections and patronage. This is not to say that such forms of patronage, sometimes even matronage, do not exist in the UK but what became clear was that it is much harder to establish Women's or Gender Studies in a European country that has few universities, with little or no staff mobility, where women are the students of powerful men and then, if they manage to become patronized by one such powerful man, are integrated into the higher education system, always in moral hock or debt to that man with whom they are never allowed to enjoy an equal relationship even if they eventually become colleagues.

One might, then, argue that current trends in the institutionalisation of Women's Studies in Europe range from the beginnings of an integration of Women's Studies into the university curricula of traditional disciplines, such as is predominantly the case in Portugal, for example, to a re-examination of the viability of Women's or Gender Studies as an independent discipline, and a concomitant tendency towards mainstreaming, understood as the reintegration of Women's or Gender Studies into more traditional disciplines, in countries such as the UK and some Scandinavian countries. This suggests that Women's or Gender Studies as a discipline in Europe has in some ways come full circle, starting out, either in the past or currently, as individual modules within traditional subjects and ending up as the same, supported by the argument that these traditional disciplines need changing and that that can only be effected by integrating Women's or Gender Studies. I would like to suggest that we need to consider what we lose by dropping, or consenting to the burial of, Women's or Gender Studies as an independent subject. There can be no question that its visibility in academe has lent impetus to women's issues. Within a much wider framework, ranging from the European Union itself to international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank⁷ we have seen the explicit incorporation of 'gender' (for which we might substitute 'women' because that is what it means) as a key factor in shaping policies, something which could not have happened without the women's movements and feminist research.

COURSES AND CURRICULA IN WOMEN'S STUDIES

When Women's Studies degrees, initially mainly Masters degrees, were set up in the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Hanmer 1991), three key concerns, *inter alia*, marked their content:

1. the need for the validation of women's experiences and the notion that women had knowledges and histories, famously called *herstories*, not represented in conventional curricula;

⁷ See, for example, the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women of 1979, and its 'Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000' which were adopted at the Nairobi World Conference on Women in 1985. Similarly, the World Bank created its framework *Toward Gender Equality: The Role of Public Policy*, for example, in 1995.

2. the sense that Women's Studies was multi- or interdisciplinary, fed by feminists coming from a range of disciplines which should be adequately represented;
3. that the absence of an undergraduate curriculum in Women's Studies meant that women were doing postgraduate courses in Women's Studies without any or much prior experience of the subject. This in turn meant that courses attempted to be as comprehensive as possible in their content.

In consequence, the first MA degree in Women's Studies I ran, for example, had many modules, as opposed to concentrating on one broad area of concern, all with titles such as 'Women's Writing', 'Women in History', 'Women's Health', 'Women and Representation', etc. and a course on 'Feminist Theory', very much taught separately from the rest. In 1999, when together with colleagues I set up yet another MA in Women's Studies, the menu looked quite different. Our current MA has three substantive modules only, plus a Feminist Research Methodologies and a Dissertation module. The substantive modules are on 'Women, Work and Welfare', 'The Body, Gender and Sexuality', and 'Race, Ethnicity and Gender'. There has been, in the UK in general, a significant change in the curricula of Women's or Gender Studies courses. The first one, following on from the establishment of undergraduate courses in Women's Studies, is the increasing specialization at postgraduate level. There is no longer a sense that you have to cover everything on an MA in Women's Studies because, even if incoming students have not done an undergraduate degree in Women's Studies, they are likely to have had many modules or individual courses with a feminist or Women's Studies content. Postgraduate survey courses are therefore on the whole a thing of the past. The new specializations take into account those issues which surfaced in the 1990s as concerns for Women's Studies. They typically include sexuality and the body, the new technologies and their impact on women, issues of gender and representation, the impact of changes in demography on women, the effects of changes to and the decline of the welfare state on women, issues of race, ethnicity and gender, and theories of identity. There are specialist courses on women and the law, and other such courses. The impact of grass roots work, and women's voluntary organisations on Women's Studies, which was both quite strong and very contested during the 1970s and 1980s (Aaron and Walby 1991), has receded in many northern European countries in favour of a greater engagement with certain kinds of theoretical debates and an emergent academicism which has fuelled much feminist research of the 1990s and beyond. We talk in abstractions now in ways that were, I would argue, unthinkable in the

1970s and early 1980s. But side by side with this change goes a continuing project which has been at the centre of Women's Studies, that of excavation and restoration, the establishment of traditions of women's work and women's presence in a whole variety of areas ranging from history to anthropology, geography, literature, and so on. In a number of European countries that mapping process—which was also, and continues to be, a key project of the anglophone world—continues to occupy much of the time of feminist researchers.

WOMEN'S STUDIES: CURRENT TRENDS IN RESEARCH

It is very difficult to make general pronouncements about current trends in Women's or Gender Studies research in Europe as a whole. It seems to me that two of the abiding characteristics of feminist research in Europe are:

- a) the fact that such research tends to be carried out by individuals or small groups of researchers rather than be the function of some large-scale effort, and
- b) that such research is in many respects regionally specific, a function of the needs of particular groups in particular localities at a given moment in time.

There are key concerns which are the objects of sustained research in many European countries such as the fate of the welfare state and of welfare provision post 1989 on the one hand, and in the wake of increasing privatization on the other. Feminists in both East European countries and northern European countries are thus preoccupied with the impact of the decline of welfare provision on women for, notwithstanding, as Harriet Silius has described in her chapter for the forthcoming European Women's Studies textbook (Griffin and Braidotti 2002), the patriarchal nature of much of that welfare provision, and its social engineering element, such provision has enabled women to participate in the public sphere in ways increasingly challenged by women's newly enhanced role as private caregivers in an ageing society (Hugman 1994), for example. But such research tends still to be carried out at the level of specific European countries rather than in a pan-European fashion and, indeed, I would argue that to date there is little that one might describe as pan-European research. We have many comparative studies of various kinds but what these, in a sense, do is measure differences, the differences between the various countries that make up Europe. They are therefore not so much European studies in a

pan-European sense as based on assumptions of nationally specific boundaries of research. They assert, if you like, the national parameters of the research undertaken. One might also argue that such comparative studies measure the relative distances between national realities and a certain European ideal of what, in a given situation, might be the most desirable pan-European solution through representing the ‘shortfalls’ of a country in relation to a particular ideal or norm. In any event, they make us aware of how context shapes research and that the tendency, on the whole, is to research what effects you immediately and what impacts on your immediate environment. This is evident in volumes such as *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminisms in International Politics* (Scott *et al* 1997) or Threlfall (1996) in which individual contributors by and large focus and report on their country of origin. And that seems to be, precisely, the idea. Thus at present, for example, there is quite a lot of feminist research in the UK on internet porn, an issue that affects many other northern European countries where access to the internet is widespread and easy. The trading of women for prostitution purposes on Europe’s eastern and south-eastern borders, on the other hand, has a limited impact on UK feminist research, partly because the female victims of this abuse do not surface as much in the UK as they do in, for example, the former West Germany or in Italy. What this suggests is that in some respects the issues facing feminists in the diverse European countries are quite divergent, and that the notion of a European dimension to that research is still very much in its infancy. We remain frequently unaware of what the European, especially any pan-European, dimension is of the research we undertake. It may be that the notion of ‘situated knowledges’ which has been so central to Women’s Studies⁸ has encouraged our bounded engagement with Europe as an entity, attempting to negotiate a tenable position somewhere between homogeneity and heterogeneity. We possibly also underestimate the impact of each European country’s history in relation both to the other countries that make up Europe and to Europe as a concept. These histories are quite diverse. In the UK, for example, Europe on the whole is presented as something separate rather than as something to which

⁸ From the emergence of critiques of white middle-class feminism by women of color and by lesbians, feminism and Women’s Studies has never looked back in acknowledging the partiality, subjectivity and situated condition of knowledge (Hesse-Biber *et al* 1999).

we⁹ in the UK belong. Culturally we are still at war with Germany that only figures as Nazi Germany in endless television films and public rituals. We think badly of the French, and we fight with the Spanish over fishing rights when we don't go on holiday there. But we do not think about the Dutch, for example, or the Fins. I'm sure similar caricatures of the kinds of stereotypes that inform national assumptions about other European states can be articulated for every European country. The point is that the cultural shift from a focus on the nation state to a focus on Europe has, in my view, not occurred to date, and that this is evident in how we conduct feminist research where paradoxically we find easier to think about the global than about the European.

WOMEN'S STUDIES AND FEMINIST WORK OUTSIDE THE ACADEMY: CURRENT TRENDS

When Women's and Gender Studies first started in the academy in the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s many of its advocates, many of the feminist academics involved in setting it up, were also activists outside of the academy, involved in women's organizations, in campaigning for women's rights. Given the relatively stable political history of Britain over the past several hundred years, the distance between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the academy was therefore not as great as it was in other European countries such as the East European countries where academic institutions were closely bound up with the government of the day, and where NGOs might figure as sometimes illegal oppositional forces to that government. But this situation has changed in the 21st century. For one thing, in many northern European countries there now is a new generation of feminists growing up and coming into the academy who have no history, or a very limited history, of any political activism outside of the academy. The children of a conservative late 20th century in which relative economic prosperity, on the one hand, and new economic insecurities on the other, produced a politically fairly apathetic and simultaneously materially driven generation, these new feminists in northern European countries are often part of an educational elite which is much less focused on

⁹ The 'we' in the next few lines refers to 'the English'. Evidence for what is asserted can be found through reading any of the British tabloid newspapers, in particular *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror*. In addition the inspection of the television programmes for any given week will highlight the number of films focusing on the Second World War.

straightforwardly political agendas than on cultural ones, less inclined to seek changes in the law than in understandings of cultural trends. As activism in northern European countries has changed (Griffin 1995) so have feminist academics. Much of the activism carried out now is done by single-issue, politically highly skilled, quasi-professional groups who understand the impact of certain kinds of lobbying on producing change within the weakened democracies of these northern European countries. In these countries we now have groups of professional campaigners in NGOs whose work is driven both by particular issues and by a self-understanding of themselves as professionals, not amateur philanthropists. Vocationalism has, if you like, given way to professionalism. This seems to me to be quite different from what is happening in many of the Eastern European countries where, pre-1989, certain NGOs in which Women's Studies activities happened had oppositional functions in relation to the government (Blagojevic 1999) and to an academy tightly ruled by that government. The democratization of these countries has raised important questions about the role of the NGOs in relation both to the new governments and to the academy, a situation not made easier by the attempts of American-funded organizations to pour support into the presumed void generated by the collapse of communism in order to create higher education institutions in the image of certain western models. Two things then seem to me to be the predominant current trends regarding Gender or Women's Studies in relation to feminist work outside the academy: in the northern European countries the ties between the two have loosened as both have developed into professional domains, in the eastern European countries the relation is under scrutiny and unresolved. I am not sure what the situation is in the southern European countries. But my sense from some of the countries I have visited recently is that there is a divide between feminists working outside of and working inside the academy rather than an integration of agendas and actions.

WOMEN'S STUDIES AND CURRENT SOCIO-POLITICAL CONCERNS FOR WOMEN: SOME ISSUES

I come to my last point, the question of the relationship between Gender or Women's Studies and current socio-political issues for women in Europe. The first thing I should say is that I think that some very important current socio-political issues for women in Europe are not, at present, being aired in Women's Studies in the academy, at least not in the countries whose higher education curricula I am familiar with. One of

these is the issue of democracy, citizenship and participation in the political process. Let me make clear that I am not suggesting that these issues are not being debated within the traditional disciplines of sociology and politics. Indeed, much feminist scholarship is devoted to them. What I am saying is that they do not surface significantly in taught Women's Studies courses. We are aware, for example, that participation in the political process through voting is in decline in the north European democracies. Researchers on radical democracy such as Chantal Mouffe (1992; 2000) have suggested that this is because voters in the current democracies feel disempowered and think that political decision-making processes are no longer tied into voting preferences but are effected through particular forms of lobbying etc. Whatever the reasons for this situation, as women we must ask ourselves what the impact of the weakening of these north European democracies is on our situation as citizens in countries in Europe. In the UK, for example, some of the key Women's Studies centres are not engaged with the wider issues of public policy formation which relate feminist work in the academy directly to political forces for change. It is worth asking what the situation is like in other European countries. My impression is that some of the Women's Studies centres in the Nordic countries, for instance, are more effectively involved in public policy-making than those in the UK, for instance.

One key issue tied in with this concern regarding the democratic process is the issue of regulation, and of the interface of regulation between individual European countries and Europe as a legal, political, and geographic entity. Traditionally, women have lobbied for changes to the law¹⁰ as a way of improving their situation. But the legal scenarios directly impacting on women vary enormously from European country to European country. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the area of reproduction and reproductive technologies. Differential laws regarding abortion in the UK and in Ireland (Smyth) have, for example, led to a steady flux of Irish women into the UK in order to have the abortion in Britain that they were prevented from having in Ireland. Regarding the new reproductive technologies, issues of cloning, and research on embryonic stem cells, the UK is one of the most highly regulated country

¹⁰ This lobbying, driven by liberal and equality agendas, has not been without its critics. Especially in France and in Italy many feminists have agreed with Audre Lorde's line (1979) that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' and that recourse and appeal to the structures and institutions which have been generated by and for men are incapable of encompassing or responding to women's experiences, needs, and knowledges (eg The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990).

in Europe. In Italy and in other southern European countries that regulation is very different ('The Line Against...' 2001),—we have all heard of Severino Antinori, the doctor from Rome who has become the object of much media publicity—with the result that especially older women from the UK, for example, now flock to Italy to enjoy postmenopausal motherhood, and that the cloning of human beings is likely to be carried out, or carried out much sooner, in certain European countries but not in others. In the face of these differences there are profound questions to be raised about the issue of regulation at both national and supra-national, European level. These include whether or not we as women need to take a particular stance, whether or not we should strive for European-wide rather than country-specific regulation, and what the impact of this might be. Debates have already been had regarding the so-called minimum wage which affects women disproportionately since women in all European countries tend to congregate, and be kept in, lower paid jobs. There are many other such arenas which require that we as women take a stance but doing so seems, at present, to happen less and less. Whilst there is a wider picture that we should contemplate, the pull seems to be towards a kind of postmodern atomization where individual issues may generate investment but where we seem to shy away from larger political concerns. We know, *de facto*, that many of the issues around which women in Europe have campaigned in the past have been resolved only partially or not at all.¹¹ Thus in the UK rape in marriage is now illegal, domestic abuse is meant to be taken seriously and dealt with by the police, numbers of reported sexual crimes against women are up BUT: convictions are significantly down (Lees 1997). We have not exactly lost faith in the law—women still campaign for changes to the law such as campaigns around provocation in cases of murder in cases where women murder their abusive partners—but I think there has also been a recognition that the law and its enforcement are two separate things, and that cultural changes are harder to achieve than legal changes. Virginia Woolf famously asserted that 'as a woman I have no country'. We may wish to refine this to say, 'as a feminist I have no nation state'. Europe as a concept and as a political reality may represent an opportunity for women of which we might need to make more use.

¹¹ The laws on abortion on demand, for instance, one of the earliest campaigning issues for women, is constantly under pressure and revision in many European countries and gains made in the 1970s and 1980s have gradually been eroded during the 1990s.

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ATHENA and Gender Studies

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INTRODUCTION

This paper offers an overview of the main points of consensus about the key-concepts and the main terminology of the field of gender and women's studies in a European perspective. The latter refers to the concrete experience of institutional co-operation and joint activities with a large number of universities within the SOCRATES programme of the European Union. All references to "Europe", therefore, are to be taken in this sense.

The process of developing European perspectives into the curricula and the research projects in the field of gender and women's studies involves a number of difficulties which all come to bear on the task of institutionalizing this area. In this paper I will address them and attempt to provide some answers on the basis of the experience of European co-operation projects.

Women's studies as a term is a North American invention; it was quickly and easily adopted by the Anglo-Saxon world because of the strong cultural ties existing between the two geo-political areas the North of Europe also followed. Whether this concept can be applied systematically right across Latin, Catholic, Southern and especially in Eastern Europe is, however, a very serious question. I am not saying this to be excessively Euro-centric but rather to try and be alert to the differences in culture, religion, political and educational practices, which could well make the American-based model of women's studies not a universally applicable one.

The question can then be raised: to what an extent is the very concept of women's studies today respectful of cultural diversity? How does it relate to and take into account the problems of women in less advantaged or in developing countries? How does it compare to the wealth and variety of cultures, even of feminist cultures, within Europe today? Ever since their beginnings in the late 1980's, the European cooperative projects, joint activities, exchanges and networks in academic women's studies have had to confront this complex reality.

The whole field of women's studies has been marked by a series of debates and questioning about the aims and scopes of its very enterprise. This has given rise to areas of divergence and uncertainty; let me try to give you some example of these.

TERMINOLOGY

Even the simple and apparently straight-forward "women's studies" did not strike a note of adequate simplicity. Some groups prefer the more explicitly political: "feminist studies"; others go for "sex-role or gender studies", which aim at greater objectivity by suggesting a higher level of scientific precision. The slightly older "female studies" may sound neutral but is far too limiting in political scope; "feminine studies" will probably please the Lacanians but it does beg the question. "Feminology" was suggested and recently the term "clitoral hermeneutics" was brought forth (Schor, 1987). More than anything else, this semantic euphoria stresses that the term "women's studies" was never more than a compromise solution, revealing the depths of hesitation surrounding the very signifier "woman".

The point about the instability of the category "woman" has been emphasized over the last ten years by the so-called post-structuralist wave of feminist theory; it is complex enough to deserve a better treatment than I can warrant here. Suffice it to say that the question remains: how do we define the referent "woman" and what epistemological value do we attribute to it in developing a field of study called "women's studies"? What does the human being embodied female study, when she studies women's studies? I will return to the epistemological issues later on in my presentation.

The polyvalence surrounding the terminology reflects a much larger variety of views concerning the very nature of the women's movement. It is just as difficult today to analyze and map out the locations of the movement as it is to codify the practices of women's studies. This is due partly to the relative invisibility of the movement in the social sphere and partly to the proliferation of groups and sub-groups which actually defies classification. A special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* devoted to the assessment of the second wave of feminism identified three main criteria of definition of the women's movement: firstly, it covers the general evolution of the lives and ways of thinking of women in general, even and especially those who do not claim to be feminists.

Secondly it refers to the impact that feminist values have had on the cultural and social representation of women in all societies but especially in those white industrialized countries where the “problem without a name” (Friedan, 1963) became a key political factor.

Thirdly it refers specifically to the multitude of groups in the feminist networks. Out of this complex, polyvalent web of meaning-making groups we can detect common areas of concern, or coalitions of interest that make the movement into a political machine governed by the common will to improve the status of women.

DEFINITION OF GENDER

Gender research at the international¹ and the European levels² has undergone considerable and significant developments in the last 10 years³. Most of them are the result of systematic and intense networking on the part of different social actors, both male and female, within a variety of institutions in Europe today. The final Report of the evaluation of women’s studies activities in Europe⁴ states as the main aim of gender research and education the pursuit of the political, cultural, economic, scientific and intellectual concerns of the struggle for the emancipation of women. Gender research challenges scientific thought and it aims at enlarging the meaning and practice of scientific research so as to further reflect the changes in the status of women. Gender research is trans- or multi-disciplinary and it engages in a constructive dialogue with a number of established academic disciplines and scientific practices.

Those unfamiliar with gender research tend to assume that this field constitutes a unified framework for analysis. This is partly true, in so far as ‘gender’ plays the role of a constitutive concept. It does not, however, provide one monolithic framework of analysis. It rather caters for a

¹ See Sandra Harding and Elizabeth McGregor (eds) *The gender Dimension of Science and Technology*, extract from the World Science Report, UNESCO, 1995.

² *Women and Science. Proceedings of the Conference*. Directorate General XII of the Commission of the European Union, 1999.

³ See Jalna Hanmer (ed.) *Women’s Studies and European Integration. A report to the Equal Opportunities Unit, DGV*, April 1994.

⁴ Rosi Braidotti, Ellen de Dreu, Christine Rammrath *Women’s Studies in Europe. Final Report of the Evaluation of Women’s Studies Activities in Europe for the SIGMA Network and Directorate general XII of the Commission of the European Union*. September 1995.

variety of different methods, which can be accounted for and evaluated with reference to specific theoretical traditions. In this paper, I will take three such traditions into account: empiricism, standpoint theory and deconstructive gender research⁵.

The working definition of gender I want to present is the following. The concept of gender refers to the many and complex ways in which social differences between the sexes acquire a meaning and become structural factors in the organization of social life. Gender is a cultural and historical product, as opposed to essentialist definitions of the physical differences between the sexes.

A gender approach in research focuses on:

- the study of the social construction of these differences;
- their consequences for the division of power, influence, social status and access to economic resources between men and women;
- the impact of socially induced differences upon the production of knowledge, science and technology and the extent to which these differences control access to and participation in the production of knowledge, science and technology.

According to this definition gender refers primarily but not exclusively to women. Not only does it include men, but it also defines ‘women’ as a very broad and internally differentiated category which includes differences of class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and age. All these variables are highly relevant to gender research.

Gender being a multi-layered concept, it needs to be investigated on three levels, according to the useful classification system provided by the feminist epistemologist Sandra Harding⁶:

- 1) Gender as a dimension of personal identity. On this level gender is investigated as an inter-personal process of self-consciousness. It also studies the dynamic relation of self-images to the individual and collective identity.

⁵ I take inspiration here from the categories proposed by Rosemarie Buikema and Anneke Smelik in their useful: *Women’s Studies in Cultural Studies. A feminist Introduction*. London, Zed Books, 1994.

⁶ Sandra Harding *The Science Question in Feminism*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1986; *Feminism and Methodology. Social Science Issues*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987; *Whose Science, Whose Knowledge?*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991.

- 2) Gender as a principle of organization of social structure. On this level, gender is investigated as the foundation of social institutions ranging from the family and kinship structures to the division of labour in social, economic, political and cultural life.
- 3) Gender as the basis for normative values. On this level, gender is investigated as a system that produces socially enacted meanings, representations of masculinity and femininity which are shot through with issues of ethnicity, nationality, religion. These identity-giving values are organized in a binary scheme of oppositions that also act as principles for the distribution of power.

In short, gender research aims at providing methodological and theoretical tools that study the visible and invisible power mechanisms that influence women's access to posts of responsibility in social economic, political, religious intellectual and cultural life. Gender research emphasizes issues such as culture, sexuality, family, gender-identity and the power of representation and language. It gives high priority to women's experience and women's access to and participation in democratic processes, with special emphasis on decision-making mechanisms. It aims at revealing the full extent of women's lives, which has been hidden because men were the predominant subjects and objects of knowledge, and most importantly, they aim at improving the status of women in society.

STRUCTURE OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Women's studies as a practice exists for the moment mostly at university level. Women's studies has also been strong in adult education classes, re-entry and access to education classes and in some countries even literacy classes. Throughout Europe, women's studies also exists as extra-mural and extra-institutional training. It is the case however that nowhere is women's studies taught at secondary level. This situation places extra responsibility on the women's studies teachers and feminist academics to define our relationship to the university as an institution of higher training and research. This raises a number of questions that are relevant not only in the strategic sense of the term.

What vision of the university do we espouse from within women's studies? In thinking and planning for our own growth, what educational values do we uphold? In our relationship to the institution of learning, what notion of the university is at work: is it the idea of a liberal island of

progressive thinking or rather the view of the university as a vehicle of social control? Does women's studies lend itself to the growing commercialization of university teaching and research, or does it on the contrary remain loyal to classical ideals of education for its own sake? Where are the feminist blueprints for a university that will answer and live up to the challenges of our times? Could we not see women's studies as a laboratory for the re-working of the very scope and function of higher education?

Such questioning is particularly needed at this point in time, when the institution of the university as a whole suffers from the post-modern disease: lack of legitimation. The university, even more than any other institution of higher learning, is under increasing pressure to fulfil the requirements of productivity and competition of the market economy. The question of whether it is equipped to do so and of whether this aim is compatible with the university's century-old vocation: the pursuit of excellence *per se*, is an open question.

The moral and economic imperative of training people so that they are employable after they graduate must be set up against one of the most prominent features of the contemporary university system: the obvious feminisation of the student population at least in the humanities and social sciences. Regrettably, the feminisation of the professorial body seems somewhat slower in coming. In fact, the position of women academics in most faculties in these areas still follows the classical patriarchal pyramid: the higher the rank, the fewer the women. As far as the students go, however, the over-presence of girls in the humanities and social sciences coincides with the relative depreciation of these fields in the eyes of the educational authorities and policy-makers, who miss no chance to introduce budgetary reductions. I am struck by the perversity of the system, by this constant association of feminization with depreciation: it is as if the presence of women were synonymous with decline and crisis. The eternal historical delay of women plays a role here: as if we were condemned to occupy the spaces, the monuments that patriarchy has already deserted. Thus, well may we wonder why women are not present in any significant number in the hard sciences faculty (Fox-Keller, 1985; Hubbard 1984, 1990; Nagl, 1987), in mathematics, in all the advanced technologies? The complex relationship that "gender" as an academic field entertains with the institution of the university, and with other symbolic structures is the counterpart of the issues surrounding women's exclusion from socio-political rights, i.e.: what is commonly known as "power". In other words: women's exclusion from

the city of letters is symptomatic of our exclusion from citizenship at large. As relative newcomers in the world of legal and intellectual rights, women have the advantage of a more critical outlook. No discussion of women's studies international perspective is therefore complete unless it rests on a lucid analysis of one's inscription in the networks of power and signification that make up one's culture and its institution of learning and research. The issue of institutionalization of feminist knowledge, in other words, raises that of citizenship and women's participation in larger social processes. National identity is included in this cluster of very complex questions. The issue of nationality and of the sense of national identity is especially relevant in an international framework, such as that of inter-European co-operation projects.

Moreover, as Gabriele Griffin has pointed out⁷, it is impossible to establish a one-to-one relationship between women and 'own country', not only because identifications are not one-dimensional, but also because in the multicultural societies of Europe today they are not easily classifiable in terms of "national" versus "international". Griffin also argues that it is questionable whether, under the impact of globalization and the repoliticization of religious affiliations as markers of identification, the "nation state" still functions as a major point of reference in identity-formation. It is in the context of the crisis of the concept of the nation-state that I would situate the debate on "internationalism". The European union project is like an ideal horizon, which often raises high expectations. It is as if the lifting of the national boundaries were lifting a burden off our chest; as if a trans-national entity called the EU could come and deliver us from a problem we have never ceased to grapple with: the nation-state. Although I accept that all identifications are troubled, contested and politically implicated, I am wary of using the "international" as a way of avoiding local realities. How do we assess our belonging to a nation-state? Why have we written so little about it? The topic of the State has been put on the feminist agenda: why not that of the nation? With the exception of the studies on women in totalitarian regimes (Bock, 1986; Thalmann, 1986; Koonz, 1987) we still lack adequate analyses of our relationship to a nation-state, that is to say ultimately of our own sense of citizenship.

The agenda and content of the field

Women's studies is a field aimed at challenging the premises and epistemological foundations of the disciplines. Feminism is a form of

⁷ ATHENA meeting, Leeds, November 1999, panel 1c.

critical theory. The actual topics covered by the feminist agenda encompass everything from the organization of the brain to socialization and motherhood, without forgetting the feminization of poverty, feminist theology or women's role in musicology. Clearly, it is not by focusing on the topics of the agenda that we can hope to reach a compromise, but rather by stressing common forms of approach and methods.

The debate over the foundations of the discipline is translated into a political issue: should women's studies be an autonomous area of its own, or should it aim at the integration into the disciplines? The integrationists aim at including women's studies into existing curricula and thus force the disciplines to evolve; the autonomists, on the other hand, believe in radical disruption and in the specificity of women-based knowledge.

In the early stages of the women's movements, such a debate acquired heated political connotations. Here in Europe the arena where a great deal of these discussions were assessed and in some way resolved were the European networks for women's studies. The issues that emerged as crucial are: the structure and importance of the disciplines and of disciplinarity in the university today. Can we speak, for instance, of a European tradition of reflection and critique of the disciplines that differs considerably from the eclectic pragmatism of the Americans? Is the epistemological and symbolic value that we Europeans give to the disciplines different from the American epistemological "melting pot"?

How far does a new field of inter-disciplinary work like women's studies actually fit in with the university structure? Is the mono-disciplinary tradition of universities on the continent not a formidable obstacle to the development of an inter-disciplinary women's studies curriculum? Is autonomy a better structure for women's studies education than integration? Let me simply quote the prophetic words of Virginia Woolf, who in *Three Guineas* (1939) warned us against integration as being a one-way street into the conventional, safe, white, middle-class, heterosexist world of the learned powerful few. As later theorists (Duelli-Klein, 1987) were to point out, integration can become a form of invisibility.

There is also another political issue at stake here: how is the process of institutionalization of women's studies likely to affect the often fragile alliance between women of different classes, races and sexual preferences? How does the confrontation with mainstream discourse

affect the working-through of the differences among women? Does an emphasis on gender guarantee respect for diversity?

In this respect one of the points of consensus among women's studies teachers cooperating in the European networks is the creation of a class of trans-disciplinary translators, who can transpose the assumptions and methodologies of one discipline into those of another and of different cultural traditions into each other. This task-force of conceptual translators could well become the core of what could be rightly called a feminist intellectual and academic task-force. And in so far as no translation can ever be perfect duplication, approximations, deletions, omissions—the vast array of subjective factors are integral part of the process of interchange which alone makes intellectual processes possible.

Moreover, hiding the complexities of cultural differences among women under the convenient umbrella of a universal, or global sisterhood (Morgan, 1984) seems to me both unfair and unworkable. This epistemological side, connected to the critical discussion about the signifier “woman” has been made necessary of late by the emergence of the question of “differences among women”. This movement has resulted in the rejection of the univocity of the term “woman” also and especially within feminist theory. The political urge to develop this issue has come from specific sectors of the movement: firstly from psychoanalytic feminism (Irigaray, 1974, 1977, 1986; Melandri, 1977; Molino, 1986; Chodorow, 1987; Rose-Mitchell, 1982; Benjamin, 1986; Flax, 1987). Secondly from the so-called “post-colonial” discourse of third-world feminists (Lorde, 1987; Mohanty, 1987) who have analyzed the way in which the category “Third world women” has been constructed by feminist discourse. Thirdly, the lesbian discourse, its theory and practice (Johnston, 1973; Rich, 1981; Dworkin, 1982; Wittig, 1973; Spivak, 1988).

Another argument for translation as an epistemological stance is that, unless we submit our own discourses to the test of feminist transdisciplinary translation we run the risk of re-inventing the wheel, i.e.: of borrowing sloppily from the terminology and the conceptual framework of other disciplines. Sloppy loans may induce a false sense of creativity; thus, an idea from sociology applied to literature may seem revolutionary, though it is absolutely commonplace in its own originary discourse.

It seems to me that the key idea in all these cases is that of cross-disciplinary, or cross-cultural comparison. The focus is on the cultural differences such as they become manifest in our own theoretical practices. As an example, do we think that the Anglo-Saxon idea of “gender” has an equivalent in, say French or Italian? Inversely, is the idea of sexual difference or “différence sexuelle” translatable in a meaningful manner? Instead of taking shelter behind a facile sort of cultural relativism, should we not take seriously the conceptual challenge raised by these questions? Should we not ask whether women’s studies, feminist theory or the women’s movement as a whole possess a common language? Are we talking about the same sort of project? Do we share the same vision? Is the mixture of critique and creativity, which for me lies at the heart of the women’s studies project a trans-cultural, trans-historical truth? Is the term precise enough to re-present the gesture which unifies us in one common political goal? These questions have been the focus of a great deal of research and serious discussions in women’s studies over the last twenty years.

Following Harding’s three-fold classification of different feminist epistemologies, in the next section I will analyze three dominant framework for gender research.

1. Empiricism

This assumes that the practice of science disproportionately represents men’s interests, needs and expectations. It consequently aims at repairing the under-representation of women at all levels of science research, teaching, implementation, policy-making and dissemination of data and information. Openly stated as one of the aims, this approach is to promote women throughout the scientific and university practice of research, at both community and national levels.

One concrete way in which empirical gender research contributes to the issue of women in science is by furthering the understanding of the macro and micro causes that hinder women’s access to and participation in science education, career and practice. Gender research supports the cause of women in science because of the insight it provides into factors which:

- affect science education and help to explain women’s drop-out rate in science and technology;
- influence the entry and the retention of women in science and technology education programmes;

- determine the effect of scientific and technological advances on women as a group.

As a strategy, gender equity joins forces with the battle for equal opportunities for women and it aims to:

- achieve basic education in science for women and the struggle against masculine domination of the educational resources in science;
- equal opportunities for women in science employment, advanced training and careers;
- to achieve gender equity in policy-making at all levels of institutional life;
- to ensure that men and women have equal access to information and scientific knowledge and that the dissemination of scientific findings occurs among women especially;
- to pay special attention to women who are under-privileged by class, ethnicity, race or other social factors, such as immigration or ‘minority’ status;
- this translates into a broad sense of equal opportunities.

What I find significant about the empirical or equity-minded approach to gender research is that it sides resolutely and unequivocally on the side of scientific rationality and objectivity, without questioning any of its tenets, including the distinction knower/known. It adheres to the neutral procedures of observation by a knowing subject. In fact, it takes these principles so seriously, that it applies them to the analysis of the practice of science itself. It therefore argues that gender bias and discrimination against women is a failure of scientific rationality. In other words, gender biased or downright sexist scientific practices make for bad science, thus they constitute a fault in the proper, objective use of scientific objectivity.

It follows that, in this methodological framework, re-dressing the gender balance in science amounts to cleansing science of some of its irrational features. Scientists of both sexes can thus work towards the improvement of scientific objectivity by fighting the specific form of irrationality that consists in identifying objectivity with male domination of scientific processes. The masculinist bias is the error of judgement that needs to be eliminated in order to produce a type of scientific practice that would be truly worth of the ideals of objectivity and rationality. Proper scientific objectivity can and must be restored by fighting male domination of the use of reason.

I see two problems with this approach. First, this approach tends to remain restricted to repair-work, that is to say in mending the gender gap in science and technology. This is undeniably important considering the persistence of factors of inequality and of discrimination against women. In the long-run, however, an equity-minded approach runs into structural difficulties. The experience of years of state-sponsored equal opportunities for girls and women in scientific educations and careers in countries such as the Netherlands, in fact, has pointed to a vicious circle. Namely that a great deal of the resistance against the advancement of women in science as in society is due to ‘invisible’ factors. These have often to do with cultural habits, traditions and mind-sets which cannot be removed by formal means or by quotas alone. More complex strategies and frameworks of analysis are needed in order to tackle the continuing issue of male domination of scientific and technological knowledge. In order to break the vicious circle, issues of power and identity need to be raised. These challenge the conceptual framework of what we have learnt to recognize as ‘scientific objectivity’ in European culture.

Secondly, most equity-minded projects tend to essentialize the category of ‘women’, flattening out the wide and widening range of differences among women. Diversity is underplayed in the name of an over-arching principle of equity of equality, which often begs the very question it asks, namely: ‘science for women’ is a worthy ideal indeed, but for whom and by whom can it be implemented?

2. Standpoint gender theory

This gender approach starts off from the dilemmas disclosed by the previous one. It recognizes that the differences between the sexes play a major structuring role in societies and culture at large. It argues that increasing attention must be paid not only to the quantitative issue of women’s access to and participation in science and scientific policy-making, but also to the development of new insights, innovative analytical tools and scientific and social methods that rest upon the experience of women and on their struggle for equality. A standpoint feminist approach sees women as agents of change for science as a whole and aims at developing problem-solving tools that, while redressing the gender gap in science participation, would benefit the scientific community as a whole.

The standpoint feminist approach assumes that because of their different social roles, activities and socialization patterns, men and women also have culturally different interests which also translate into different ways

of doing science. Difference-minded or standpoint feminism covers a variety of methods, which have in common a critique of empirically-minded gender equity⁸. The grounds on which ‘difference’ is defended as a positive value, and not merely as a signifier of inferiority or oppression, vary greatly. Some rather essentialistic brands of gender research—not very popular in feminist circles—argue for hormonal, brain-size differences; others are based on psychological characteristics or psycho-sexual ones such as verbal ability, finger dexterity, visual-spatial coordination. Women’s ethical powers and sense of moral responsibility, including a wilful rejection of competitiveness and aggression have also been quoted as a positive source of difference. Of special relevance here are the French and Italian scholars of sexual difference.

In terms of its relationship to science, this gender approach is far more critical than the previous one⁹. Scientific objectivity is challenged from without and a more radical critique is offered of the ways in which rationality and objectivity are implemented as a human, a social and a scientific ideal. The assumption behind this critique is that women’s socially induced ‘difference’ is in fact a capital, a human and scientific resource that needs to be infused into what our culture has codified as science. The aim here is the enlargement of the notions of rationality and objectivity, in order to make them less discriminatory and more inclusive.

Let me stress here that the emphasis that standpoint gender research places on the social construction of scientific concepts and practices and consequently also on the social responsibilities of scientists is not an attack against science. To reduce it to an anti-scientific position would be a serious misreading of both the aims and the arguments produced by this gender methodology. In fact, standpoint feminism argues that to question the objectivity and the neutrality of science need not be dissonant with accepted notions of what constitutes good science. Evelyn Fox-Keller¹⁰ even suggests that to question these basic premises is precisely one of the elements of excellent scientific enquiry in these days of fast-changing technological developments.

⁸ For a very enlightening account of this, see Sue V. Rosser: “Applying feminist theories to Women in Science programs”, *Signs*, 1998, vol. 24, n.1, pp. 171-200.

⁹ See Ruth Bleier: *Gender and Science*, New York, Pergamon Press, 1984.

¹⁰ Evelyn Fox-Keller: *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985.

A very important element in this approach is the critique of power relations and the relationships of domination and exclusion which operate within science and scientific projects. We are a long way here from the unquestioned acceptance of scientific concepts of the empirical gender tradition. For instance, the dualism mind/body; subject/object or knower/known; nature/culture comes under scrutiny and is taken as the mark of a hegemonic way of thinking that favours masculine domination.

For standpoint feminism, all knowledge is socially produced and therefore mediated by the subject's position in society, which can be analyzed in terms of variables such as gender, class, race and ethnicity, religion, age and sexual preference. In particular, this gender approach stresses the positive contribution that women and other socially marginal groups can make to the production of scientific knowledge. It assumes that position of social marginality are ideal sources of knowledge in so far as they do not defend any vested interests and thus end up being more objective and more impartial.

Far from rejecting the notion of truth altogether, standpoint gender research uses the insight of psychoanalytic methods in order to provide a rigorous account of how social and cultural mediation affects the production of science. The emphasis falls on the importance of the positionality of the subject of knowledge and on the social mechanisms that empower his/her access to scientific practice. It stresses issues such as identity-formation, identification, mothering, role-models and mentoring as major factors in shaping women's ability to access the production of knowledge and science, as well as other fields of social endeavour.

Nancy Chodorow and other object-relation theorists¹¹ have challenged the masculine bias of science not merely as an accidental or a statistical instance, but rather as a structural element in scientific practice. In other words, science is masculine not only because it is empirically dominated by men, but rather because it implies a male subject and object of science at each and every step of the making of science. This covers "the choice of experimental topics, the use of male subjects for experimentation, the way data are interpreted and theorized and the practice and applications of science" (p. 187).

¹¹ Nancy Chodorow: *The Reproduction of Mothering. Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978.

The masculine bias that is built into the practice of science reflects the codes of behaviour that are operational in society as a whole. Here, psychoanalytic studies of the psycho-sexual development of individuals cast an important light on the ways in which masculinity comes to be identified with autonomy and femininity with dependence (Benjamin, 1986; Kristeva, ?? and in refs). By studying how these translate into patterns of behaviour of male and female children towards their mother, and especially on how they negotiate their respective separation from the mother, this kind of gender research accounts for the cultural implementation of a pattern of socialization that favours respectively masculine self-assertion and feminine timidity. In turn this encourages men's access to the use of rationality, the well-defined rules and protocols of scientific objectivity and an inquisitive spirit that results in experimentation. In the female, insecurities and lack of assertiveness are implemented instead. Because girls and women are socialized into motherhood and care-taking, they find their access to scientific investigation and the uses of rationality seriously hindered by inter-personal and relational concerns.

As a strategy, this approach aims to:

- question scientific objectivity so as to enlarge it and to include the principles of social responsibility of the scientists;
- ensure that the needs and aspirations of women are equally taken into account in the designing of science projects and the setting of scientific priorities;
- to devise strategies to monitor attentively female students' access to a scientific education, by favouring for instance all-girls science classes;
- to work systematically on providing positive role-models and mentoring systems for women at all levels of their scientific career;
- to enlist the support of men in encouraging girls and women into science and dispelling the cultural prejudice that sees it as oppositional to their femininity;
- to recognize the value of local and alternative knowledge systems and even of gender-specific norms are source of knowledge that can be complementary with and not antithetical to modern science.

I find that standpoint gender theory, also known as 'the alternative science project' offers stimulating perspectives and useful strategies for the advancement of women in science. In so far as it challenges the alleged neutrality of notions such as objectivity and rationality, it contributes to a more thorough analysis of the epistemological structures

of scientific practice. By emphasizing the importance of social and cultural mediations, it also stresses the degree to which the positionality of the individual researcher—in terms of gender, class, age, race, religion—affects the kind of scientific projects s/he is likely to engage in. This is not to be confused with a relativistic position but rather with a systematic attention to power relations.

What constitutes the strength of this position, however, can easily turn into its main weakness. Many scientists, including women, have expressed scepticism at the claim of female difference. Statistical evidence about female scientists' 'different' work environment and genderized forms of organization and of interaction with other women do not conclusively point to systematic patterns of alternative scientific practice. Often, the emphasis on the social responsibility of scientists and the social accountability of science can be taken as an intrusion into scientific practice.

I think however that, in the light of environmental and health concerns¹², as well as in terms of basic principles of democracy and social justice, standpoint gender theory has a great deal to offer. Provided that it is taken as a strategy and implemented by consensus, I think it offers clear advantages over a straight-forward equity approach, although it runs the risk of essentializing women and the difference they are likely to make to science and scientific practice.

3. Deconstructive gender research

The critique of the essentialism implicit in standpoint gender theory is the starting point for the more deconstructive approach which I would like to defend in the last section of my paper. Whether it is based on a postmodernist, post-structuralist or post-colonial approach, this gender method fundamentally challenges the possibility to speak in one unified voice about women, including 'women in science'. The focus is entirely on issues of diversity and differences among women. By crossing gender-questions with a critique of the Euro-centric bias in science, this approach questions the idea that science and scientific knowledge can be truly universal. It rather tends to see it as an expression of western culture and of its drive to mastery. Increased attention is paid to race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and age.

¹² For a more detailed account see Rosi Braidotti, Ewa Charkiewicz, Sabine Hausler and Saskia Wieringa; *Women, the Environment and Sustainable development. Towards a Theoretical Synthesis*, London, Zed Books, 1994.

Frequently bad-mouthed and seldom understood, deconstructive gender research is in my eyes a pragmatic response to two factors that have arisen simultaneously: firstly, the processes of globalization and the social and cultural transformations they have engendered. Secondly the loss of consensus about a unitary concept of 'women' and 'femininity'. Whereas empirical gender research effaces differences and standpoint feminism enhances them, a deconstructive approach takes off from them in order to transform them into stepping stones towards cross-border or transversal alliances. As a strategy, this approach tends therefore to emphasize differences among women, in terms of class and ethnicity but also of age, thus targeting especially the needs and aspirations of the next generations. Neither relativistic nor a form of sceptical suspension of belief in values, deconstruction is the simultaneous recognition of the ubiquity of power and the necessity of resistance.

In a deconstructive framework, science is taken not only as an attempt to explore and analyze, but also as a way to control and normalize. Scientific discourse is embedded in a network of power relations aimed at disciplining nature, its resources and the many 'others' that are different from an implicit norm of scientific subjectivity. This norm equates science with masculinity and both with white, Euro-centric premises. The recognition of the normativity of science and of the partiality of scientific statements as well as their necessary contingency¹³ has nothing to do with relativism. It rather has to do with a critique of falsely universal pretensions and with the desire to pluralize the options, paradigms and practices within Western science, so as to free it from some of its hegemonic habits. It also stresses the recognition of complexity and multiplicity and major traits of contemporary culture and of today's science.

In what I consider a radical critique of dualistic thinking, deconstructive approach emphasizes the extent to which power is a process of formation of pejorative 'others'. Here 'difference' plays a constitutive, if negative, role. 'Difference' has been colonized by power-relations that reduce it to inferiority; further, it has resulted in passing off differences as 'natural', which made entire categories of beings into devalued and therefore disposable others. Discourse, as Michel Foucault argues¹⁴, is about the political currency that is attributed to certain meanings, or systems of

¹³ For an illuminating account see the work of Donna Haraway, especially: *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*. London, Free Association Books, 1991.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault: *Discipline and Punish*, London, Allen Lane, 1977.

meaning, in such a way as to invest them with scientific legitimacy: there is nothing neutral or given about it.

Take the examples of misogyny and racism: the belief in the inferiority of women—be it mental, intellectual, spiritual or moral—has no serious scientific foundation; the same goes for racist beliefs. This does not prevent them from having great currency in political practice and the organization of society. The woman or the black as ‘others’—that is to say as both empirical referents and symbolic signs of péjoration—function discursively as shapers of meanings. That is to say that they organize differences in a hierarchical scale that divides man from woman, but also man from the animal, or non-human and the divine. The mark of differences fulfils the crucially important function of dividing the subjects along a set of axes of varying degrees of ‘difference’. To divide, so as to conquer in a normative order the subversive or dangerous charge that is potentially contained in these ‘others’.

As a corollary of the above: the pejorative use of the feminine, or of blackness, is structurally necessary to the dominant system of meaning. By being structurally embedded, these differences of gender or race become paradoxically both abstract and invisible, i.e.: are perceived as ‘natural’. The real-life, empirical subjects that are associated with categories of ‘difference’—women and blacks—experience in their embodied existence the effects of the disqualification (of the feminine and of blackness), which is effected at the symbolic level.

Thus, a deconstructivist approach to the analysis of power and discourse highlights the links that exist between scientific truth and discursive currency or power relations. As such, it primarily aims at dislodging the belief in the ‘natural’ foundations of socially coded and enforced ‘differences’ and of the systems of value and representation which they support. Secondly, a politicized deconstructive method emphasizes the need to historicize the analysis of the formation of scientific concepts as normative formations, thus it allows us to take on the historicity of the very concepts that we are investigating. In a feminist frame, this emphasis on historicity means that the scholar needs some humility before the eternal repetitions of history and the great importance of language. We need to learn that there is no escape from the multi-layered structure of our own encoded history and language.

The political implications are even more striking. It implies that there is no readily accessible uncontaminated or ‘authentic’ voice of the

oppressed, be it women of black or people of colour. This turns firstly into an attack on the essentialism of those who claim fixed identities of the deterministic kinds. It also undercuts, however, any claim to 'purity' as the basis for epistemological or political alternatives. Claims to 'purity' are always suspect because they assume subject-positions that would be unmediated by language and representation.

As a strategy, therefore, a deconstructivist approach is:

- Opposed to 'identity politics', while simultaneously stressing the positivity of difference. It is opposed to the counter-affirmation of oppositional identities, because they end up re-asserting the very dualism's they are trying to undo.
- A theoretical platform for a politics of diversity, because it makes a point of carefully avoiding and even undermining any attempt at re-essentialising 'gender', 'race' or 'ethnicity' as a natural given 'data'.
- Committed to a radical politics of resistance, which would be mercifully free of claims to purity, but also of the luxury of guilt.
- Committed to think the simultaneity of potentially contradictory social and textual effects, which cut across established ways of thinking and relatively simplistic dualistic, essentialized on 'natural' oppositions.

This simultaneity is not to be confused with easy parallels or arguments by analogy. That gender, race, class and sexual choice may be equally effective power variables does not amount to flattening out any differences between them. Any account of feminist theory and practice which gives the impression that simultaneity is merely a multi-layered version of one-directional thinking, is inadequate.

I could sum up post-deconstructivist strategies by saying that: all deconstructions are equal, but some are more equal than others. Whereas the deconstruction of masculinity and whiteness is an end in itself, the non-essentialistic reconstruction of black perspectives, as well as the feminist reconstruction of multiple ways of being women, also have new values to offer. In other words, some notions need to be deconstructed so as to be laid to rest once and for all: masculinity; whiteness; heterosexism; classism, ageism. Others, need to be deconstructed only as a prelude to offering positive new values and effective ways of asserting political presence of newly empowered subjects: feminism; diversity; multiculturalism; environmentalism. We need to fight passionately for the simultaneous assertion of positive differences by, for and among women, while resisting essentialisation and claims to authenticity.

THE ADVANTAGES OF NETWORKING

Whether one works with the empirical, the standpoint or the deconstructivist or with any other gender methodology, the crucial point remains the cross-comparisons, the networks of exchanges and the construction of discursive communities of individuals committed to fostering the cause of women as subjects, including as subjects of science and technological knowledge. Alternatively understood as a web of people with similar interests and concerns (empirical); as a community of similar-minded political and epistemological agents (standpoint); or a web of transversal alliances (deconstructive), networking remains central to the project of women in science as it is to gender research as a whole.

Experience has shown the advantages to be drawn from effective women's networking. The current explosion of telecommunication and electronic mail also offers new possibilities that were not available before. According to Osborn, networks are important in monitoring all-around the progress of women in science and technology, from the educational level, to job-finding, monitoring career progression, providing contacts, exchanging information and corporate tactics. Networks can act in such a way at EU, national and regional levels, but also in professional settings and in specific scientific fields.

This becomes especially important in the age of globalization and transnational economic flows of people, goods, data and capital. Intense transversal networking by women in all levels and dimension of science education, employment and research can constitute an effective platform for the next millennium.

As Kum-kum Bhavani put it¹⁵: "I am not simply a woman, nor Black, nor a university professor, not Indian, nor someone who teaches social psychology and feminist studies, nor an aunt, nor heterosexual, nor a socialist. Each of these categories is both circumscribed and limited by other categories and each of them can always change."

Ultimately, networking is a way of doing justice to the complexity of our respective social, academic and political practices, as well as a positive reflection on the inner complexities of the sort of subjects that women

¹⁵ Kum Kum Bhavani: "Towards a Multicultural Europe?", Bernadijn ten Zeldam Stichting, Amsterdam 1992.

have become in the twentieth century, which will go down in history also as the women's century.

In conclusion, the discussion as to what a distinctly European perspective on women's studies could be, has been at the centre of many debates, which have tended to be rather polarized along a North-South divide. Countries in the South of Europe have been both culturally and intellectually more resistant to assimilating North-American methods and teaching material. Considering the structure of universities in these countries, the question of the creation of specific positions for women's studies has also proved quite controversial. In France, Italy or Spain there are practically no specific women's studies positions, though first-class work on women's studies is done by academics in positions that are 'integrated' in existing departments, and also by feminist groups outside the institutions.

The experience of setting up women's studies in a European perspective¹⁶ has proved to be a delicate exercise in cross-cultural analysis and comparison. In its daily practice, this has turned out to be a labour-intensive process of confrontation of differences among women, which has only just begun: we think it will keep us busy for years to come. One thing that is already clear to all concerned is that the idea of 'Europe' that we have in mind is critical of ethnocentrism and nationalism. Fortunately, most European feminists have taken their distance from the legacy of European nationalism and are deeply concerned by the rebirth of xenophobia, racism and anti-semitism on our Continent. Moreover, without turning our back on our historical heritage, many of us have also voiced pertinent criticism of the increasing isolationism and protectionism fostered by the idea of a 'United' Europe (Braidotti and Franken, 1991).

It is our hope that these concerns can be put to the task of contributing actively to the construction of a genuine European community spirit, where sexism, racism and other forms of exclusion will be targeted for elimination. As Helma Lutz so eloquently puts it: in the EU today, we need to put an end to that specific European habit that consists in holding onto a ethnocentric centre, confining the rest of the world to the position

¹⁶ For a detailed account of the experience attempted in Utrecht, please see the special issue on 'Women's Studies at the University of Utrecht' of *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 16, n. 4, 1993, edited by Rosi Braidotti. See also the special issue on 'Women's Studies in Europe' of *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 20, n. 3 and 4, 1992, edited by Angelika Koster-Lossack and Tobe Levin.

of a necessary and necessarily under-rated periphery. Lutz explores especially the condition of immigrants in the EC today as a significant case of peripheral existence within the alleged centre of this community. In other words, women's studies is not only education for women, it is the re-education of a whole culture, to help it move away from discriminatory practices, so that it can give the best of itself to the development of a renewed sense of a common European house.

The experience built up over the years of inter-European teaching exchanges has allowed the members of the network to reach a common definition of women's studies. Women's studies is a field of scientific and pedagogical activity devoted to improving the status of women and to finding forms of representation of women's experiences which are dignified, empowering and which faithfully reflect the range of women's contributions to cultural, economic, social and scientific development. Women's studies is a critical project in so far as it examines how science perpetuates forms of discrimination and even of exclusion, but it is also a creative field in that it opens up alternative spaces to women's self-representation and intellectual self-determination.

Our experience has also highlighted another point: that in order to construct effective inter-European perspectives in women's studies, due attention must be paid to cultural differences and to the specificity of national contexts. Noting in fact that both the terminology and most of the existing teaching material in this field is of North-American origin and consequently is available only in English, European women's studies scholars have been faced with a double task. On the one hand, they have had to struggle to get this new field of study accepted in their respective countries and institutions; on the other hand, they have had to develop their own instruments for teaching and in research. In this regard, the support that women's studies academics have been able to gather from the Commission of the European Community has been and remains crucial in many different ways. Whereas countries where this field is under-developed have benefited from both the financial and the moral support of the EC, well-endowed programmes in other countries have experienced the EC support as a form of international recognition and therefore of scientific legitimation. In both cases, the impact of the EC 'stamp of approval' is enormous.

The feeling is strong among European women's studies academics that this field can only be genuinely 'European', if it addresses rigorously issues of ethnic identity, multi-culturalism and anti-racism. The issues of

cultural and of gender identity are intimately inter-linked and cannot be easily separated. We would even like to go as far as to suggest that no perspective in women's studies can be considered truly 'European' unless it addresses the need to produce non-exclusionary and non-ethnocentric models of knowledge and education. We think that the fostering of a European consciousness can only profit from the enlarged definition of knowledge, which women's studies imply and enact. In this respect, many women's studies scholars feel very strongly that they need to strengthen and to broaden the anti-racist European dimension of their work. More international exchanges are needed in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the cultural diversity of women's studies traditions and practices in the European community today. Moreover, for this work towards a common and yet diversified definition to succeed, discussions are needed in a comparative framework with women from Eastern and Central Europe, from the United States and from developing countries.

In fact, it is important to stress that although as citizens of the EC we do our best to participate in the creation of a shared cultural space that may contribute to lessening intra-European in-fighting and economic competition, we are also perfectly well aware of the limitations and the dangers of a unified Europe. In this respect, a multi-cultural anti-racist approach to the making of European women's studies seems to us essential at this moment of our history. In this respect also, "gender" cannot function alone, but rather as a bridge between different levels and layers of social inclusion and exclusion.

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Women's Studies and Gender Research: Experiences in the Nordic Countries

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THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Women's studies and gender research have developed in all Nordic countries in the last 20 years. Throughout these years there has been a close cooperation between the Nordic countries, which will be my point of departure. There are however national differences, which I will not stress here. The Nordic countries are: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, plus three self-governing regions: The Faeroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Scandinavia only includes Denmark, Norway and Sweden.¹ I will, however, talk about women's studies in the Nordic Countries. This area is characterized by proximity, in a geographical as well as a cultural, social and linguistic sense. This is the background for the existence of a networked, Nordic community on the civic level encompassing a significant number of institutions, including research institutions, which have been helpful for women's studies.

It is important to know that Nordic cooperation has a long tradition going back to the 19th century. Cultural cooperation has generally proven to be the most successful, but there has also been a long tradition of political cooperation. There has been cooperation around legislation, i.e. a unified Nordic legislation on domestic relations (liberalization of marriage laws) in the 1920s.² Nordic cooperation worked most effectively within civic areas of society, steering clear of the more comprehensive domains of politics, economics, security issues and foreign policy.

There are several Nordic institutions: the Nordic Associations, created in 1919. The Nordic Council (*Nordisk Råd*), an interparliamentary Nordic

¹ In medieval times, the Nordic peoples were linguistically very close, but the national languages have since developed in somewhat separate directions. Today, the linguistic community is only comprised of Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Finnish is a member of a separate family of languages, but Finland does have a Swedish-speaking minority, and Swedish is taught as an obligatory subject in schools.

² Rosenbeck, B. "Modernization of Marriage in Scandinavia." Sogner, S. and Hagemann, G. (Eds.) *Women's politics and women in politics. In honour of Ida Blom*. Bergen 2000.

body, was created in 1952. 1971 saw the formation of the Nordic Council of Ministers (*Nordisk Ministerråd*). Following World War II, cultural collaboration was intensified, gradually encompassing research as well. In 1947, *Nordforsk*, a Nordic Council for research in the natural sciences, was created, primarily by the national research councils for the technical and natural sciences. The Nordic Council recommended that similar, collaborative strategies were adopted for other areas of research, which indeed happened during the 1960s. This collaboration was strengthened in 1968 through the founding of several Nordic committees, kind of Nordic Research Councils, that awarded funding for research projects, conferences, publications and journals. Women's studies could benefit from these collaborative frameworks from the 1970s.

THE FIRST PHASE

We can find Nordic networks between women (teachers, women's organisations) from the late 19th century. In women's studies it started in the 1950s, when Nordic research was undertaken into gender roles and social structure, influenced by structural functionalism in the United States.³ Nordic researchers did, however, adopt a position more radically critical of society and gender roles than that of the leading functionalists. The dominant Nordic perspective on gender roles that prevailed in the 1960s was fundamentally radical and inaugurated many changes in terms of equal rights. Thus, Nordic gender research in the '60s worked with many of the themes that were to surface as the new women's movement and women's studies emerged in the beginning of the 1970s.

In 1973 the Norwegian Berit Ås introduced the concept women's culture into the Nordic scientific discourse.⁴ As opposed to gender roles, which was very much a 1960s concept, the concept of women's culture emanated from the new women's movement which was to characterize the ensuing phase, beginning in the 1970s.

³ Berit Ås, Harriet Holter and Erik Grønseth from Norway; Rita Liljeström and Edmund Dahlström from Sweden; and Elina Haavio-Mannila from Finland. *Acta sociologica Special Issue on Sex Roles*. Vol. 14, No. 1-2, 1971. (Editors were Elina Haavio-Mannila, Harriet Holter and Rita Liljeström).

⁴ Ås, B. "On female culture: An attempt to formulate a theory of women's solidarity and action". *Acta Sociologica*, no. 2-3, 25-41, 1975.

In the phase leading to what we might call the new women's studies, Nordic collaboration played a prominent part through the institution called NSU (Nordic Summer University).⁵ NSU is a pioneering institution not only for Nordic collaboration amongst academics but also for introducing new scientific approaches and especially for advancing interdisciplinary perspectives. Intellectual ideas from abroad have always been quickly reflected, and the NSU has actively contributed to developments within these new ideas. Starting in 1973, the NSU initiated a collaborative research effort in women's studies under the heading 'The Characteristic Situation of Women under Capitalism'. In those days women's studies were close related to the student movement and the left. This work was initiated the previous year during a winter symposium in Denmark with the participation of the British researcher and activist Juliet Mitchell—which shows that external influence was present from the beginning. The workshop research under this heading continued for some years, and was followed by a series of other themes: The women's movement and women's studies, Aesthetics, gender and culture, Feminist critique. In 1994, a research group focused on male gender research was launched, entitled 'Between Men and Masculinities'.⁶ After the men came a theme about cyborgs and 'Body and culture'. This development shows the changing focus in women's studies (which has taken place in most Western countries) from women to gender, and from making women's lives visible to a stronger engagement in theoretical and methodological questions.

From the NSU, women's studies slowly spread to the universities; here, starting in the mid-1970s, courses were offered and networks founded, while the 1980s saw the initiation of centres all over the Nordic countries.

WOMEN'S STUDIES IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

Until now, new centres have been established in all major Nordic universities. Some of these centres will expand, some will be integrated

⁵ There are a 10-day Nordic meeting every Summer, and symposiums and local seminars during the Winter.

⁶ Ervø, S. and Johansson, T. *Moulding Masculinities*. Volume 1: Among Men; volume 2: Bending Bodies. Ashgate Publishing with the Nordic Summer University 1999.

with other interdisciplinary initiatives, which has been the situation in Denmark.

Each of the Nordic countries has a national women studies coordinator or secretariat, who primarily organizes and coordinates women studies on a national level, but who also undertakes coordination in relation to other Nordic centres and international organisations.

At present, more than 20 centres exist in the Nordic countries, and at least one, sometimes several journals, both national and local, are devoted to women's studies and gender research in each country.⁷

Teaching in women's studies and education has been both integrated into the traditional disciplines and departments and organised in autonomous and inter-disciplinary units within the universities.⁸ The development has, however, been somewhat varied across the Nordic region. In Norway and Iceland, teaching of women's studies as a part of an undergraduate degree has recently started at some universities, whereas the other Nordic countries have a longer tradition in this respect. Women's studies has mostly been offered as a minor or subsidiary subject. Students have majored in the traditional departments and specialised in women's studies as part of their degree. At a few places it is possible to get a Ph.D. degree. Until now, most courses in women's studies and gender research have been of approximately a year or a year-and-a-half in length. In Finland, Sweden and Norway, full professorships (in women's studies) have been established in all fields—within the humanities and social sciences, and within the technical and medical sciences. In Denmark there are none, so that is the reason why some of us have left for Sweden.

In the 1970s and 1980s Denmark took the lead, in the 1990s Sweden, Norway and Finland had their heydays with Sweden in a leading position. In Denmark women's studies centres were established around 1980 in the other countries in the late 1980s.

⁷ Bergman, S. (Ed.). *Women's Studies and Research on Women in the Nordic Countries*. Åbo:Institute for Women's Studies, 1994. Bergman, S. (Ed.). *Satsningar och samarbete. Nordisk kvinno- och könsforskning under 20 år*. Nikk Småskrifter nr. 5, 2000.

⁸ Bergman, S. "A Bird's Eye on Women's Studies in the Nordic Countries". *News from Nikk* 1/99.

NORDIC COOPERATION

A reason for the significance of Inter-Nordic cooperation has been the comparatively small size of the separate research communities at the individual universities. The cooperation has unfolded within individual subjects, disciplinary fields and interdisciplinary studies alike; one course of action has been to organise larger interdisciplinary conferences, as well as conferences devoted to more wide-ranging political issues of Women's Studies.

Oddly enough, the first disciplinary conference was launched as a Dutch-Scandinavian venture in 1975.⁹ Subsequently, an initiative arose from the research organisations in the Nordic countries. As a case in point, the Joint Committee of the Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities (NOS-H) held a conference on 'Women's studies within the humanities' in 1979. 70 individuals gathered at this conference, the goal of which was twofold: to discuss methodological and theoretical questions within Women's studies; and to establish contacts between researchers in the Nordic countries so they might discuss potential fields of Nordic cooperation. This work was followed up 10 years later by a conference entitled 'Future Strategies for Women's Studies in the Humanities'. It was on this occasion that the proposal of a Nordic Institute was put forth.¹⁰ Nordic conferences on strategies regarding research organised as joint colloquia involving both politicians, administrators and researchers have been held, in 1983 as well as in 1993.

1981 saw the founding of the Nordic Forum for Research on Women in the Nordic Countries (Nordisk forum for kvindeforskning i Norden), which, at that time, experienced some difficulties in getting many of its ideas across. However, the Inter-Nordic collaboration between researchers within Women's Studies did result in an interdisciplinary conference in 1983 and in the founding of a Summer University at the

⁹ Silfwerbrandten C., S. and T. Govaarts Halkes and M. de Swart. *Feminology. Proceedings of the Dutch-Scandinavian Symposium on woman's position in society, June 8-11, 1975*, University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

¹⁰ NOS-H. *Kvinneforskning i de humanistiske fag. Konferenserapport: Nordisk konferanse avholdt på Hurdalsjøen hotell, Norge, 7.-10. mai 1979*. Oslo, 1979. NOS-H. *Framtidsstrategier för humanistisk kvinnoforskning. Konferensrapport: Nordisk konferens Hanaholmens kulturcentrum i Esbo, Finland 28.-30. maj 1989*. Helsingfors, 1991.

Nordic Forum of 1988 in Oslo.¹¹ This conference, consisting of an official as well as a grass root conference—almost as a parallel to the United Nations Women’s Conference—drew more than 10,000 participants. One result was the appointment of a Nordic coordinator for Women’s studies, affiliated with the Åbo Academy in the period from 1991 to 1995. The project leading to this appointment was launched by the women researchers and achieved through lobbying by, among others, the network Nordic Forum for Research on Women in the Nordic Countries. This coordinator became part of the Nordic action programme for equal rights 1989-93, based on the realisation that the equal rights effort presupposed a basis of knowledge on which to work.

The Nordic coordinator project was successful; among the achievements has been ensuring continuity in the Nordic areas of cooperation and the inauguration of fresh initiatives, including the founding of *Nora, Nordic Journal for Women’s Studies*.¹² This English language journal commenced publication in 1993, and it has contributed towards the internationalization of Nordic women’s studies. In 1995 a Nordic Institute for women’s studies and gender research (*Nordisk institut for kvinde- og kønsforskning (NIKK)*) was set up. The desire for a Nordic Institute, in view of the many such institutes (about 30) that exist throughout the Nordic countries, had been felt for many years, but not until 1995 did the necessary political, and thus financial, endorsement materialize.

In 1994 a Nordic Association for women’s studies and gender research was established, the purpose of which is to support *Nora* and further develop Inter-Nordic cooperation.

EQUALITY AND GENDER STUDIES

The Nordic welfare model has given rise to research into the welfare state as such. We see a close interrelationship between equal rights and women’s studies in the Nordic countries. Through a number of years, the Nordic Council of Ministers has prioritised equal rights, sponsoring a committee for equal rights issues made up of Council officials as well as

¹¹ *Women’s Studies and Research on Women in the Nordic Countries*. Uppsala: Uppsala University. Centre for Women Scholars and Research on Women, 1989.

¹² Editor: Susanne Knudsen and Bente Meyer. <susannek@dpu.dk> – <<http://www.tandf.no/nora/>>.

setting up an official equal rights consultant, a position later renamed equal rights advisory officer. A series of projects has been initiated. One of the most extensive was the Bryt Project, aimed at developing and testing methods to combat the sexist allocation of work within the labour market (Nordic Council 1990).¹³ The action programme from 1995 to 2000 sees mainstreaming as an important tool in the Nordic cooperation towards equal rights. The equal rights aspect must be integrated into every policy area of society.

Nordic Forum 1994 gave rise to several publications which were then translated into English to coincide with The UN World Women Conference.¹⁴ The project of having a coordinator was also part of the first action programme (1989-1993), just as the Nordic Institute came into being after the subsequent action programme which covers the period 1995-2000. There has been a general recognition of the fact that research and researchers within women's studies can contribute substantially to the equal rights efforts. This is perhaps a Nordic characteristic and it might be a useful experience for the efforts in EU to promote women's issues and women's studies.

The emphasis on equal rights between the sexes has also meant political support in favour of research in women's studies in several countries. Often, women politicians have actively demanded that women's studies be allocated more funds; while support from within, from the Academy itself, has been more subdued. The proportion of women politicians is comparatively high in the Nordic countries (in excess of 30%) compared to other countries; while, on the contrary, the same is not true when it comes to women engaged in research. In Denmark and Norway, particularly, the figure is less than 20% women. Therefore, the ongoing initiatives concentrate not only on supporting research in women's studies and gender research but also on getting more women into research. Along with the heightened priority now given to men in equal rights politics, research in men's studies has also become an increasingly important area, boasting Nordic as well as international networks. From 1999 there has been a Nordic Coordinator for Men's Studies. The coordinator shall advance men's studies in the Region (1999-2001) and collaborate with the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers in

¹³ *The Nordic Bryt-project. Final report.* 1990. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.

¹⁴ Fougner, B. and M. Larsen-Asp. *The Nordic Countries – a paradise for women?* København: Nordic Council, 1994.

carrying out the research—relating to the aspects of ‘Plan of action’ on men and equality.¹⁵

I do think that this political alliance has been of advantage for women’s studies, but it can and has been criticized, because it does not support the more radical parts of women’s studies. The problem is that Nordic women’s studies can be seen as equivalent with and regarded as an instrument for gender equality policies. It means that feminist research is integrated into the political apparatus and develops into an institutionalised policy of gender equality sometimes called Nordic State Feminism.

NORDIC INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN’S STUDIES AND GENDER RESEARCH

A Nordic co-ordinator for men’s studies is one of the latest projects at Nikk, an institution which has expanded the last 5 years.¹⁶ Nikk is an interdisciplinary Nordic research institution financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The main tasks of Nikk are the cooperation for women’s studies and gender research in the Nordic countries. Its activities are based on cooperation with the Nordic countries, the adjacent areas and with Europe.¹⁷ This Nordic center promotes, initiates, co-ordinates and informs about women’s studies and gender research.¹⁸ The institute initiates Nordic research projects, research courses, conferences and seminars, research networks, information service, e.g. through newsletters and the web site.

¹⁵ *Kan mænd? Menn og likestilling i arbeidslivet – et idédokument.* Nord 2000: 24. Nordisk Ministerråd.

¹⁶ Nikk—Nordic Institute for Women’s Studies and Gender Research—nikk@nikk.uio.no—<http://www.nikk.uio.no>

¹⁷ *Nikk in Dialogue: Reports from the Baltic Countries and North West Russia on Women’s Studies and Gender Research*, Paper no.1, September 1998.

¹⁸ Publications: *Nytt fra Nikk and Nikk magasin.* In English: *News from Nikk* and the English issue of *Nikk Magasin*. Subscription is free of charge. Databases Edith and Emilja with information on Women’s Studies and gender research and on the women’s organizations both in the Nordic countries and the adjacent areas. *Emilja: the Baltic and North West Russian Database for Women’s Studies and Gender Research.* Paper no. 2, September 1998.

One of the first big events was (Frø og frukter) ‘a Conference on Women’s Studies and Gender Research in the Nordic Countries’, November 1996. Two years after the first Nordic symposium on teaching within women’s studies was held in Stockholm in 1998.¹⁹ One of the first research projects was ‘Living for Tomorrow’, a research and development project in Estonia, designed to further develop sexual health awareness and safer sexual behaviors focused on gender issues among young people.

Today the main research of Nikk is ‘Gender equalities in the Nordic countries between rhetoric and practice. Changes in public and private interpretations of modern gender equality’, which was launched in 1999. The first phase of the project focuses on major political players such as political parties, labour unions, local and central government agencies. The second phase of the project will try to bridge the gap between rhetoric/ideology and individuals’ daily practices and ongoing identity in relation to meanings of gender equality.²⁰ Nikk has also given several research courses among them: Method, power and Ethics on Qualitative Methods. In 1999 there has been intensified cooperation about women’s studies and gender research in relation to and its representation in the media.

NETWORKING

The reason for the significance of inter-Nordic cooperation has been the comparatively small size of the separate research communities at the individual universities. The Nordic platform has given rise to a series of researchers’ courses; not just of an interdisciplinary nature but also more general courses on method and theory.

The considerable array of networks established over the years—some of them have been largely ad hoc, while some have been more durable—has been of significant importance to Nordic women’s studies and gender research. One of the first, very sizeable networks was ‘Women in Politics’, which, in 1983, published a comparative study on the position

¹⁹ *Undervisning i kvinno- och könsforskning i Norden. Rapport från symposium i Stockholm 28-29 september 1998.* Red Eva Lundgren. Nikk småskrifter nr. 3 1999.

²⁰ Magnusson, E. *Gender Equality in Many different versions: Patterns in political and gender equality rhetoric in the Swedish 1990’s.* Nikk Occasional paper no. 4, 1999.

and role of women within political systems in the Nordic countries. The report, entitled *Unfinished Democracy (Det uferdige demokrati)* was also published in English.²¹ This project was followed up in 1999 with 'Equal democracies? Gender and politics in the Nordic Countries'. Both projects were funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.²²

Another big project was 'The Nordic Women's Literary History', a comprehensive history of literature written by women in the Nordic countries, consisting of 5 volumes: 4 volumes of text and 1 reference volume, amounting to a total of 6000 pages. In the 4 text volumes, approximately 100 contributors from all the Nordic countries present an exhaustive account, from a Nordic perspective, of literature written by women from the Norse era up to Samic and Greenlandic women's literature.²³

Scholars concerned with Women's History, have been active on a Nordic scale, having held regular Nordic conferences covering the Middle Ages as well as Contemporary History; in addition to which several Nordic research projects have been initiated through the years. Nordic cooperation renders otherwise unrealistic projects possible; an example worth mentioning is the three volume Women's World History, result of a predominantly Danish-Norwegian collaboration, published from 1992 to 1993.²⁴

I will use history as an example of what has happened within a discipline, since I'm an historian myself. Female historians started to meet around 1980 on a Nordic level. In 1981 I went to my first big

²¹ Haavio-Mannila, E. *Unfinished Democracy: Women in Nordic Politics*. København: Nordic Council. 1983.

About Nordic women in general, see Karvonen, L. and P. Selle (Eds.). *Closing the Gap. Women in Nordic Politics*. Dartmouth, 1995. "Women and Men in the Nordic Countries. Facts and figures 1994", *Nord 1994*: 3. København: Nordic Council. Fougner, B. and M. Larsen-Asp. *The Nordic Countries – a paradise for women?* Copenhagen: Nordic Council, 1994. About Nordic cooperation, see Larsen, K. "Scandinavian Grass Roots: From Peace Movement to Nordic Council". *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 9, 183-200, 1984.

²² Bergqvist, C. (Red.). *Likestillte demokratier? Kjønn og politikk i Norden*. 1999. Translated into English: *Equal democracies?: Gender and politics in the Nordic Countries*. Scandinavian University Press 2000.

²³ Møller Jensen, E. *Nordisk kvindelitteraturhistorie*, vol. 1-5 respectively in both Danish and Swedish were published 1993-1999.

²⁴ *Cappelens Kvinnehistorie*. 1992-93. Oslo: Cappelen, vols. 1-3. *Kvinder fra urtid til nutid*. 1992. København: Politiken vol. 1-2.

conference: The Nordic History Conference, where there was a session 'Women's work in society and family in the Nordic Countries 1870-1960', presented by a Nordic project funded by both national and Nordic funds. From 1983 female historians have had their own conferences every three years (1983, 1985, 1989, 1992, 1996, 1999, 2002). It was in the 1980s difficult or in fact impossible to become integrated in the general historical conferences, and it took 14 years and three conferences before women's history became a grand theme at the Nordic History Conferences. Since then women's history has been a natural part of general historical conferences.

Around 1990 International Federation for Research in Women's History was established, and the initiative came from a Norwegian historian Ida Blom. I went to my first world conference in history 1990, where the IFRWH had a separate smaller conference in the big conference. 10 years later I went to a world conference again. It was in Oslo 2000, and I must agree with Catherine Hall, when she said, that women's history and gender history were not marginal. We had our own seminars, three half days themes, many papers in the other sessions had a gender perspective. The periphery had become the centre. Feminist historians have a Nordic, perhaps also a national organisation and an international but not a European organisation. There have been European ad hoc conferences, and since the American social history organisations started a European organisation (European Social Science History Conference) 5 years ago Women's history/gender has been one of the themes.

Both in history and other disciplines it is possible to see a development in the Nordic cooperation. In the beginning everybody came with their own project so-to-speak and Nordic collaboration operated more as a structural umbrella for cooperation and inspiration rather than as a motor for striving towards an integration of subjects. It was often the case that in reports each individual country was dealt with separately. Today there is more emphasis on comparative studies and the collaborative efforts have thus become more than a mere umbrella. An example of an inter-Nordic, integrated project, where the nationalist principle takes a backseat was the History of literature by Nordic women. Here a comprehensive view of literature by Nordic women is presented, making it possible to see Nordic trends in a clearer light than would be possible through a national approach to the subject. When you work in a Nordic project, it is important that the Nordic perspective takes precedence over the nationalist elements. The Nordic countries make up a region eminently suited for more stringent comparative investigations. Given

the rising level of internationalisation we also see comparisons between the Nordic countries and other mostly European countries.

A NORDIC PROFILE?

It remains beyond doubt that Nordic cooperation has had an immense effect towards the instigation of research, even in the case of individual and national projects. Only by thinking beyond the boundaries of each individual country has it been possible to bring together sufficient numbers of researchers in comparable fields. Even within larger fields like Women's History, this has proven to be the case; and the imperative has been even greater in the more narrow fields like musicology, philosophy, art history, etc. Some networks are centred on specific disciplines (medicine, law, history, psychology), while others are of a more cross-disciplinary or thematic nature and ad hoc (philanthropy, salon-culture²⁵, marriage laws, modern gender equality politics).²⁶ Different feminist libraries, likewise, have for many years maintained contacts and have established Nordic Virtual Women's Studies and Gender Research Library in 1999, a rather impressive project, which connects bibliographical databases and archives in the Nordic countries.²⁷

A definitive profile of Nordic women's studies is difficult to pinpoint. There can be no doubt that in the 1970s and 1980s, the productive sides of women's lives have been the ones highlighted; along with a certain stress on gender and class, maintaining an emphasis on materiality.

Because Nordic research in women's studies has been so strongly centred on equality, areas like education, work, politics, social reproduction and the organisation of daily life have been central research focus areas,

²⁵ Scott Sørensen, A. *Den nordiske salonkultur*. Odense 1998.

²⁶ Two new networks are: 'Women's movements and Internationalisation.' 'The "Third Wave" Nordic & International Network for research 1998-2001. Information Technology, Transnational Democracy and Gender – a Nordic Research Network including Estonia, Lithuania and NW Russia.'

²⁷ Larsen, J. and H. Wedborn. "Nordic women's documentation centres". *Nora* Vol. 1, no. 1, 125-130, 1993.

The Q-library, Nordic Virtual Library of women's studies, studies on men and gender research can be found at <www.nikk.uio.no>. You can find bibliographic databases, databases of experts and projects, archives, statistics and gender equality facts. A new project at Nikk tries to digitize archives and material in women's history.

while for instance research into the body, identity formation, socialisation and mentality has been less prominently featured, only to be entered into in more recent years. But there has been a rising critique of the 'work' paradigm.

Feminist thinking has altered in the last 20-25 years. In the beginning the main focus was on women's participation and visibility in politics, in paid work, in cultural activities. It was a question of women becoming valued as much as men, although or even because, they acted differently. Today the issues of participation and visibility continue to be addressed, but the focus has widened. Interest is now turned to the very preconditions/ premises on which women were 'let in' in the first place, as well as with those which frame their possibilities today. This means that equality and difference both as institutionalized principles and as rhetorical arguments have come into focus.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s discussions on feminism and socialism, patriarchy and capitalism were dominant. In the mid-1980s linguistics and post-structuralism came into the forefront. The field of feminist science and technology studies, as expressed by Donna Haraway, has expanded alongside the general development of social and cultural studies of science and technology. We see the same development in the Nordic Countries as in other countries. Today there is considerable theoretical diversity of ideas in Nordic feminist thought and it is impossible to point to any clearly dominating theoretical directions or scholarly agendas.

The situation of the Nordic welfare state has also been in focus together with women's work, both paid work and care work. This is the reason why Nordic feminist scholarship has been work-oriented, theoretically, empirically and ideologically. But it also means, that women's studies in the Nordic Countries have a strong position in welfare studies. Gendering the welfare state still is a problem and a task for the years to come.

Does there exist a specific Nordic profile within gender research and women's studies? In *Is there a Nordic Feminism? Nordic feminist thought on culture and society* a book published in 1998 Anna Jonasdottir from Sweden and political science, Drude von der Fehr from Norway and literature and I from Denmark and history addressed the question if there was something specifically Nordic about the feminist

movement and the modes of thought that lie behind it.²⁸ The answer was no: ‘There is no one Nordic feminism and, thus, no unitary focus or sole mainstream in the Nordic countries’ feminist scholarship. We think, however, that one of its streams, some of which runs through the pages of this volume, focuses on the organization of everyday life, on dialogical or interactive individuality, and on ontological realism. This focus, we believe, can be seen as significantly Nordic. At the same time it connects us to several equally fascinating contemporary schemes of thought being developed in other parts of the world’ (p. 18).

One of the most interesting results of the book, was the combined use of constructivism and realism as a way of approaching gender issues. We concluded, that women’s studies were less interested in dealing with ‘the nature of woman’ than with the question of ensuring a place for women in culture and society and ‘perhaps the most important issue for feminism to address, now and in the future, concerns the possibility for combining social constructivism and the critique of essentialism with ontological realism’ (p. 18).

The cooperation between social science and the humanities in the book can throw light on the relationship between philosophical discourses and rhetoric on the one hand and persons’ acting and thinking in socially structured situations on the other.

It might have been unusual to combine women’s studies in the humanities and social science as we did in *Is there a Nordic Feminism*. That idea came to me because one of our American reviewers suggested that the social science part should be left out. In Denmark and the Nordic Countries we of course think that humanities and social science are marginal, but compared to other countries in Europe, research in the humanities has a high priority. Since 1996 the Nordic Ministers of Council has specially supported research in social science and humanities, because the EU was more oriented around technology and natural science. There are three research programmes, one big programme about The Nordic Countries in Europe 1996-2001. I have participated in a project about the Nordic Marriage Model, and there are

²⁸ von der Fehr, D., Jonasdottir A., Rosenbeck, B. (Eds.) *Is there a Nordic feminism. Is there a Nordic feminism: Nordic feminist thought on culture and society*. London 1998.

two other projects about women and gender.²⁹ A smaller programme about Gender and violence started in 2000 (-2005) and the third joint research programme about welfare will start 2002, with gender end equality as a stream. It has been possible to mainstream Nordic research programmes.

It is by no means possible to expostulate characteristics that are specific exclusively to Nordic research in women's studies as opposed to women's studies in other parts of the world. In the 1980s Nordic women's studies have had a closer affiliation to Anglo-American women's studies than to research in these areas from other European countries. But in the 1990s and as European integration grows stronger, this has changed, and there is now much more cooperation on a European level. In 1991 the first European conference in interdisciplinary women's studies was held in Aalborg and in 2000 the 4th conference was held in Bologna.

European women's studies faces a challenging future; European cooperation, therefore, has many inherent, innovative possibilities for development. And I think we will see a model for cooperation, where national and regional, national and European/international cooperation will flourish. There have been a new wave of Nordic feminism, young women and men have raised the debate anew, and this again will perhaps influence science and research. I do hope that women's studies will continue to contribute to the modernization and democratization of science, for the enrichment of women and of science as a whole.

This paper is based on my article Nordic women's studies and gender research in *Is there a Nordic Feminism?* (See note 28).

²⁹ The Nordic countries and Europe. A research programme with 3 projects about women:
- Ægteskab i Norden. Det nordiske ægteskab i europæisk perspektiv – modernisering og kønskonstruktion. Kari Melby, Anu Pylkkänen, Bente Rosenbeck (Eds.). *Ægteskab i Norden fra Saxo til i dag*. Nord 14, 1999. København 1999. Kari Melby, Anu Pylkkänen, Bente Rosenbeck, Christina Carlsson Wetterberg (Eds.). *The Nordic Model of Marriage and the Welfare State*. Nord 17, 2000. København 2000.
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- Nord-Fru-Jus. Forskningsprojekt Kvinnan, familj och arbetsmarknad i den nordiska rättskulturen. Reports in English, see <<http://www.abo.fi/norden/europa/konferens/program.htm>>.

**Differences among Nordic Countries and Feminists.
Response to Bente Rosenbeck: Experiences in Scandinavia.**

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In order to situate my response, I will mention that Bente and I have known each other for 27 years. Our personal stories are tied up with the history of institutionalization of Women's Studies in Denmark, and recently we have both become part of the Danish Women's Studies "emigration" to Sweden. We have both left Denmark in order to gain chairs in Women's Studies because, unlike Sweden, Norway and Finland, Denmark has not established full professorships in Women's Studies.

I will start my response from this point of departure: the differences between the Nordic countries, symbolized by the scandalous lack of professorships in Women's Studies in Denmark. Bente hinted at this sad situation, but I want to stress it more, although I do not disagree with the overall picture of a success story that Bente gave. Institutionalization of Women's Studies in the Nordic countries is in many ways a success, and in my opinion Bente is also right when she mentions that the Nordic Women's Studies communities benefit from the welfare state and the equal opportunities policies of the Nordic countries.

My personal history may, in fact, sustain Bente's point about a success story. I have been employed at the University of Southern Denmark for almost 20 years—and my job description has all these years been defined as Women's Studies. Therefore, it would be unfair and arrogant of me not to recognize that I have had the privilege of being able to pursue a long university career within Women's Studies. This is, first of all, due to the women's movement, which paved the way for academic Women's Studies in the 1970s. But it is also due to the welfare state, which sometimes has given significant support to Women's Studies. The Danish Action Plan for Women's Studies, which was passed through Parliament in 1986, is one such example. The big grant from the Swedish state, which among other things resulted in the Department of Gender Studies and an independent five year Ph.D. programme in interdisciplinary gender studies at Linköping University in Sweden, where I now have a chair in gender and culture, is another significant example. So I definitely do not want to complain personally. Talking about success stories, I will also mention that Bente, a radical Women's

Studies researcher and feminist, was last year appointed head of the Danish Research Council for the Humanities. So I am far from saying that everything is rotten in the State of Denmark.

Nevertheless, I want to add a couple of more gloomy perspectives to Bente's success story about the institutionalization of Women's Studies in the Nordic countries. I will modify the story of undeniable success by paying attention to its limits.

1. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

First of all, I will stress that it is important to differentiate between the Nordic countries, and I will emphasize that the existence of a welfare state that boasts of its sensitivity to equal opportunities issues does not automatically pave the way for a smooth institutionalization of Women's Studies.

My example is the question of establishing full professorships in Women's Studies in Denmark. The fight for professorships has been part of our struggle for institutionalization of Women's Studies in Denmark. But in vain. Unlike the other Nordic countries, Denmark does not want to promote Women's Studies as an area in its own right. The lack of professorships is a symbol of this, and the discussion of the issue in Denmark in the 1990s makes it very clear.

In the 1980s the prospects looked better. In 1986, an Action Plan for Women's Studies was passed by the Danish Parliament, as mentioned above. This happened thanks to an alliance between feminist researchers and women politicians, but was also due to the very specific composition of Parliament. There was a conservative government, but the center and leftist opposition had the majority of votes in Parliament, and with this majority they wanted to annoy the government. This meant that radical proposals, put forward by a small number of the center-leftist majority, sometimes had a unique chance of being passed, because the rest of the center-leftist majority backed up these few in order to tease the government. This is why the Action Plan for Women's Studies was passed.

Among other things, the Action Plan granted eight associate professorships in Women's Studies and many grants for Ph.D. students.

Two Women's Studies coordinators and library resources were also part of the plan.

The Action Plan was meant to facilitate the institutionalization of Women's Studies in the universities, and to promote the building up of the field as an area in its own right. Seen in retrospect, it is, however, obvious that the intended integration of Women's Studies in the universities did not come about very well. Today three of the eight associate professors in Women's Studies, Bente, myself and the feminist political scientist Drude Dahlerup, have become full professors in Women's Studies – NOT in Denmark, but in Sweden. Moreover, only a very small proportion of the women who received the Ph.D. grants via the Action Plan were given the opportunity to continue in research positions, defined within Women's Studies.

In the 1990s, the universities and the politicians systematically refused to follow up on the Action Plan with full professorships in Women's Studies or adequate research positions for the PhDs who had been trained to do Women's Studies research as part of the Action Plan. This is symptomatic and symbolic. It demonstrates the reluctance of the Danish state and university system to integrate Women's Studies as an area in its own right and, seen in retrospect, the Action Plan must be assessed as an exception to the rule of general unwillingness and maybe as a momentary result of a unique political alignment rather than as a policy grounded in deeper-felt attitudes of a solid majority in Parliament.

This Danish example underlines that having a welfare state boasting of its equal opportunities policies is no guarantee of the smooth institutionalization of Women's Studies. In this sense things are different and better in Norway, Sweden and Finland. So the second conclusion generated by this example is that it is important to differentiate between the Nordic countries. In some ways, they are VERY different, and it may even be misleading to discuss them under one umbrella.

2. "IS THERE A NORDIC FEMINISM?"

My second comment and addition to Bente's success story, concerns my reaction to her question: "Is there a Nordic feminism?"

Bente poses this question in a very cautious and thought-provoking way, and she answers it carefully with both a no and a yes. I also know from

Bente's chapter in the book "Is there a Nordic feminism?" (v.d.Fehr et al 1998) that she takes her point of departure in Benedict Anderson's classic analysis of imagined communities (Anderson 1991). She stresses that she considers the term "Nordic" to be a reference to an imagined and therefore historically and politically constructed community and NOT to a pre-given essence.

Nevertheless, Bente and the other authors of the book pose the question: Is there a Nordic feminism? And at this conference, she gave compelling and convincing examples of very productive collaborative inter-Nordic projects in Women's Studies (the Nordic women's literature history, the comparative project on Nordic marriage laws etc.). I agree that the success of these big projects may sustain the use of the term "Nordic feminism". But even though I wholeheartedly support these big feminist research projects and consider them to have been important for the unfolding of Women's Studies in the Nordic countries (no doubt about that!), my reaction to the discussion about a so-called "Nordic feminism" is—I must admit—a feeling of "otherness". To be a bit polemical for the sake of the discussion, I feel that none of my own research interests fit into the scheme implied by the question "Is there a Nordic feminism?"

I have never personally been attracted to the isolated study of specific Nordic phenomena (Nordic literature, Nordic history, the Nordic welfare state, Nordic work patterns). I have primarily been engaged in exploring the inter- and transdisciplinary dimensions of Women's Studies and feminist theory together with its potentials to erode the foundations of traditional university structures such as disciplines. However, when I look at the list of big collaborative Nordic projects that have been granted economic support by Nordic funding agencies, it seems as if the majority are either VERY discipline-specific (related, for example, to history or to the study of national literatures) and/or they have a VERY specific Nordic focus such as Nordic marriage laws, Nordic women's literature etc. The success of these collaborative Nordic projects can be considered as an indicator of a certain mainstreaming effect, which sustains the posing of the question "Is there a Nordic feminism?" This mainstreaming has been important, but it also has problematic aspects. Research that is not included in either a specific disciplinary area or a Nordic scheme does not fit under the imagined umbrella that is evoked by the question, and this makes visible the limitations of the question and, more importantly, of the mainstreaming effect it involves. Taking my own research as an illustration, I have always felt that it fitted much better with other trends in Feminist Studies than the ones interpolated by

the label “Nordic feminism”. So even though I have spent the major part of my professional life as a feminist researcher in the fight for institutionalization of Women’s Studies in North European welfare states (first Denmark and now Sweden), I do not feel that I belong to the imagined community whose potential existence is conjured up by the question “Is there a Nordic feminism?”

Moreover, I am in general sceptical about the use of the word “Nordic”. I cannot avoid hearing echoes of the nationalistic essentialism of the romantic movement. I am well aware that this is NOT the way Bente and other feminists from the Nordic countries want to use it. Indeed, Bente and the other authors of “Is there a Nordic feminism?” (v.d.Fehr et al 1998) stress anti-essentialism and anti-universalism very strongly. They underline the significance of sociohistorical constructions and imagined communities, and they emphasize that there is “no one Nordic feminism and, thus, no unitary focus or sole mainstream in the Nordic countries’ feminist scholarship.” (v.d.Fehr et al 1998: 18). I like that very much. But still, I cannot help being sceptical about the word “Nordic”. I think it is VERY difficult to give terms that traditionally are burdened with a heavy nationalistic and essentialistic semantics a totally new meaning. So, in conclusion, let me try to rephrase the discussion.

On the one hand, I think that the big collaborative feminist research projects on Nordic topics are important in terms of the situating of knowledges which have taken place due to their existence. Reflections on the context of Feminist Studies and feminist theory are very much needed. Situated knowledges, as probably all participants in this conference will agree, are very important for Feminist Studies. It is problematic that feminist theory too often appears on the international scene without situating itself in relation to the regional contexts and local conditions from which it emerged. We have all taken part in the problematic construction of Anglo-American feminist theory as a kind of universal, and I think we all agree that this construction is very much in need of deconstruction. As an alternative to the construction of such universals, I think that the focus on local conditions, which is very prominent in much feminist research in the Nordic countries, is a useful and important starting point for theoretical reflections.

BUT, on the other hand, it seems to me that to talk about “Nordic feminism”, “Italian feminism”, “French feminism” etc. is to take the issue of situated knowledges too much in a direction that makes it difficult to see the different feminist research communities as potential

players in the construction of an international and genuinely multiregional feminist dialogue. Therefore, I would like to shift the discussion away from the question “Is there a Nordic feminism?” over to the question: “How can we, in our capacity of an undeniably successful and well established regional Women’s Studies community, best enter into productive dialogues with other feminist researchers in the larger regional and global contexts in which we are also situated?” (And by “we” I mean feminist researchers in the Women’s Studies communities in those North European welfare states which to a certain extent, but not completely, coincides with the Scandinavian language community.)

As my last word, let me stress that the tendency to close around national or regional language communities, of which I was provoked to speak by Bente’s question: “Is there a Nordic feminism?”, is definitely not specific to the Nordic countries. Here I think that we all need to be much more active in posing new questions, and this conference is a step in this direction. So thank you to the organizers of the conference.

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Gli studi di genere all'Università di Firenze

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Nel descrivere gli studi di genere all'Università di Firenze, procederò a grandi linee, con l'intento di valorizzare, nella ricchezza e varietà che è propria dell'area fiorentina, le presenze e le esperienze più significative, capaci di restituire il profilo di una comunità scientifica indubbiamente caratterizzata, nel panorama italiano, da tratti peculiari, sia per il patrimonio ormai sedimentato di storia e di produzione, sia per la progettualità che tuttora è in grado di esprimere, come testimoniano la molteplicità e il rilievo delle opere in corso.

Alla fine degli settanta, a partire dalle prime, frammentarie prove di didattica della storia delle donne nelle facoltà di Lettere e di Magistero di Firenze, alcune giovani ricercatrici di storia e di filosofia (in un documento che ho ritrovato in questi giorni tra le carte e che mi pare interessante ricordare, perché testimonia di una riflessione comune che si avviava ormai a suscitare confronto pubblico e nuova visibilità all'interno dell'istituzione universitaria) si interrogavano sugli spazi, del tutto marginali, della storia delle donne nella didattica dell'università, sui percorsi possibili per uscire dalle posizioni di nicchia, e avviare una comunicazione aperta ad apporti disciplinari diversi, dove confrontare categorie, metodi di indagine, e individuare terreni comuni di lavoro.

Non è questo il luogo per ripercorrere la vicenda di esperienze troppo specifiche per trovare spazio in questo intervento, e che non hanno prodotto del resto documentazione pubblica, ma hanno semmai sedimentato tracce significative nei percorsi e nella produzione di alcune di noi: penso ad esempio ad un gruppo di studio di cui facevano parte Elena Pulcini, Michela Pereira, Monica Toraldo di Francia—io ero l'unica storica — che si chiamava “Emma” e che si riunì per diverso tempo nella seconda metà degli anni ottanta presso il dipartimento di filosofia, lavorando attorno al tema del femminile nel pensiero simbolico del novecento; il gruppo poi si sciolse, ma le sue componenti si ritrovarono di lì a poco, nei primi anni novanta, all'interno di un nuovo gruppo sorto questa volta fuori dell'università, e con ben altra visibilità, presso l'Istituto Gramsci Toscano: il “Laboratorio sul genere”. Mi sono soffermata su questo episodio per introdurre, proprio a partire da esperienze come questa, un primo aspetto che vale la pena di accennare: è il legame, a Firenze particolarmente significativo, che attorno agli

women's studies intreccia la ricerca che si fa nelle università con il più ampio e variegato circuito di ricerca, produzione e comunicazione costituito da istituti culturali, gruppi e associazioni di donne. Quell'effetto di "provocazione" nei confronti del mondo universitario e accademico che alla fine degli anni settanta si proponevano le firmatarie del documento che citavo sopra, ha trovato efficace sostegno, nel corso dei due decenni successivi, proprio nel rapporto di collaborazione che si è creato nel tempo con queste realtà, a cui d'altra parte molte delle docenti e delle ricercatrici universitarie erano legate da una comune storia di appartenenza nel movimento femminista degli anni settanta. Un rapporto che non poco ha contribuito nel conferire visibilità e riconoscimento al nostro lavoro di ricerca. Penso in particolare alla Libreria delle donne, al Giardino dei ciliegi, e anche al Laboratorio sul genere dell'Istituto Gramsci, di cui fanno parte varie docenti universitarie, che nel corso degli anni novanta si è inserito in questa discussione a più voci con contributi significativi di ricerca. Ma vorrei anche ricordare la collaborazione con il Laboratorio Immagine Donna, e l'interesse che ha costituito per molte di noi la riflessione condotta dal Centro Documentazione Donna di via Sant'Agostino. Sono, tutti questi, luoghi di donne, che prima ancora dei fragili rapporti interni al mondo dell'accademia, hanno costituito occasione di incontro tra le ricercatrici universitarie, e hanno contribuito a far crescere negli anni quella rete di relazioni che è stata un po' la base per il nuovo, significativo sviluppo degli studi di genere a Firenze nel corso soprattutto dell'ultimo decennio.

Accanto a questi elementi descrittivi che sono certo specifici della realtà fiorentina, ma che possono essere di qualche utilità nel disegnare ancora una volta quel particolare intreccio di "dentro e fuori" che come è noto ha segnato l'origine e il percorso della ricerca delle donne nelle università, vorrei ora introdurre altri aspetti, che evadono l'ambito locale, ma che sono stati determinanti nel produrre, a Firenze come in altre università italiane, ma a Firenze secondo tratti peculiari, la nuova stagione di studi e di realizzazioni degli anni novanta. Tra questi in primo luogo ricordo la nascita, alla fine degli anni ottanta, della Società italiana delle storiche, che raccoglie donne che fanno ricerca di storia nelle università, che sono impegnate nella conservazione archivistica, nelle biblioteche, negli istituti per la storia della resistenza e dell'età contemporanea, donne che fanno ricerca didattica nella scuola. La Società, che conta oggi circa 300 socie, ha contribuito in modo decisivo, e per un settore di particolare rilievo nell'ambito degli women's studies, quale è la storia delle donne, ad aprire reti di relazione, a costruire ricerca, discussione, e non ultima nelle nostre finalità, didattica nelle

università. Nell'ambito della SIS, il gruppo fiorentino che fa capo, anche se non esclusivamente, al Dipartimento di storia dell'Università di Firenze, ha un rilievo significativo: è stata per quasi dieci anni a Firenze la sede della redazione di *Agenda*, il bollettino di informazione che fin dal 1990 ha costituito lo strumento di comunicazione privilegiato della SIS, fino alla sua chiusura, recente, per dare vita ad una vera e propria rivista, *Genesis*, il cui primo numero uscirà in autunno. Nella creazione della nuova rivista e nel lavoro di coordinamento e di redazione, figurano ancora una volta due storiche fiorentine, Dinora Corsi e Alessandra Pescarolo, a testimonianza di una continuità di impegno che il gruppo locale della SIS ha portato in questi anni nella vita dell'associazione e nelle sue iniziative.

Nella promozione della Scuola estiva di storia e culture delle donne di Pontignano, ora intitolata ad Annarita Buttafuoco e che ha sede presso l'Università di Siena, il gruppo fiorentino della SIS ha avuto nel corso di questi dieci anni una parte di rilievo, così come nelle trasformazioni istituzionali che hanno interessato la struttura della Scuola nell'ultimo periodo, con l'ingresso nella partnership del Dottorato in scritture femminili con sede presso l'Università di Roma La Sapienza. Se la scuola di Pontignano, che è giunta al suo dodicesimo anno, è ormai una realtà toscana, e dell'Università di Siena in particolare, di indubbio rilievo nazionale, a cui le storiche fiorentine sono particolarmente legate per aver contribuito a fondarla (Simonetta Soldani ed io facevamo parte con Annarita Buttafuoco della commissione della SIS che organizzò le prime due settimane nel 1990, così come negli anni seguenti vi hanno portato il loro contributo Elena Giannarelli e Dinora Corsi), altre iniziative anche queste ormai sedimentate per una tradizione decennale, caratterizzano invece con efficacia il profilo delle storiche a Firenze, nell'Università e nei rapporti con le istituzioni cittadine, in particolare per ciò che attiene al legame tra didattica e ricerca, che Firenze sembra avere ormai intrecciato con forza ed esemplarità nel panorama italiano.

Mi riferisco al Premio del Comune di Firenze intitolato a Franca Pieroni Bortolotti. Il nome di Franca Pieroni Bortolotti indica già il radicamento tutto peculiare che a Firenze ha la storia delle donne: il premio, sostenuto in buona parte, sotto il profilo scientifico e organizzativo, dal gruppo delle storiche fiorentine (oltre a Simonetta Soldani e a me, che vi abbiamo prestato opera più a lungo, ricordo Elena Giannarelli, Adriana Dadà, Alessandra Pescarolo) è teso a valorizzare proprio la ricerca di storia delle donne che si fa nelle università italiane. Il catalogo e il regesto delle opere consegnate al premio e conservate nel fondo intitolato

a Franca Pieroni Bortolotti presso la Biblioteca Comunale centrale di via Sant'Egidio sono significativi, nel corso di questi dieci anni, della crescita qualitativa di queste ricerche, affidate a tesi di laurea e a tesi di dottorato, dell'emergenza di talune aree di particolare continuità e qualità della produzione — le tre università della Toscana, l'area bolognese, le università di Torino e di Roma; ma ciò che più di ogni altra considerazione preme sottolineare è come il premio abbia contribuito in più casi nel corso di questi anni a promuovere nelle giovani laureate un rapporto con la ricerca che ha proseguito in varie forme, nei dottorati, nelle borse di studio post-dottorato, in collaborazioni con gli ambiti universitari, in pubblicazioni.

Tutto questo non sarebbe stato possibile senza il contributo del Progetto Donna del Comune di Firenze, e qui vorrei introdurre brevemente un altro punto, che a partire da questa efficace collaborazione promossa ormai più di dieci anni fa dalla SIS, dal gruppo fiorentino della SIS, e da una brava amministratrice quale era Catia Franci, assessore in quel tempo alla Pubblica Istruzione e promotrice nell'ambito dell'assessorato del Progetto Donna, caratterizza ormai ampiamente le iniziative della nostra comunità scientifica: esse trovano infatti puntualmente sostegno e promozione prima ancora che nell'Università, nelle istituzioni e nelle amministratrici locali. È grazie al sostegno dell'assessore alla Pubblica Istruzione Daniela Lastrì del Comune di Firenze che nel 1998 la Società italiana delle Storiche poté organizzare in Palazzo Vecchio il suo quarto seminario nazionale, dedicato ai viaggi delle donne, e pubblicarne poi gli atti in un volume oggi esaurito, *Altrove*, uscito da Viella nel 1999; ed è ancora l'assessore alla Pubblica Istruzione e alle Pari Opportunità della Provincia, Elisabetta Del Lungo, che ha consentito negli anni un rapporto frequente di collaborazione nell'ambito della formazione delle insegnanti. Sono tutti questi legami istituzionali, che indicano efficacemente il radicamento della nostra comunità nel contesto cittadino, e che hanno indubbiamente contribuito a promuovere la nostra visibilità all'interno dell'università.

Nel concludere questa parte che ho dedicato alle storiche fiorentine e alla presenza a Firenze della SIS, vorrei ricordare ancora il nome di Elena Giannarelli, che è il nostro punto di riferimento per gli studi di antichistica, di Simonetta Soldani, per il valore dei suoi studi ma anche, ciò che qui forse preme più sottolineare, per la sua capacità di organizzazione e di progettualità, per la qualità del suo insegnamento, capace di valorizzare nelle studentesse le attitudini alla ricerca, di promuoverne percorsi oltre la conclusione del corso di studi, favorendo

insomma quel legame tra generazioni e quel rinnovamento che da qualche anno noi tutte sentiamo come il compito più urgente.

Luisa Passerini, che oggi ci ospita e che dirige il Programma di Studi di Genere dell'Istituto Universitario Europeo, è stata in questi anni ed è tuttora un punto di riferimento di particolare valore per la comunità fiorentina e non solo per le storiche, a partire dalla sua riflessione su categorie e temi, quali la soggettività femminile, che sono stati, in particolare per le storiche italiane, un luogo di discussione e di riferimento costante nelle ricerche dell'ultimo periodo, a partire da quel primo seminario dedicato a "Biografia ricerca e soggettività", che tenemmo proprio a Firenze nei primi anni novanta, e che costituì una sorta di manifesto programmatico della SIS appena nata.

Infine, occorre ricordare che la SIS non esaurisce la ricchezza di presenze nel mondo fiorentino delle storiche: i nostri percorsi si sono variamente incrociati nel tempo con Anna Benvenuti e con i suoi studi sulla santità femminile e la società toscana nell'Italia medievale; da vari anni insegna presso il Dipartimento di storia Gabriella Zarri, che costituisce nell'università fiorentina non solo un punto di riferimento di grande valore per la significatività dei suoi studi di storia delle donne, sotto il profilo della storia religiosa, ma perché è stata a sua volta nel corso degli anni novanta e nell'ambito della modernistica un punto di aggregazione, suscitatrice di ricerche innovative dal punto di vista tematico e metodologico, condotte mediante un lavoro di équipe che ha contribuito a allargare la rete delle relazioni, oltre i confini dell'accademia fiorentina: penso a un gruppo come il "Pentafillo", coordinato da Gabriella Zarri, da Olwen Hufton e da Sara Matthews Grieco, che ha creato momenti significativi di discussione e di raccordo con l'Istituto Universitario Europeo, con la Villa I Tatti, con la Syracuse University e l'Istituto degli Innocenti, incrociando spesso ricerche di storia delle donne con gli studi di storia dell'arte, a Firenze così significativi.

Nel 1996, frutto di un lungo lavoro condotto in particolare da Liana Borghi e da Annamaria Crispino (direttrice della rivista *Leggendaria*), nasceva in Italia la Società delle Letterate, la seconda associazione nel tempo a carattere nazionale, dalla struttura composita — raccoglie scrittrici e studiose di letteratura, insegnanti, docenti universitarie. È interessante la varia appartenenza disciplinare che contraddistingue le socie: figurano infatti angliste, americaniste, italianiste, germaniste, secondo quel profilo di "letterature comparate" che caratterizza in modo originale il progetto della Società, che conta oggi circa 150 aderenti. Più

ancora che per la Società italiana delle Storiche, si può parlare di una vera e propria promozione che per le Letterate ha preso avvio dall'Università fiorentina. È infatti soprattutto per l'assiduo lavoro di Liana Borghi, insieme ad Anna Maria Crispino e a Paola Bono (della rivista *DWF*), che la Società delle Letterate ha avuto origine. Liana Borghi, che nel 1979 fu tra le fondatrici della Libreria delle Donne a Firenze, da vari anni insegna nell'università fiorentina letteratura anglo-americana ed è la rappresentante dell'Università di Firenze nella rete tematica europea AOIFE/ATHENA per gli studi delle donne. Accanto a Liana Borghi e a Ornella De Zordo, che da anni tengono corsi universitari esplicitamente nominati come corsi di *gender studies*, è però importante sottolineare come già dagli anni ottanta a Firenze Uta Treder e Rita Svandrlík, nell'ambito di un luogo neutro come l'Istituto di lingue e letterature germaniche e ugrofinniche, avessero promosso corsi in tal senso collaborando a formare sinergie con la città. Uta Treder e Liana Borghi collaborarono nel 1987 con la Libreria delle Donne per organizzare il convegno "Viaggio e scrittura. Le straniere nell'Italia dell'Ottocento" di cui uscirono gli atti (Torino: CIRVI, 1988) e subito dopo, sempre con la Libreria, Rita Svandrlík e Uta Treder organizzarono a Firenze un memorabile ciclo di incontri con scrittrici di lingua tedesca del secondo dopoguerra, che fu anche per le studentesse universitarie un momento significativo. Si può parlare insomma di una vera e propria tradizione da loro iniziata, che ha sedimentato quell'intreccio tra ricerca e didattica che ora caratterizza il lavoro delle letterate a Firenze, promuovendo una messe di tesi di laurea che anche in questo caso hanno spesso inaugurato percorsi di ricerca oltre la conclusione degli studi universitari e creato trasmissione tra generazioni diverse. Con Rita Svandrlík, Liana Borghi organizzò nel 1996 il convegno dedicato a *S/Oggetti immaginari: Letterature comparate al femminile* (Urbino: QuattroVenti 1996), da cui di fatto prese le mosse la Società delle Letterate; e ricordo ancora il secondo convegno, "Passaggi" tenuto dalla Società a Firenze e i cui atti sono in corso di stampa presso la stessa editrice, ancora per la cura di Liana Borghi. La pluralità dei soggetti anche sotto il profilo di associazioni oltre che di singole figure che ormai operano nell'area universitaria fiorentina ha consentito in questi ultimi anni uno scambio sempre più proficuo e stimolante verso nuovi progetti; ricordo il convegno organizzato da Monica Farnetti e da Anna Botta dello Smith College di Firenze, in collaborazione con Rita Guerricchio, Anna Nozzoli e La Società delle Letterate al Gabinetto Vieusseux nel maggio del 2000, dedicato alle "Scrittrici eccentriche", sempre a sottolineare i contatti sempre più frequenti ormai anche con queste istituzioni universitarie straniere che operano nell'area fiorentina.

E vengo a introdurre il discorso sul progetto più significativo, anche in termini di rapporto con l'istituzione universitaria e il mondo accademico, che ha segnato una svolta nel panorama degli studi di genere a Firenze, sotto il profilo della visibilità e dell'autorevolezza, con riferimento al numero e al valore dei soggetti coinvolti. Si tratta di un progetto, presentato nel 1997 da Maria Fancelli Caciagli, germanista di spicco dell'area fiorentina, all'approvazione del Rettorato nell'ambito di quel programma di finanziamenti 'strategici' dell'ateneo fiorentino che ha consentito in questi anni l'avvio di ricerche di particolare rilievo per l'entità dei finanziamenti erogati. Il progetto, di cui Maria Fancelli si fece promotrice, era rivolto alla costituzione di un "Archivio della scrittura delle donne in Toscana dal 1861", e nasceva in realtà da una tessitura di accordi e di consensi nel comune progetto di ricerca tra le docenti e le ricercatrici dell'area umanistica, che finì per coinvolgere numerosi dipartimenti, da quello di Italianistica a quello di Filologia moderna, dal Dipartimento di Linguistica a quello di Filosofia, dal Dipartimento di Storia a quello di Storia dell'Arte. Il progetto venne finanziato, e nacque dal progetto stesso un'Associazione, con l'apporto significativo dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze nella persona della sua direttrice, Rosalia Manno Tolu, di una funzionaria e studiosa di valore come Sandra Contini, di Ernestina Pellegrini, italianista, il cui nome inserisco ora tardivamente, ma avrebbe dovuto già figurare in più punti di questo profilo per la presenza vivace che Ernestina Pellegrini riveste nella comunità scientifica fiorentina, di Ornella De Zordo, di Elena Pulcini oltre alla già più volte ricordata Simonetta Soldani, di Rita Svandrlik e di tante altre che sarebbe lungo nominare, ma anche questo può essere indicativo del successo e della capacità di aggregazione della nuova associazione, in grado di creare ponti tra luoghi diversi di ricerca.

L'"Archivio per la memoria e la scrittura delle donne" — questo è il nome dell'associazione — ha sede presso l'Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Ernestina Pellegrini ne è la presidente, e Sandra Contini la vicepresidente. Ha promosso in questi pochi anni di vita una pluralità di iniziative, dal reperimento e acquisizione all'Archivio di Stato di significativi archivi privati di donne toscane, secondo quella finalità di conservazione e valorizzazione della scrittura e della memoria delle donne che è finalità dell'associazione, alla realizzazione di videointerviste, all'organizzazione di seminari, incontri, convegni: in particolare, la mostra curata da Ernestina Pellegrini e Liana Borghi, "Donne per il libro" (San Miniato, novembre 1998; Firenze-University, febbraio 1999) e, nel marzo 2000, un convegno internazionale su "Donne e giornalismo" a cura di Silvia Franchini e di Simonetta Soldani, i cui atti

sono in corso di stampa. Un segno della vitalità del progetto è la capacità di aggregazione che esso ha mostrato in questi anni: da un iniziale interesse per l'età contemporanea, l'associazione ha rivolto ora la sua attenzione anche all'età moderna, grazie all'ingresso di figure significative in questo senso come quella di Gabriella Zarri. E di questo ampliamento di prospettive, in grado di far dialogare entro l'associazione una grande ricchezza e varietà di competenza e di appartenenze disciplinari, è testimone il progetto ideato da Sandra Contini e coordinato da alcune di noi, su un censimento regionale della scrittura delle donne in Toscana dal XVI al XX secolo. Il progetto ha avuto un significativo riconoscimento dalla Regione Toscana, che lo ha finanziato, e i primi risultati sono stati esposti nel corso di un convegno, "Carte di donne", che si è svolto presso l'Archivio di Stato nel marzo scorso; la regione era rappresentata al convegno dall'assessore alla cultura, Mariella Zoppi. Quello che preme sottolineare, è non solo la rete di collegamenti che un tema come questo, che ha al suo centro la scrittura e la memoria delle donne, ci consente, a partire dal Ministero dei Beni Culturali per accennare poi, anche solo di sfuggita, alla molteplicità di iniziative che un progetto come questo, unico ancora nel suo genere in Italia, può contribuire a suscitare o a collegare. Ma un altro aspetto di interesse, in continuità con quanto sono venuta via via descrivendo degli studi di genere nell'Università di Firenze, è anche qui la cura nel promuovere ricerca tra le più giovani, valorizzando, come abbiamo fatto nel seminario del marzo, ricerche di laurea, istituendo assegni di studio, creando anche qui relazione tra generazioni, senso di appartenenza a una comunità di studio.

Ho iniziato questo percorso con i nomi di alcune filosofe, Monica Toraldo di Francia, Michela Pereira, Elena Pulcini, figure che per la qualità dei loro interessi e delle loro ricerche hanno costituito, fin dagli anni ottanta, un punto di riferimento dentro l'Università di Firenze, e in particolare nel Dipartimento di Filosofia, per gli women's studies. Sono la filosofia morale e la filosofia politica gli ambiti di ricerca e di didattica di maggiore interesse ai fini del nostro discorso, settori che Monica Toraldo ed Elena Pulcini hanno segnato con la loro presenza (Michela Pereira, medievista, già da vari anni è migrata verso l'Università di Siena). Monica Toraldo coordina attualmente il Corso di perfezionamento in bioetica del Dipartimento, e presiede il Comitato fiorentino di bioetica, del quale fa parte anche Elena Pulcini. Studiosa della relazione, delle passioni, del soggetto e del legame sociale, quest'ultima ha introdotto le studentesse di filosofia, attraverso i suoi

studi e i suoi corsi, alla conoscenza delle problematiche introdotte da Carol Gilligan, Seyla Benhabib, Carole Pateman, Jessica Benjamin.

E relazioni interessanti sono ormai quelle che si vengono intessendo sia con le pedagogiste del Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Educazione, Giulia Di Bello e Simonetta Ulivieri sulle tematiche educative e pedagogiche relative alla storia di genere, alla pedagogia della differenza e alla formazione delle insegnanti, sia con le sociologhe di Scienze della Formazione, Giovanna Gurrieri e Gabriella Paolucci. A Scienze della Formazione Gabriella Campani conduce didattica dell'interculturalità, mentre Mila Busoni ha volto i suoi interessi di antropologa agli studi di genere, e ci ha offerto di recente un contributo proprio in questa direzione. Ma anche nel Dipartimento di Storia dell'arte, Dora Liscia, con le sue ricerche intorno ai gioielli, ha aderito all'"Archivio per la memoria e la scrittura delle donne", mentre Luciana Brandi costituisce un punto di riferimento per i suoi studi di psicolinguistica. Questo per mostrare, in conclusione, come accanto ai gruppi più numerosi e organizzati, che fanno capo alla Società delle Storiche e alla Società delle Letterate, vi sia poi nei tanti settori dell'Università fiorentina — penso ad esempio a tutto il settore di medicina sociale con gli studi sulla menopausa — una ricchezza di presenze che vanno trovando via via collegamenti, e si incontrano in progetti condivisi. Uno di questi, per chiudere con uno sguardo aperto sul futuro prossimo, è il nuovo "Laboratorio di mediazione interculturale", che inizierà i propri lavori a Prato alla fine di agosto di quest'anno, promosso da Liana Borghi nell'ambito del gruppo toscano della Società delle Letterate con la collaborazione dell'Associazione Il Giardino dei ciliegi e in intesa con l'Università fiorentina.

Vorrei ancora ricordare che nell'ottobre 2000 ha cominciato a funzionare il Programma di Studi di Genere presso il Centro Robert Schuman dell'Istituto Universitario Europeo, diretto da Luisa Passerini e coordinato da Dawn Lyon. Il Programma intende non solo coordinare e valorizzare le molte iniziative sul genere che già esistono nei vari dipartimenti dell'IUE, ma anche promuoverne di nuove. Tra queste sono di particolare rilevanza la serie delle Ursula Hirschmann Lectures on Europe and Gender, che si terrà ogni anno in maggio (la prima è stata affidata per il 2001 a Rosi Braidotti e la seconda, per il 2002, a Barbara Duden), e la Scuola Estiva internazionale che si terrà nel giugno 2001 sul tema "Donne e relazioni di genere in Europa: frontiere a sud e a est", con la direzione di Eleni Varikas e il coordinamento di Isabela Corduneanu.

E infine, l'ultimo progetto, quello che a livello istituzionale mi pare il più rilevante: la costituzione dentro la classe di discipline storiche dell'Università di Firenze, di un corso di laurea triennale in storia delle donne e studi di genere, che dopo molte difficoltà è stato finalmente approvato ed è ormai inserito a pieno titolo nel nuovo ordinamento didattico dell'Università. Si tratta di un corso di laurea credo unico in Italia, almeno per ora, e che per trovare concreta attuazione avrà bisogno del sostegno, del concorso e dell'impegno di tutte le docenti e di tutti i settori che ho ricordato in queste pagine.

Concludo riprendendo l'immagine di comunità scientifica che ho introdotto all'inizio e più volte richiamato nel corso dell'esposizione; una comunità che è venuta crescendo nel libero intreccio di relazioni di studio e spesso anche di amicizia, senza mai consentire a forme chiuse, aperta ideologicamente, attraversata anche da tensioni che non mancano mai, nelle relazioni tra donne, ma più animata tutto sommato da volontà di scambio e di progetto, e da curiosità reciproca.

PART TWO: ROUNDTABLES

Flexible girls.
A position paper on academic generational politics¹
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This paper is based on my intervention during the round-table *Transitions and Transmissions: two-way traffic* at the conference *Gender Studies in Europe* the 2nd April 2001 at the European Institute, Firenze. I would first like to comment on this title, chosen for the discussion by one of the organisers, Dawn Lyon. These preliminary notes mark the paper thoroughly.

The idea of a “two way traffic” going on between generations responds to a certain kind of time trade familiar to the feminist *generational²* politics I have had the occasion to experiment. The conference gave good examples of this: on the one hand, ‘baby-boomers’ foot-note with humour their re-affirmation of personal-political engagement as ‘maybe old-fashioned’; on the other hand, ‘twenty-thirty something’s’ supposedly less politicised or at least politically different, paradoxically also claim this engagement, driving back in a two-way traffic flow. I will come back to this (mis)understandings and (un)coincidences between generations’ engagements.

¹ This paper is in « dialogue » with another written for Athena Network (Panel 1A) on current transformations of the university. That paper offers further analyse and research resources on today’s transformations in the academy (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2001).

² I borrow the notion of ‘*generation*’ to the NextGENDERation European network, yet I do not ‘represent’ the network here. I am not an active member of the network and I have not participated in their performances and writings. Nevertheless I have participated in some meetings of the network and have built personal political friendships with active members. I am also a member of the mailing list. The present article is inspired by the sharing of experiences that these friendships have made possible. I take *generation* here as a ‘concept’ that is not unproblematic. The way I have seen it used by the European feminists is far from designing a political closure or any kind of *youngism*. It stands rather as a starting point for reflecting and engendering collective meanings on the ways we are situated by the times we live in and by intergenerational perceptions. The emergence of other networks as the Italian 30something reflect an increase of interest focused on this open issue during the nineties. During the European Summer School in 2000 I had the opportunity to participate in conflictive debates that reflected interrogations and explorations of what feminist *generational* politics may mean, more precisely concerning the positioning of feminist today’s students within the history of feminist politics in the academy.

Secondly, the title could also signify our times, specially the assumption that we live in a back-and-forth flowing world, where boundaries are difficult to draw, and power relationships (too?) complex to be tracked. We live in the middle of a process, struggling to build meanings for extremely fast changing realities. As a white western privileged city woman, fast on-going traffic appears to me as a recognizable image for this accelerated and fluid existence, constantly needing 'stress management' and 'adaptability'. Madonna's 'material girl' better be today a 'flexible girl'. This contribution will address critically this 'flexible paradigm'.

1. NEW GENERATIONS' CORRIDOR TALK: PERSONAL AND POLITICAL

The main concern motivating my intervention in the conference was today's working conditions in the academy because I feel concerned with the increasing depressing predicaments expressed by young researchers and academics.

I have been working at the university as a full-time PhD researcher for three years now. This might seem short, but it has been long enough for me to notice a dominant depressing ethos among young researchers and academics. 'Colleagues' meet in corridors and make cynical comments on their overloaded day, their careless boss, their colleague on depression leave, their 'I don't have the right stuff' (Stengers, 2001) feeling etc, etc... Little enthusiasm or even respect for their own work is expressed, considered of little use and interest. In our 'post-' contexts, the regrettable arrogance of academic tribes (Becher, 1989) has left all place to an equally regrettable academic nihilism. So be it. I nevertheless feel concerned by the way many young academic workers see their bad feelings and unsatisfying work as personal failure. But these complaints are too frequent to be 'personal'.

The sharing of these feelings with feminist 'colleagues' in feminist meetings has been richer because their discourse is not cynical. The symptoms are not very different, but in younger feminist environments the issue is often formulated as a contradictory tense feeling where a feminist politically engaged standpoint enters into conflict with increasingly disempowering academic work and relations: *do we want to maintain this?*... asks a young feminist researcher. Among young feminists there is no nostalgia for academic arrogance and self-

confidence—criticised in the past by Virginia Woolf (1996). The feminist anti-nostalgic tradition is a strength to cultivate. Nevertheless, the present academic cynicism doesn't represent an alternative. There are political desire at stake and meanings to be built.

European feminist networks are a precious opportunity to share experiences. This sharing is a joyful and empowering practice that helps transform personal predicament into political claims and resistance. I have noticed that academic working conditions are often discussed in feminist conferences and meetings I had the opportunity to attempt *but...* they remain blocked in corridor discussions, dinners and room-mate's talk. This paper is an attempt to speak out these discussions and contribute to this personal-political sharing.

Among the many interesting observations concerning the university and Women's studies that were expressed during the conference, I would like to highlight two visions: Rosi Braidotti, stressed the use of the university as a "centre of resistance", as a "space of freedom" and "critical thinking" where "education for the sake of understanding" may focus on "issues not commercially valuable" (Braidotti 2001). Secondly, Gabriele Griffin stressed the fact that originally women's studies were not only about "description" but more about 'transformative analysis' and the 'need for change' (Griffin 2001). This statements show that are other paths for academic ethos than arrogance and/or nihilism.

From these two visions put together results an unpredictably fertile critical and constructive composite and in spite of the well spread rumour that young feminist students and researchers are less politicised than the ones in the seventies—an observation also expressed during the conference—many young feminists in the university (and students) affirm this political motivation. *Tell them we want our teachers to be more feminist* – says a young feminists when talking about the intervention I am preparing for the conference... *Generational misunderstandings?*

In a challenging and illuminating article in the review *Feminist theory* Liz Stanley and Sue Wise suggest that the promotion of a feminist elite of theorist that are producing 'feminist theory with a capital T' separated from feminist practice (Stacey 1993) is among others due to the 'successive cohorts' that after the 70s 'came to feminism' through the text rather than through political practice' (Stanley and Wise 2000, 278). The *generational* issue is not explicitly treated by the authors, they

rather point to an ‘us’ of academic professionalised feminists that constitute the ‘fans’ that support the feminist ‘star system’ (267). Nevertheless, feminist historicized time is present in the vocabulary used through their paper: ‘older’ feminists (from the 70s) are opposed to the ‘successive cohorts’ of ‘recyclers and neophytes’ (274) and an ‘earlier’ critique of theory has suffered from ‘collective forgetting’. They certainly have a point (among many others) which I cannot deepen now, but because it is not the first time I encounter this kind of vague suggestion of the apolitical ethos of new *generations* of feminists I still *burn* to ask: are *older* generations of feminist scholars and academics more engaged *today* in feminist practice than their younger counterparts and students? Is still true today that feminist academic practices challenge inside and outside traditional academic barriers and how? Indeed, there is no age to demonstrate, constitute discussion (may I say CR?) groups, alternative conferences and symposiums, there is no age to use our knowledge to share empowering practices and reinvent political strategies. The lack of political engagement among intellectuals and academics is not exclusively a generational affair and in spite of the linear temporality involved in their vocabulary, Stanley and Wise don’t affirm that, they rather criticise increasing academism among feminists.

I would like to suggest the addition of another kind of temporal axe to their diagnose of ‘academism’: I am tempted to say that many academics, old and young, have increasingly little *time* to invest themselves in the women’s movement! How many academic women a day do you hear complain on work overload, physical fatigue and mental exhaustion? My argument here is that the deterioration of working conditions in the academy, the feeling of instability and increasing competition are accentuating the decline of political desires to “make the difference” throughout the building of feminist academic structures. The pressure of elitist academic success is not fading out but getting worse and feminist academics of all ages are also subject to this stress.

Tell them we want our teachers to be more feminist! In present contexts, it seems as if feminist political *practice* among students and younger colleagues is not really respected and cherished among many feminist teachers that continue to insist on the links between the movement and its “academic arm”.

But is it fair or even interesting to drive back the “apolitical” verdict from one generation to another? Isn’t it more constructive to find other kind of meeting points to turn this traffic jam into a multiple-way traffic

debate? Isn't it more interesting to make a 'common' problem of it? If there is no ready made general solution or formulation of these issues, there is at least a need to reassess 'glocally', openly and collectively our strategies to overcome the mere day-to-day survival ethos and promote constructive feminist practices in the academy. I am not saying that these concerns have not been explored yet in feminist environments (Aaron and Walby 1991; Morley and Walsh 1995, 1996; Stanley 1997; Morley 1999). I am just suggesting that, if we take seriously the persistent new generations' corridor talk, these issues have not been stressed enough and are often marginalised or ignored. There is a need to speak out, in an intergenerational discussion, our academic predicaments in order to stop considering them as personal failure and address them collectively, politically.

If academics, including feminist, 'put the pressure' on younger researchers it means that the pressure is *real*. Publish or perish, network or die... You better have the 'right stuff' because the old abstract principle of academic excellence and competition will not get better through today's openly capitalist conception that measures knowledge through credi(t)bility³. Feminist academics are not free of accepting or not this social neo-darwinist ethos: survival in the academy depends on individual adaptability and availability to an ever-changing environment while the phantom of "knowledge *per se*" plans over the place arousing culpability over bad done work and lack of motivation. Among feminist academics you may add the contradiction between the 'I am in it for the cause' feeling with the feeling of abuse among overworked employees. Many young feminist researchers' political wings seem damaged because of these contradictory exigencies of academic representations and especially by the lack of intergenerational discussion on this issues.

Which kinds of 'mutilations' are necessary to survive in the academy? This is not a *new* question of course, but a question we shouldn't cease to ask through different periods and social contexts. For contemporary feminist generations of academic workers a question to ask could be: how are our political desires and projects being affected by contemporary managerial ethos of profitability and competition in the academy? A transitional generation is caught between the perception of the university as a place of resistance, freedom, critical thinking... as 'another place of struggle' (Griffin and Hanmer 2001) where to

³ See B. Latour (1995) for an account of academic knowledge as "credit" in "scientific capitalism".

implement women's studies in order to develop transformative analysis and the perception of a working place where they are increasingly 'proletarianised', brain capital evaluated through publication production flows, where critical thinking becomes an old fashioned ethos (Seller 1997, 31) and reductionist visions of applied research dominate. A place where the value of education is more and more conceived in relation to a paradigm of 'employability' that implies 'flexible adaptability'.

As an (implicated) witness the vision expressed here can only be partial. In addition this is a *position* paper which means it attempts provisional political positioning. Nevertheless, this position is not arbitrary or irresponsible. In what follows I have tried a personal-political understanding of this situation. Adding elements of the socio-political background underlining 'intersubjective' (Passerini 2001) corridor discussions on working conditions helps me to build a political understanding and to depersonalise this everyday predicaments.

2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT: NEO-DARWINISM?

Universities have always been *in* and *part* of society. However, this is increasingly true today because of their 'sociological opening' (Scott 1997, 41), especially since the sixties. It is not anymore possible to imagine that the walls of the Ivory Tower protect academic worlds from the influences of 'outside' worlds. From my feminist standpoint this is of course a positive thing, it seems difficult for people engaged in emancipatory politics to be nostalgic of the academic gardens portrayed by Virginia Woolf in *A room of one's own* and *Three Guineas*. Knowledge *per se* and disinterested pursuit of truth are Edens of which feminists not easily long for. On the contrary, the critique of this ideals is at the heart of feminist knowledge politics⁴.

Nevertheless if the opening of the academy is to celebrate, a critical awareness should remain alive to be able to track new distributions of power relationships. A question could be: opening to *what*? Accountable to *whom*? Opening to challenging knowledge practices and emancipatory conceptions of knowledge and science that account for power relations built on gender, race, class and environmental preoccupations? Opening

⁴ I prefer to speak of feminist knowledge politics instead of 'feminist epistemology'. I have tried to justify this choice through a paper published on-line in the website of the 4th European Feminist Conference, (Puig de la Bellacasa 2000).

to management practices of knowledge trade within global capitalist competition? Accountable for social relevance? Accountable to a restricted version of economic relevance? Are we forced to choose, as some seem to think, between elitism and supermarketing?

University has always reflected the society that feeds it. The current situation of academics and researchers in the academy, especially among “non tenured” generations, reflects a general degradation of working conditions and a normalisation of precariousness. Academics are ‘workers’, surely of a certain ‘privileged’ kind, but still workers in a capitalist competitive environment. So not only the ‘personal’ sense of failure and lack of meaning is less personal than it seems when discussed within the academy but it appears to be more ‘social’ than it could seem when discussed with ‘outsiders’. Same sense of pressure all over the place.

Yet, a confident discourse, quite dominant, describes the changing patterns of labour markets. The job-for life model dreamed by middle-classes, by mediocre *petit bourgeois* is supposed to be dead (Brown and Scase 1997, Scott 1997). Today, people ‘create’ their own ‘job portfolios’ and social order modelled by class gender and race is being replaced by ‘stratification’ through ‘life-styles’ (Scott, 1997, 44). A certain discourse among employers, especially popular since the last years of the 1990s, claims the need for flexible workers, out of rigid and boring bureaucratic profiles. A new recruiting ethos valorises the ‘creative’, ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘individualist’ qualities of ‘charismatic’ personalities. ‘Suitability’, ‘capability’ and ‘acceptability’ are preferred to old organisational fidelities (Brown and Scase 1997, 96). Innovation requires creative people capable of ‘adapting’ their skills, ‘up-grading’ their competencies and re-programming themselves during their working life cycle through long-life learning (Alaluf 2000, 2001; De Meulemester and Rochar 2001).

Another discourse, that overdetermines the preceding one, must be read against an European background of an everlasting unemployment crisis. A dominant argument says: unemployment is due to a lack of training and flexibility among labour force (Alaluf 2000, 2001; Giovannini, 2001; De Meulemester and Rochar 2001). The knowledge society imposes ‘challenges’ we have to face, to which we need to *adapt*, in order to *survive* in the international competition (Alaluf 2000). Therefore, long life-learning and increasing flexibility (in addition to deregulation of labour markets) are the solution to European uncompetitiveness—a

patent discourse of the famous White Paper *Growth, Competitiveness, Employment. The Challenges and Ways Forward Into The 21st Century*.

The social neo-Darwinist accents of this discourses are patent (Alaluf 2000, 54). Today's economic and social conditions are naturalised, reified: it is *reality*, we have to adapt to it. And reality is an inevitable jungle. In a period of scarcity the feeble die out and the stronger survive. Today, aptitude to survival depends on individual adaptability, flexibility and mobility: be innovative, autonomous, polyvalent, multifunctional and never stop learning in order to seduce your successive employers. Employability. On-going education is not any more a collective emancipatory purpose but an individualistic survival necessity (Alaluf 2000, 2001).

Universities are not exempt from responding to these *challenges*. It is proclaimed to be their destiny to play an 'active' role on the globalised economy of knowledge. To be 'competitive' because markets are getting 'impatient' with slow 'old style' academics and their 'archaic' world vision (Gray 1999). In the knowledge society universities are to some extent out of the run, because information is everywhere and knowledge 'that counts' is delocalised. Conversely, intellectual capital, universities' main resource, gives them an advantageous position in the knowledge economy (Robertson 1999), to the extent that knowledge workers (Drucker 1994) accept the rules of this *reality*.

Storytelling Interlude: this is not politics, it is reality

Modernity was boring, our 'post-...' worlds are fun: you never know what will happen to you tomorrow, isn't it exciting?

An information session at my university. 'Scientific staff' (untenured teachers, PhD students, assistants...) from the Arts Faculty (Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres) are being informed of a forthcoming reform (restructuring?).

The Deans are interrogated about the social consequences of the reform and about the lack of solidarity, protest and resistance of 'tenured' academics against such politics. Answer: The university owes you nothing. It prepares you for the outside world. In addition this is not politics, it is reality.

Private employment agencies: job shops in search of atypical profiles?
Innovative people looking for the next two-month job, for the next part-time contract...

Job shop ads claim: no job for life, live before you get caught up, don't let them encapsulate you, all men are born equal, we make you unique. Models photographed, two thirtysomethings, a guy with abundant piercing and a young girl with an afro-haircut. Another ad shows employers miming obscene positions through whorehouse windows to attire employees.

A woman in her forties with a poncho dress, long hair and big boots quits a 'job-shop' in a winter afternoon leaving her CV behind. We'll call you the young employee says. The boss to the employee: don't send freaks to our clients.

Intellectual capital transfers.

A department in my university, a colleague has just lost his job. He has been working for years with six-month contracts. A new rule limits the number of successive fixed-term contracts. The rule intends to promote secure contracts: at a certain point the researcher must be engaged with a permanent contract. But the department has no money to engage the person under these socially advantageous conditions (e.g.: accounting for length of service). A newcomer is appointed with a six-month contract to pursue the work of his expensive predecessor.

A woman teacher worried for the career of a young researcher?

If you ever get pregnant during your PhD contract I will withdraw my support from you.

Less people, bad pay, more work. Act I)

Liege, Belgium: a young manager from Quick (Belgian equivalent of MacDonald's) declares to a news paper that the pressure in the company forces him to work more hours with less people and that he is at the same time held responsible for all functioning failure. He works more and more and the salary remains the same. He gets fired for this declaration. (Alaluf 2000, 87).

Less people, bad pays, more work. Act II) Somebody cares out there?

I hear at the radio that in England a survey reveals increasing illness (mental and physical) among workers caused by stress, overwork etc... Companies get worried, they say, because performance and efficacy are decreasing.

(Belgian news broadcast, June 2001)

A women's world indeed. Women have always been flexible, able to do lots of things at the same time⁵. Homework economies have feminine futures in the information society (Adam and Green 1999).

A young part-time assistant works for two teachers in the History department. She has a part-time job somewhere else. In her academic time she has to lead seminars, correct exams and write her PhD (of course, she has twelve years to do it). Feeling schizophrenic she wants to quit the other part-time job to be able to do her PhD. But she is a single mother. Gently her two bosses propose a second academic part-time job so she can finish her PhD... The job means to become the assistant of three more teachers with their respective seminars to lead and exams to correct.

*

This is not politics, it is reality. Before getting angry against conformist realism it must be said that this 'reality' is one of a pro post-welfare Europe where public services, especially social insurance and first need services (health, transport, water supply) are being privatised or are adopting corporate functioning encouraged by governments. Public interest is gone, better buy your individual survival kit. The university is no exception, its 'public' status (of the institution and of the knowledge produced) is fading (Melody, 1997).

The storytelling just proposed witnesses a generalisation of work precariousness. Academics are in privileged positions regarding many other workers. Still, the new knowledge economy and the consequent proletarianisation of academic work offer knowledge workers an occasion to recreate solidarities over the ruined walls of universities and to try out responses to reality's *challenges* beyond mere adaptation. An opportunity to enact an opening of the university in directions other than those inspired by the dominant discourses of managerial capitalism and the new knowledge economy.

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But what has all this to do with feminism and *generational* politics?

⁵ For an homage to women's flexibility see Catherine Bateson (1990).

3. FEMINIST PROJECTS AND THE ‘NEW SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM’

I am concerned with the challenges these contexts presuppose for feminist projects, particularly academic women’s studies. I first will focus on two challenges for feminist politics that appeared through the paper and I’ll end with a general remark on *generational* politics.

What follows concerns language and meanings. The new economy of knowledge and managerial capitalism communicates through celebratory ‘post-...’ language⁶ giving off a scent of increasing autonomy for everyone and breaking with modern rigidities. L. Boltanski and E. Chiapello (1999) have analysed this discourses that express for them ‘the new spirit of capitalism’ and G. Chatelet (1998) referred to this culture as the ‘festive naiveté’ of ‘techno-populism’. Boltanski and Chiapello have pointed the use of emancipatory vocabulary—especially of the 68’s generation—within this discourses. Le Goff has stressed this also (De Meulemester and Rochar 2001). Emancipatory discourses are metabolised (Braidotti 1996) by capitalism. What I would like to stress is the importance for feminist projects to resist their assimilation to these discourses, to nurture the differences they are proposing to make.

Flexible girls?

The first example of this discourse, approached earlier in this paper, proclaims the end of modern (e.g. Fordist) ways of working and shows the ‘creative’, ‘autonomous’ profiles that new workers have to practice in order to invent ‘innovative career paths’ in post-bureaucratic worlds. Flexibility and mobility are part of the credo. A new social and geographical mobility: no more gender, class and race? (Scott 1997, 44) No more borders? While these discourses flourish, old power relations get reinforced, exclusions proliferate and geographical mobility gets restricted to the ‘haves’. The mobility of the ‘haven’ts’ is (savage) delocalisation.

Don’t take me wrong... I am in no case nostalgic of the middle-class dream of a job for life and permanent stability... but I don’t believe in the current alternative either. Trying to make a difference?

⁶ That paradoxically shows exaggeratedly modernist in its permanent obsession to highlight the “overcoming” of modern rigidities.

Flexibility, I have suggested, is a feminine word. Women have always been flexible and are therefore prepared for shifting existences. As they could easily be ‘material’ in the eighties they could easily espouse the flexible paradigm of the late nineties. Moreover, ‘mobility’ (*nomadism* in the ‘deleuzo-guattarian’ formulation developed by Braidotti (1994)) is a feminist project entailed by networking desires and alliance needs. European feminist academic projects have stressed the need for mobility of students, teachers and researchers. The Athena TNP⁷ to which I have the opportunity to participate is an example of this promotion of mobility through a networking project. Moreover, the Athena group (Panel 1A⁸) I have worked with is concerned with the career paths of women’s studies graduates under the imperatives of the contemporary ‘employability’ paradigm: are these graduates following ‘innovative career paths’?

If we stop at this level, and recall Boltanski and Chiapello’s analysis, European feminist networks seem managerial-capitalism-compatible. Without being purist it is possible to be critical and attentive to our use of dominant discourses’ vocabulary. Fortunately, feminists are well-trained to ‘parasite’ strategies: camp on a concept and undermine it, transform it, build new meanings on it (e.g.: woman, objectivity, nature). ‘*Squatting*’ as the Next Generation member Sarah Bracke conceptualised in Bologna. A strategy to ‘avoid capitalism’s cannibalistic incorporation’ (Bracke 2000, 160). A kind of survival politics that doesn’t aim at adaptation. As another Next Generation network member, Ingrid Hoofd, said quoting an LA street poet: *if you only have one strategy, you don’t survive these days* (Hoofd 2000).

Does this seem ‘apolitical’?

However, ‘reflexive parasites’ shouldn’t forget with which aims they are using the current language of power. Feminist projects of academic women’s studies in European universities cannot afford to ignore the implications of current ideologies underlining contemporary European educational projects (Alaluf 2000; De Meulemeester and Rochar 2001; Stroobants 1993).

⁷ ATHENA, Advanced Thematic Network in Activities in Women’s Studies in Europe, supported by the Erasmus/Socrates Programme. Coordination Rosi Braidotti and Esther Vonk, Utrecht University. Website <<http://www.let.uu.nl/womensstudies/athena/index.html>>. Contact: <athena@let.uu.nl>.

⁸ Panel 1A. Evaluation of women’s studies in relation to the job prospects of its graduates. Coordinator Nina Lykke.

An example of feminist use of the current language of power that hides other aims than those of managerial capitalist employability is for me Utrecht Next Generation's network contribution to Athena Panel 1A: a survey on 'innovative career paths' and 'atypical profiles' taken by Women's Studies graduates. The project aims to see how WS graduate's 'expertise and knowledge is useful and valued in a range of professional contexts', but also if they introduce 'gender perspectives into the labour market' in 'innovative and unconventional ways'. The study also aims to analyse WS graduates' career choices and see if they use them as strategies of contestation, and if they consider Women's Studies as a 'brand of political resistance' that may 'work in contemporary European Society' (Vonk and Anders 2000). It seems to me that what is meant by 'innovative' and 'atypical' is quite different from the dominant axes of the flexible paradigm.

A bridging open question for *all* generations: Flexible girls? Yes maybe... but flexible for *what*?

Knowledge that counts?

The second example of the (un)coincidence of feminist language with managerial vocabulary is the 'academic opening' of the university and the stressing of its 'social relevance' and its contribution to local communities through 'accountability'. Accountability is popular. Modern elitist universities based their identity on a principle of academic freedom that served also as the alibi of disciplinary and academic corporatism. Since the end of the Second European War and specially since the sixties, universities are identified also as 'socially relevant' and services to the community or the society are part of their official 'missions' together with education and research. Therefore, universities' new identities are better suited to accountability towards public and private sponsors.

But still the outside world is 'impatient' because academics 'resist to change'. Economic relevance should be enhanced. Therefore, the remains of elitist practices should be evicted because 'communities' need their universities to participate in their 'competitive' economy and 'development' (Gray 1999, 8). You can find this imperative in theoretical analysis of university management (Gray 1999) but you can also track it through European commission official papers (De Meulemeester and Rochar 2001) as in the famous White paper quoted earlier. The alternative proposed by managerial capitalism and its discourse (that

reduces social relevance to a reductionist economic relevance) is between Oxbridge and Coca-Cola universities.

Before encountering these discourses, accountability was for me a concept-tool used by feminists to struggle against a science and knowledge grounded on irresponsible 'god tricks' (Haraway 1991). Moreover, 'social relevance' was a feminist urgency as 'investment in the community' was a feminist practice. Today I find these words in managerial-oriented writings but they don't mean the same thing. Feminist accountability in practices related to knowledge production and its transmission aims at 'knowledge that counts' through criticising and enlarging the meanings of 'who counts as a knower'. Managerial-capitalist meaning of accountability reduces 'knowledge that counts' to a mere accounting formula: it *counts* if it contributes to economic competition. Insistence on the 'social relevance' of knowledge means breaking barriers between theories and practices, academics and activists; academic investment in the community means working for women's social and political empowerment at a local level: through permanent education with emancipatory aims. But for managerial capitalism 'social relevance' is cut down to a reductionist version of economic exchange that seems inspired by social neo-Darwinism and 'long-life learning' means an 'up-grading' of human resources in order to give the market what the market needs.

Generational politics in the academy

1930's: Virginia Woolf refused to acquiesce that daughters from educated men '*had not time to think*' because '*daughters of educated men had always done their thinking from hand to mouth*'. Again, women have always done many things at the same time, they have developed flexible brains and flesh. She exhorted us to think, because '*think we must*', in *offices, omnibuses, marriages and funerals*. Think we must she said, '*let us never cease from thinking "what is this "civilisation" in which we find ourselves?"*' (Woolf 1996, 176)

2001: Today, some generations after, if women *in* the academy have little time to think to their politics, '*bazaars*', '*rents to pay*', '*cradles to rock*' aren't maybe the (sole) reason. We are at the place we are supposed to think '*under green lamps at study tables*'. We have Women's Studies and a whole tradition that has attempted to address critically Woolf's question: *where in short is leading us the procession of educated men?* But as thinking is a situated practice in time and space, we may need to

add other issues to Woolf's picture, especially now that many women have joined *the procession*.

One of the issues is that today the '*right stuff*' of the academic remains grounded on what I. Stengers has pointed as a double exclusion: on the one hand, exclusion of those that can't or don't want to engage themselves in a career where all that means "losing your time" (take care of children or get interested to "undisciplined" aspects of knowledge) is an handicap; exclusion, on the other hand, of issues and interests that don't get translated directly in disciplinary terms (accumulation and competition) (Stengers 2001). Feminist knowledge politics have aimed especially since the seventies at destabilising these exclusions. Today, the ethos of the new spirit of academic capitalism is not contradicting but reinforcing this idea of the 'right (academic) stuff'. Moreover, job precariousness and competition are also reinforcing other 'qualities' of the profile: '*meritology*', '*personal patronage*' and '*compliant conformist behaviour*' (Brown and Scase 1997, 91). Elitism and supermarketing are not incompatible. Managerial capitalist practices may promote a certain kind of flexibility but maybe not the kind of flexibility needed to think.

It is not politics, it is reality. Could feminist lips ever pronounce such a statement? It is important that feminist academics resist this *wise* saying. But there is no one-way mean. Yet, it seems as if younger generations get the impression of an acceptance of today's academic increasingly competitive ethos as 'it is' with little interrogation and solidarity among generations. Feminist teachers under pressure, students and researchers under pressure and little time to have politicised talk on it. You better have 'the right stuff'. Yet, a collective endeavour is needed to resist this pressure. Collective understanding and meaning building are traditionally feminist tools for resistance. Politics starts and ends in daily life. The point is not only to have academic women's studies everywhere... the aim has *always* been also 'transformative analysis' (Griffin 2001) and practices. 'Reality' indeed shows that universities 'as usual' are ready to espouse global competition and corporatised practices. Some women will probably make it... but how much are we to lose of our political desire? Last, but not least, there is also a *body* issue here: '*there are limits and their threshold is sustainability*' (Braidotti 2000). Negotiate the thresholds in a flexible world, a challenge indeed.

It is not politics, it is reality. If feminist women had accepted this *wise* saying a century ago and before, I would not be writing this today and if

born white and privileged, I would probably be the daughter, sister or wife of an ‘educated man’. I feel grateful to a personal-political feminist tradition that helps me to refuse to acknowledge this ‘reality’ as an external naturalised thing that I should accept as a ‘challenge’ to which ‘adapt’. Far from a political purism that would refuse co-optation with reality I prefer a practical embodiment of ‘agential realism’ (Karen Barad 1996): acknowledging the ‘real’ stubbornness of the world ‘as it is’ without accepting it as the natural(ised) fate reified in social neo-Darwinist managerial economies. The present world is challenging indeed, but there are other answers to challenges than *adaptation* to current practices and discourses. Far from nostalgia, if our ‘post-whatever’ worlds offer chances for positive transformative experimentation, we may want to be able, in and outside the academy, to invest our ‘innovative’ ‘material’ and ‘flexible’ feminist flesh and brains for other purposes than those of the ‘new spirit of capitalism’.

(Un)conclusions

Standpoint under construction yearning for connections.

To be continued... collectively.

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Women's Studies Qualifications and Professional Trajectories

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INTRODUCTION

My contribution to the 'Gender studies in Europe' seminar held in April 2001 at the EUI attempts to demonstrate the advantages to be gained from studying the professional trajectories of students who have received some kind of university training in women's studies¹ in different European countries. This topic has been extensively developed by panel 1a) of the ATHENA thematic network² and will be at the centre of the 5th Framework research project entitled 'Employment and Women's Studies: The Impact of Women's Studies Training on Women's Employment in Europe' (EWSI), co-ordinated by Gabriele Griffin and Jalna Hanmer, which is due to start in October 2001.

After a brief discussion of the reasons for my personal interest in this question, the first part of the paper considers some of the methodological and analytical difficulties associated with the comparative analysis of the employment trajectories of women's studies graduates in Europe. In a second section, I mention some of the issues surrounding the relationship between the development of women's studies degrees and the analysis of graduates' employment trajectories. In a third part, I discuss the potential tensions between the increasing pressures on European universities to tailor their degrees to the so-called 'needs of the labour market' and the desire to develop as wide and varied a programme of women's studies courses as possible for future generations of university students in all E.U. member states. I conclude with the idea that there is no 'one best way' to ensure the successful development of women's studies degrees and graduate employment chances in all European societies. Whilst recognising the limitations posed on the academic feminist community

¹ The term women's studies will be used throughout this text as a shorthand expression for "women's / feminist / gender studies". There is no satisfactory all-encompassing term available to adequately describe the vast array of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives adopted in teaching / research on, by and for women in Europe.

² See the forthcoming volume from this project, edited by Lykke, Michel, and Puig.

by the increasing pressures on universities to enhance the ‘employability’ of their graduates, I argue that the combined effects of gender mainstreaming in national public policies and the push for more ‘accountability’ from universities as to the vocational relevance of their qualifications could—under certain circumstances—provide a more favourable climate for the development of women’s studies in many southern European societies than has been the case to date. (see Le Feuvre, 2001b, 212).

This conclusion should not, however, prevent us from adopting a critical stance on the ‘global education market rationalisation process’. It suggests rather that, with the interests of women’s studies as a field and the employment prospects of women’s studies graduates firmly in mind, we, as feminist academics, have an active role to play in defining the contours of the future European higher education system.

I. ANALYSING THE EMPLOYMENT TRAJECTORIES OF WOMEN’S STUDIES GRADUATES

1.1. Motivations

The motivations for studying this question are numerous. On a personal level, in October 1991, I was fortunate enough to obtain one of the five disciplinary Senior lectureships with a women’s studies profile to exist in France. This position was created immediately following the ministerial accreditation of a new 1 year post-graduate vocational degree (*DESS*)³ in Gender and Social Policy (*Politiques sociales et rapports sociaux de sexe*) in the sociology department at Toulouse-Le Mirail University. Since that date, I have co-ordinated this degree and have followed with some concern and much interest the employment trajectories of the different cohorts of graduates. I have also been involved in developing a wider interdisciplinary programme of gender studies courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level at the University and have played an active role in the two existing national networks of feminist research and teaching in France.⁴ From this experience, I have become convinced that the existence of the vocational degree at Toulouse-Le Mirail University has played a vital role in facilitating the women’s studies

³ *Diplôme d’études supérieures spécialisées.*

⁴ The *Association nationale des études féministes* (ANEF), created in 1989 and the more recent *Réseau interdisciplinaire, interuniversitaire des études de genre* (RING), officially funded by the Ministry of Education since July 2001.

institutionalisation process in Toulouse, despite a national context where this has been notoriously difficult to achieve to date (see Viennot 1993; Le Feuvre 1995).

This obviously doesn't mean that I am wholeheartedly in favour of developing a one dimensional vocational objective for women's studies in Europe. I am personally committed to the fundamental research aspects of feminist epistemology, theory and methodology and to the development of courses at all levels of the higher education system that stimulate personal development and 'gratuitous intellectual enquiry'. However, the experience of working in a country where the institutional structure of universities and the intellectual biases of those who wield academic power have combined to severely hamper the attempts to develop women's studies courses and qualifications, I am particularly sensitive to any opportunity to overcome these barriers. I firmly believe that a better understanding of the links between our courses and qualifications and the labour market is essential for the elaboration of effective strategies to promote women's studies in countries where progress has been slow to date. In the same vein, I believe that analysis of the employment prospects and practices of women's studies graduates can serve to reinforce the institutional status of courses in those countries where significant inroads into the academy have been made over the past 15 to 20 years, but where further progress is hampered by the current 'student recruitment crisis' for some of the existing courses.⁵

More generally, as Nina Lykke has stressed: 'It is important for women's / Gender / Feminist studies—as it is for any other academic field—to know in which segments of the labour market it is likely that the qualifications that are built up by the teaching activities will and can be used' (Lykke 2000, 57). However, given the radical and critical nature of feminist theory, a new definition of 'employment opportunities' than that currently used in E.U. and national educational policy documents is obviously required. By the mere fact that studying women's studies is generally described as a life-changing experience by our graduates, we should be wary of attempts to confine our analysis to the most obvious, explicit aspects of the relationship between women's studies degrees and the labour market. However, whatever the precise definition of 'graduate employment opportunities' we adopt, it is important to stress the fact that

⁵ It would seem that many of the women's studies degrees set up in universities in certain (Northern) European countries on the basis of 'solvent student demand' in the 1980s are currently facing a drop in applications and subsequent threats of closure.

analysing the professional trajectories of women's studies graduates poses a number of problems.

1.2. Methodological and Analytical Difficulties

Far from implying a straightforward research brief, I see three major methodological or analytical difficulties to be overcome in order to produce a better understanding of the professional trajectories of women's studies graduates in Europe. The first concerns the availability and reliability of data on women's studies graduates, the second concerns the availability and reliability of data on graduates' career trajectories and the third concerns the interpretation of this data in a comparative perspective.

Before analysing the professional trajectories of women's studies graduates, it is obviously necessary to define exactly what a 'women's studies graduate' might be. This is not as easy as it sounds. The difficulties depend on the precise nature of the women's studies institutionalisation process in each national context (Delhez, Braidotti, Rammrath 1998). In many European countries, there may not be any clearly identifiable women's studies degrees or departments at all. In this case (as indeed in many cases where women's studies degrees do exist), students may have some contact with feminist teaching, for example, via the optional components of their disciplinary degree programmes, but they are not strictly speaking 'women's studies graduates'. The number of women's studies contact hours included in these 'component courses' may vary considerably from case to case. How should we decide who is and who isn't a 'women's studies graduate' in each national context? A further methodological problem exists in tracing these graduates, since the women's studies component of their degree may or may not figure explicitly on their academic records, making them more or less easy to identify in the available data sources.

Secondly, not all European universities collect and collate systematic information on the labour market participation patterns of their graduates. This is particularly the case in countries, like France, where universities have only recently (since the beginning of the 1990s) been encouraged to provide applied or vocational degree courses. Before that date, at least at undergraduate level, French universities were responsible for providing the foundation courses in the traditional academic disciplines, that are required for access to specific vocational training institutions. Thus, qualifications in, for example, social work, journalism, nursing, engineering, management, secondary school teaching, etc., are

still mostly delivered by specific higher education institutions located **outside** universities (Le Feuvre 2001a). Rather than directly entering the labour market on graduation, a further period of study at another higher education institution and/or, for many public sector jobs, success in a competitive examination (*concours*) are the most likely option for many university graduates. French universities have thus been notoriously unconcerned with the employment trajectories of their graduates and have been slow to establish systematic data collection on this subject. Only very recently have the high drop-out and low pass rates of French university students, combined with chronic juvenile unemployment levels, led the French Ministry of Education to introduce vocational courses and qualifications into the university curriculum itself. The creation of these new 'vocational' degrees has rendered universities more sensitive to the 'employability' of their graduates and has improved the availability of information on graduate employment rates and professional trajectories, but this is still poor for students with non-vocational degrees, precisely where most women's studies teaching still takes place.

Finally, even when data on women's studies graduates and on their employment patterns is readily and systematically available, it has to be analysed with precaution in a comparative perspective. Faced with a huge variety in the organisation and relative status of higher education institutions, we must obviously deal with the question of graduate employment patterns in each country in general, before focussing on those of women's studies graduates in particular. A university education opens up varying career opportunities for students from different disciplines in different national contexts (Laviolette, Leray and Raban 2000). In some countries, rigorous selection procedures for access to university courses, high registration fees and demanding academic criteria combine to turn university graduates into a much sort after commodity on the labour market. A university degree guarantees their almost direct access to professional positions of power and decision-making. In such a case, the actual content of their degree (be it in Women's studies, English literature, History, Physics or Business administration) may be of less consequence for their future career prospects than the status of their university and/or the grade of their degree. Alternatively, there may be an explicit or implicit disciplinary hierarchy, which serves to differentiate between the employment opportunities of graduates from the same institution.

Finally, the ‘democratisation’ of the higher education system may be associated with an overall devaluation of university degrees on the labour market. This is particularly the case in countries, again like France, where universities are situated at the bottom of the higher education institutional hierarchy—way behind the *Grandes Ecoles* and many of the specialised vocational schools—and where the equivalent of a BA or BSc degree rarely provides opportunities for direct access to the labour market.

II. THE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN’S STUDIES GRADUATES

As Nina Lykke has stressed, feminist pedagogy implies almost by definition that: ‘we should [...] not blindfold ourselves to what happens to students when they leave the university’ (Lykke 2000, 57). When they leave the intellectually stimulating arena of our classrooms, it is important to know what happens to our students, not only because we are under pressure to prove and improve their ‘employability’, but essentially because women’s studies is about empowering our—predominantly female—students in all areas of their lives, including the professional sphere. Armed with a better understanding of the gendered power mechanisms at play in the media, employment, personal relationships and society at large, our graduates represent a potentially effective, although largely invisible, ground-swell movement for social transformation (see Hanmer et al 1994). However, for the positive effects of this training in women’s studies to become more visible and widespread, the opportunities to encounter feminist theory have to exist within each national university system. It is precisely for this reason that a comparative analysis of the employment trajectories of women’s studies graduates is so interesting.

The comparative approach offers several advantages over single nation studies. Firstly, it enables us to compare the employment opportunities for graduates in countries where women’s studies degrees and courses are widespread and in countries where they are not. Does being a ‘rare commodity’ improve graduates employment prospects or does the marginal character of their chosen qualifications place them in a more difficult position on the labour market? Secondly, we can analyse the effects of the ‘equal opportunity professionalisation process’ on the employment prospects of women’s studies graduates in different national

contexts. In the absence of systematic research on this theme⁶, the following sections attempt to analyse the relationship between the women's studies institutionalisation process and the employment experiences of women's studies graduates in two occupational fields: teaching and research and 'equal opportunities'.

2.1. Employment Opportunities in Teaching or Research

The level of women's studies institutionalisation undoubtedly has a direct effect on the employment opportunities for graduates in teaching and research. The lack of gender studies courses and the paucity of funding for gender research centres in some European countries automatically deprives students of a number of teaching or research job opportunities which may be very more numerous in other countries. In France, for example, the academic career opportunities for doctoral students who decide, against the odds, to specialise in women's studies are severely limited. The under development of gender studies courses at undergraduate level tends to lead to a vicious circle whereby: 'the lack of institutional support for research on gender means that few lecturers (and even fewer professors) specialise in the field > not having any experience in gender research, few tenured academics are interested in or committed to introducing gender into their teaching programmes > few students are introduced to knowledge about gender and gender inequalities during their university career > as a result, few specialise in the field and go on to do doctoral research on gender issues (not least because it is difficult for them to find a qualified (at best) or sympathetic supervisor and because the opportunities for doctoral grants in this field are severely limited) > even once an excellent doctoral thesis has been submitted, professional prospects for the graduates are limited because there are so few higher education courses in gender studies that recruitment boards do not consider a research or teaching profile in gender studies to be a priority > because recruitment levels of gender specialists are low, the capacity within a given university to lobby for the creation of new gender studies courses or degree programmes is weak and generally fails because the decision-making bodies within departments argue that they don't have enough tenured staff to teach them, etc., etc., etc.' (Le Feuvre 2001a, 193).

Of course, even in countries where women's studies have been more extensively institutionalised within schools, universities and research institutions, the academic labour market alone is rarely buoyant enough

⁶ which will be available at the end of the EWSI 5th framework project.

(particularly in these times of financial ‘rationalisation’) to provide adequate career opportunities for all women’s studies graduates. In any case, the question of professional opportunities outside academia is interesting in itself, since it requires a more general analysis of the varying ways in which labour markets are structured across the European Union members states.

2.2. Employment Opportunities in ‘Equal Opportunities’

One of the most obvious links to the labour market for women’s studies graduates concerns what could be termed ‘equal opportunities careers’. This refers to job opportunities directly related to measures aimed at combating gender discrimination and inequalities in employment, health, housing, migration, education, etc. Here again, circumstances vary considerably according to national context. In some countries, the creation of ‘equal opportunity’ positions in private companies, local government or the voluntary sector has undeniably opened up employment prospects for women’s studies graduates (and sometimes even provided an important source of mature students for continuing education courses in women’s studies). However, this is not the case in all European countries.

Firstly, the ‘equal opportunity’ employment prospects of women’s studies graduates will vary according to the type and extent of equality policies adopted and institutionalised in different national contexts. Secondly, they will vary according to the different levels of ‘professionalisation’ of the equal opportunities field in each country. As we have already seen, in some countries, there are clearly identifiable jobs in ‘equal opportunities’, to which individuals are recruited on the basis of their specific (or, sometimes, non-specific) training. In other national contexts, these jobs just do not exist, not necessarily because there is no equal opportunity legislation (see Crompton and Le Feuvre 2000), but simply because the responsibility for administering the various equality measures comes under the remit of existing professional groups or occupations. To imagine that there are ‘equal opportunity’ jobs out there waiting to be filled in every European country would be a huge mistake.

In France, for example, I have never seen a single job advert—be it from private companies, local government agencies, social services, the voluntary sector or, indeed, higher education institutions—with the

equivalent of ‘women’s officer’ or ‘gender equality officer’ mentioned.⁷ One should probably not over-estimate the importance of these employment opportunities, even in countries where they do exist, but the nature of the ‘equal opportunities job market’ is an important factor to take into consideration when considering the employment opportunities of women’s studies graduates and—since the two are directly related—when examining the different strategies to promote academic women’s studies that could be adopted in different national contexts in the years to come.

From this point of view, I share some of the misgivings expressed by Gabriele Griffin (in this volume) as to the current tendency to focus the arguments in favour of women’s studies degrees and courses solely on the employment opportunities offered to graduates in the ‘equal opportunities’ sections of the labour market. However, I firmly believe that the desire to differentiate women’s studies from the production of ‘gender equality expertise’ on the labour market is a luxury that many feminist academics from the southern European countries can not afford. Indeed, rather than seeing the association between equal opportunities and women’s studies as a constraint on the type of teaching / research we can undertake within the university system, I would argue that this association may provide the life-line that many of us have long been waiting for, in order to be able to introduce **any** kind of large scale women’s studies teaching within our academic institutions.

III. THE ‘MARKET PRESSURES’ ON EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FUTURE OF WOMEN’S STUDIES

Despite the fact that France is trailing behind the rest of Europe as far as the rationalisation of its’ higher education system is concerned (Enders, 1997), there is ample evidence to suggest that, even here, there are increasing pressures to tailor university qualifications to the so-called ‘needs of the labour market’. Of course, precisely what those ‘needs’ may be in 20 or 30 years time remains something of a mystery. However, the French Ministry of Education has recently published a number of policy documents which stress that universities should be more responsive to the needs of society and which explicitly encourage them to work in

⁷ The same observation holds for the absence of jobs related to ethnic relations and racial equality in France.

partnership with other groups and institutions: business enterprises, of course, but also local government agencies, voluntary associations, trade unions, etc. The pace of change may be slower in France than elsewhere in (Northern) Europe, but the direction taken has all the signs of the 'rationalisation' process of higher education that has received considerable research attention in recent years (see the contribution by Maria Puig in this volume). The future of women's studies will obviously depend, at least in part, on our ability to meet with the newly defined 'criteria of excellence' for higher education (Le Feuvre 2001, 211-212) and, therefore, amongst other things, on our willingness to present the professional trajectories of our graduates for public scrutiny.

Although most French feminist scholars are strongly critical of the risks to academic freedom associated with any form of 'instrumentalisation' of university teaching, reactions to the recent ministerial injunctions for more 'accountability' have nevertheless been greeted enthusiastically in the formal or informal women's studies centres. Why should this be the case? Probably because, through the experiences gained in the past—by pure necessity—in bringing together energy and expertise from members of different university departments and by establishing links with non-academic activists, groups and institutions, women's studies centres in French universities are currently finding it (unexpectedly) much easier than many of the traditional academic disciplines to meet the 'accountability' evaluation criteria for new degrees laid down by the Ministry of Education.

After years of ineffectual campaigning to get women's studies courses accredited, there is suddenly a light at the end of the tunnel and at least two new *DESS* vocational degree courses with a significant women's studies component have received ministerial approval in 2001. Although the revival of grass-roots women's rights movement in the wake of the *parité* debate (see Le Feuvre and Andriocci 2001) has provided indirect support for the women's studies centres, it is undeniably the willingness of feminist academics to demonstrate the existence of 'employment opportunities in line with the gender mainstreaming public policy agenda' that has swayed the decision to accredit these degrees. In much the same vein, despite the fact that 'social needs' have never been considered a legitimate criteria of academic excellence in France, citing 'commitment to equal opportunity policies' has suddenly become a relatively effective argument in favour of funding for invited speakers, research and for documentation centres in women's studies in French universities.

Conclusions

Given the current economic and political climate of the European higher education system, we are undoubtedly confronted with a classic feminist dilemma—how to we best work in a system whose principles (the ‘instrumentalisation’ of higher education) we refuse, in order to challenge and, ultimately, transform the system in line with our own interests (promoting women’s studies and gender equality in society as a whole). As I have argued elsewhere, ‘the wholesale adoption of the new vocational rhetoric espoused by the Ministry of Education is obviously unacceptable, since this undoubtedly represents a potential threat to the founding principles of academic freedom. At the same time, the freedom to undertake feminist research or to teach gender studies within the French university system may well exist in principle, it has nevertheless been incredibly difficult to put into practice to date. [There is a] fine line we need to tread in order to succeed in promoting gender studies in French universities without being party to the rationalisation process that may threaten the higher education system in France in years to come’. (Le Feuvre and Andriocci 2001, forthcoming).

I would suggest that, when the production and transmission of feminist knowledge to future generations depends on our ability to meet the new ‘academic accountability’ criteria laid down in public policy documents, we do not necessarily have to make do with the best of two evils. On the basis of the French experience, I believe that there is still ample room for manoeuvre within the undoubtedly increasingly constrained context of the emerging ‘education market’. As feminists, we have a role to play in resisting attempts to curb academic freedom in the interests of global capitalism: ‘We have the ability to analyse the risks and opportunities from a feminist perspective and to use the instruments of our submission to create new strategies for autonomy and social transformation’ (Le Feuvre and Andriocci 2001, forthcoming). By accepting the new rules of ‘academic accountability’—which we do implicitly when we develop our arguments in favour of women’s studies degrees on the basis of the graduate employment prospects in the field of ‘equal opportunities’—some of us, particularly in southern Europe, may just have more to gain than to lose in the long term.

However, in order to live with the dilemma, we need to work on a new definition of the relationship between women’s studies qualifications and graduates’ professional trajectories. We know full well that our students do not have to become women’s rights or equal opportunity experts in order to challenge the nature of gender relations in contemporary

European societies. Indeed, as the preliminary results of the NextGENDERation survey of women's studies graduate career profiles have shown, the most effective challenge to gender inequalities does not necessarily come from working in the 'equal opportunities' professional sphere: 'the educational and career choices made by these young women may point to a new generation of graduates that, in an innovative and unconventional way, introduce gender perspectives into the labour market, and so construct their own professional lives' (Vonk and Anders 2000, 59).

This is a potentially fruitful way of adhering to the new 'accountability' rhetoric of higher education institutions, since it enables us to insist on the multiple ways in which **all types** of training in women's studies contribute to the questioning and undermining of discriminatory and stereotypical gender norms. In this way, we may just be able to 'ride the equal opportunities wave' in order to promote the women's studies institutionalisation process, without compromising our commitment to the innovative and creative academic space that women's studies represents and which the higher education 'rationalisation process' threatens to undermine.

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Ritorno al presente: aspetti virtuali nelle relazioni inter-generazionali nel femminismo italiano

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INTRODUZIONE

Vorrei mantenere come sfondo a questo mio breve intervento le due relazioni presentate questa mattina da Rosi Braidotti e Gabrielle Griffin: mi è facile (oltretutto piacevole) riconoscere nel quadro che hanno descritto e nell'intreccio dei piani di analisi che hanno delineato un contesto adeguato alle riflessioni che intenderei proporvi, e che riguardano le relazioni inter-generazionali all'interno del femminismo italiano e la dimensione di virtualità che si raccoglie in esse. Rispetto ai tre interventi che mi hanno preceduto in questa sessione tenterò uno spostamento di prospettiva dal *sistema* al *processo*, dalle *trasformazioni* alle loro *condizioni di realtà*: sono una storica e mi accade spesso di guardare alle cose in questo modo.

Prima d'iniziare avrei bisogno di fare una precisazione che so di dovere alla rete *30something*¹, della quale sono coordinatrice nazionale: io sono qui anche come coordinatrice della rete ma parlo 'a nome mio', tutto ciò che nel corso del mio intervento dirò sulla e della rete *30something* andrà dunque inteso come ciò che io ne penso in ragione dell'esperienza che ne ho fatta. Detto così sembra un messaggio in codice ma dietro ad esso spero sia possibile intravedere almeno due ordini di problemi: vi è un importante problema di rappresentanza connesso allo specifico, relativamente nuovo, della politica di rete, e vi è un altrettanto ma diversamente importante problema di rappresentatività, connesso allo specifico, relativamente antico, della generica attribuzione di peculiarità alla giovinezza (perché è vero che io intenderei parlare di relazioni inter-generazionali ma è anche vero che mi è stato chiesto di essere qui come 'giovane').

Del primo non tratterò qui, mentre del secondo inizierei a dire introducendo una seconda precisazione: effettivamente ho una ventina d'anni meno della gran parte delle persone presenti a questo convegno, e

¹ *30something* è una rete che mette in contatto studiose e studiosi italiani, "intorno ai 30 anni" che si occupano — dentro e fuori dalle Università — di studi di genere.

ciò basta a fare di me ‘una giovane’, ma so anche di avere ormai almeno quindici anni più delle attuali studentesse universitarie, e ciò fa di me una ‘vecchia’. La dimensione di relatività che questo dato di realtà (che trova in questa sede la sua evidenza solo nel fatto che io lo dichiaro) imprime al concetto di ‘giovinezza’ e — con una consequenzialità che è tutta da precisare — al concetto di generazione, è uno degli elementi di consapevolezza che fondano la realtà politica della rete *30something*, non meno che della rete *Nextgeneration*. Personalmente credo che l’intenzione di restituire a questo dato la sua evidenza sia — con il paradosso proprio delle banalità, che solo l’apertura del conflitto sul senso delle cose riesce a svelare — un elemento di novità assoluta nelle relazioni politiche del femminismo italiano, capace — o almeno così io vorrei che diventasse — di mutare ad esso i connotati.

DEL PERCHÉ E DEL COME NEL FEMMINISMO ITALIANO ATTUALE NON SI DIA RAPPORTO TRA GENERAZIONI

A rendere nuova alla storia del femminismo italiano la relatività implicita al concetto di generazione vi è, io credo, un insieme di fattori, così coerenti tra loro che — fuor di storia — si potrebbero scambiare per un paradigma; vorrei evidenziarne due, che mi appaiono fondamentali:

- 1) La presenza di un momento di rottura radicale con la tradizione alle origini di ciò che oggi chiamiamo il femminismo italiano
- 2) La centralità assunta nella storia del femminismo italiano dal principio di esperienza

Nel corso di questo convegno tutte abbiamo parlato di femminismo sottintendendo il comune riferimento agli esiti attuali del neo-femminismo degli anni ‘70. Penso che, ragionando di rapporti tra generazioni, questo comune intendimento possa come pre-orientare le aspettative, inducendoci ad assumere che il nostro comune riferirci a quel femminismo sottintenda nei fatti l’esistenza attuale di un unico femminismo (eventualmente fatto di molte cose, dai molti aspetti, dalle infinite declinazioni, ma uno nella sua essenza), e che parlando di ‘relazioni inter-generazionali’ si intenda parlare delle relazioni tra generazioni all’interno del femminismo (di *quel* femminismo) e non, ad esempio, del rapporto tra generazioni del femminismo, o tra femminismi di generazione.

Accetterò di condividere provvisoriamente questa prospettiva, che riconosco come prospettiva relativa perché autocentrata sull’esperienza

storica di una generazione politica che non è la mia, e assumerò per validi questi due sottintesi, accettando dunque di riflettere sulle relazioni tra generazioni all'interno del femminismo, e assumendo che esso coincida con gli esiti attuali del neo femminismo degli anni '70. Lo posso fare, sono capace di farlo, perché il mio essermi fatta (da me) femminista mi ha messo in grado di riconoscere e condividere l'immaginario sotteso a quella prospettiva, e mi ha restituito la consapevolezza che, in ragione della mia appartenenza ad una generazione storica che non è riuscita a *darsi* come generazione politica, quell'immaginario non ha (ancora?) alcuna possibilità di significarsi nella mia esperienza. Lo farò provvisoriamente, perché so che la condivisione di quella prospettiva costituisce la preconditione ad ogni possibile scambio con quella generazione politica, e dunque se voglio scambiare qualcosa, qui, con voi, mi è necessario; ma intendo farlo solo 'provvisoriamente' perché so che per me accettare di condividere quella prospettiva significa, nelle condizioni attuali di dibattito, accettare di *dirmi* esclusa da essa e di sostenere, sia pure provvisoriamente, un tipo di sguardo sulla realtà che, come spero di riuscire a mostrare, non mi prevede. So che non è educato dire queste cose di sé, ma vorrei sostenere che c'è una qualche generosità nel mio scegliere questa posizione discorsiva, oltre naturalmente alla consapevolezza, a tratti drammatica, che tra me e il mio destino sociale c'è oggi quella generazione politica e non altre, con il suo potere e le sue responsabilità. La mia generosità in questo senso è dunque risultato di una scelta che non evita il conflitto ma cerca un'alternativa alle negazioni che esso offre e alle distruzioni che esso promette.

La rottura come mito fondatore

Storicamente in Italia il neo-femminismo si generò sancendo una rottura radicale con la tradizione del femminismo emancipazionista. Dico 'si generò' assumendo quel *si* come riflessivo: il neo-femminismo non solo non attinse alla tradizione emancipazionista (socialista o liberale), ma neppure si orientò ad un conflitto diretto con esso. Quella rottura (agita e mai consumata, dati i suoi stessi presupposti, in un conflitto aperto e diretto) aprì alla storia una nuova generazione politica del femminismo, e sancì con una irreparabile soluzione di continuità il mutare dei soggetti, dei linguaggi, degli orizzonti del femminismo.² Credo che quando oggi ci

² Per cogliere la portata e la profondità di quella rottura forse può essere utile ricordare come la sua esistenza abbia condizionato la possibilità di dare 'una storia' al femminismo che ne seguì; penso all'opzione che definirei *mitostorica* delle genealogie, che tenta di compensare la perdita di continuità storica con la costruzione di una continuità simbolica, o al tentativo di dare sostanza storiografica ai concetti di *inizio* e di *antecedenti* in alternativa al tradizionale concetto di *genesì storica* (Centro

interrogiamo sui temi del rapporto tra generazioni nel femminismo diventi importante sia riportare a consapevolezza l'esistenza di quella rottura originaria e del suo costituire un dato *a quo* per la storia del femminismo presente, sia riconoscere il suo riproporsi ancor oggi come rottura originante ogni percorso individuale di accesso a *questo* femminismo. Alla luce di ciò la mia domanda diventa: con che cosa immaginiamo che le giovani rompano nel loro diventare femministe, e quindi interlocutrici plausibili al nostro *discorso*? Qualche indicazione capace di orientarci nella ricerca della risposta credo possa essere data dal secondo elemento che vorrei mettere in evidenza, e che riguarda il principio che definì quella rottura, rendendola insieme originaria e originante.

La centralità del principio di esperienza

Mi sembra di poter riconoscere una sintesi efficace del portato di radicalità implicito alla rottura operata nella tradizione politica femminista dal movimento neo-femminista nel principio del 'partire da sé' e nella centralità che esso assunse nell'orientamento della teorizzazione politica successiva. Mi rendo conto che detto qui, così, sembra un richiamo banale, scontato, quasi la mera evocazione di un lessico datato (e di un principio che si è di molto affinato nell'elaborazione teorica successiva), eppure il domandarsi che cosa accada quando a 'partire da sé' sono, in momenti storici diversi, donne di generazioni storiche diverse credo restituisca a quel principio risonanze, potenzialità, ed esiti inaspettati. Tra gli esiti inaspettati vorrei provare a indicarne due.

- 1) Nel suo riproporsi come momento necessario ad ogni nuovo (o rinnovato) accesso a *questo* femminismo, 'il partire da sé' ci costringe a fare i conti con un aspetto di contenuto dell'esperienza che la rende (e conferma) irriproducibile (anche in se stessa, fuor di nevrosi...).
- 2) Se riconosciuto come gesto che dà fondamento politico alla relazione inter-generazionale il 'partire da sé' costringe ambo le parti in essa coinvolte ad accettare l'esistenza di una separazione senza ritorno: ognuna fa la sua propria esperienza di sé, e la storia le rende incomparabili. Non resta che guardarsi e cercare di capirsi.

Vorrei ricordare come nelle memorie raccolte dalle storiche del movimento femminista italiano degli anni Settanta il tema delle difficili relazioni con le donne più 'giovani' appaia già presente nella seconda metà degli anni Settanta: quando le liceali si affacciavano nei gruppi e

di Documentazione delle Donne – Bologna (1990), *Il movimento delle donne in Emilia Romagna. Alcune vicende tra storia e memoria*, Bologna, Ed. Analisi; Passerini Luisa (1991), *Storie di donne e femministe*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier).

chiedevano che le femministe *spiegassero* generavano sorpresa, insofferenza, conflitto. La giovane età c'entrava allora, in quei conflitti, meno dell'estraneità manifesta ad una esperienza condivisa: non c'era allora, così come non c'è oggi, modo di essere riconosciute 'femministe' se non diventandolo. Ed è credo importante oggi riconoscere come l'intreccio del tutto nuovo che il movimento degli anni '70 aveva generato tra percorsi di mutamento individuale e trasformazione collettiva già apparisse allora chiaramente irriproducibile. Da allora la storia delle 'giovani' femministe, in Italia, è storia di percorsi individuali persi alla significazione collettiva: il femminismo italiano non si è reso capace di riconoscere altro che sé, e l'essere 'giovani' agli occhi delle femministe (che solo per contrasto definirò qui 'vecchie'), continua ancor oggi a significare semplicemente il non essere (ancora) come loro, e il gravitare — di conseguenza — o in un altrove privo di qualunque attrattiva, o in una prossimità priva di specificità.

Personalmente credo che in quel 'partire da sé' resti la chiave di accesso dei soggetti alla storia, e che sia merito del (neo)femminismo averne fatto un patrimonio della politica. Vero è tuttavia che quel principio stenta oggi (ma da allora) a trovare, nel femminismo italiano, una propria declinazione in relazione al tempo storico. Da quel che vedo e da quel che sperimento nei miei giorni le forme delle relazioni che le 'vecchie' femministe italiane attuano oggi con le 'giovani' donne, si fondano su un principio di riproduzione del già dato (la propria esperienza) volto alla mimesi identitaria, piuttosto che all'apertura di un presente condivisibile. E' interessante. Duro da viverci, a tratti triste, ma interessante. Forse dovremmo tornare a ragionare su quel nesso tra esperienza individuale e esperienza collettiva che seppe rendere quel 'partire da sé' pratica significativa, e sugli aspetti di occasionalità che segnarono il suo verificarsi storico, per riuscire a trovare l'elemento di resistenza che ci impedisce oggi — come femministe — di accettare che quel partire da sé si rideclini nella variabilità storica senza perdere la sua forza politica.

In tutta franchezza per quella che è la mia esperienza, fuor di teoria e dentro le pratiche, le 'vecchie' femministe italiane non sanno che farsene delle 'nuove' femministe, e sono così sorde alla loro presenza da ritenere di molto preferibile il tentare di teorizzare un rapporto di generazione con un *altro* indefinito, sempre ancora *a venire*, 'le giovani' appunto, (un ente così estraneo, e privo di sé, da non generare contraddizioni neppure immaginifiche), piuttosto che interrogarsi seriamente sulle ragioni dell'esclusione (non certo della assenza) delle giovani femministe dal presente dei loro luoghi politici.

A questo proposito mi sembra utile riconoscere che nella riflessione teorica del femminismo italiano il tema delle relazioni inter-generazionali non compare se non tardivamente e come riferimento al rapporto con generiche ‘giovani’. Quando nella seconda metà degli anni ‘80 il tema delle ‘giovani’ emerge nel dibattito del femminismo italiano non è che un accessorio al (doppio) tema della trasmissione-tradizione. Il fatto stesso che i due termini di trasmissione e tradizione siano percepiti come strettamente interconnessi e che solo in tempi più recenti si sia iniziato a riflettere sulla loro non coincidenza e complementarità (riconoscendo dunque che se la centralità del principio di esperienza in relazione alla ridefinizione del campo politico operata dal neo-femminismo rappresenta un elemento di resistenza alla fluidità della trasmissione storica, essa tuttavia non preclude necessariamente alla possibilità della costruzione di una tradizione), mi sembra testimoniare che l’istanza che ha mosso il femminismo italiano a ragionare su di essi non nasceva dalla presa d’atto dei rapporti (in)esistenti con le giovani femministe, ma dall’intenzione di dare a sé una garanzia di continuità nel tempo e, nel caso, di riprodursi. Da ‘giovane’ femminista mi sentirei oggi di dire che forse sarebbe ora di riconoscere che non è l’esperienza che si trasmette, ma le sue condizioni di possibilità.

LE VIRTÙ DEL VIRTUALE, TRA IL POCO DI CERTO E IL MOLTO POSSIBILE

Vorrei ora mutare di prospettiva separandomi dal ‘noi’ che ho fin qui ambiguamente accettato di condividere con la generazione politica del neo-femminismo e provare a raccontare di un pezzo dell’esperienza della rete *30something*, riflettendo sulla possibilità che anche in Italia esistano — indipendentemente dal fatto che noi ancora non lo si sappia dire — generazioni del femminismo, e assumendo che la centralità stessa del neo-femminismo possa apparire relativa per chi — volente o nolente — si muova senza essere compresa né in esso né da esso.

Per tentare questa operazione — che nei fatti consisterà semplicemente nel tentare di tirar fuori senso da ciò che appare non averne — mi appoggerò al concetto di virtualità. Nel far ciò vorrei contrapporre all’accezione corrente del termine *virtuale* derivata dal concetto tecnologico di ‘realtà virtuale’, l’accezione più ‘antica’, che rimanda ai contenuti di potenzialità presenti in un contesto dato, evocando i temi del *possibile*, ossia di ciò che insieme *potrebbe essere* ma ancora *non è*. Da storica qual sono in quel ‘ancora *non è*’ non leggo un’assenza ontologica

ma una sorta di presenza ‘meta-fisica’ (e prego le filosofe di perdonarmi l’uso un po’ corsaro che faccio di questi termini). Le valenze di virtualità connesse agli aspetti degli scambi inter- e intra-generazionale che descriverò intendono segnalare quindi un possibile che già esiste, che già è presente nella realtà che conosciamo e condividiamo: il loro passaggio dalla dimensione virtuale alla dimensione reale, in questo caso, dipende esclusivamente da come scegliamo di descrivere ciò che conosciamo.

Il processo che permette agli aspetti di virtualità di realizzarsi, e dunque di non reificarsi (perché questa diventa la differenza sostanziale tra le due accezioni del termine quando le si avvicinano), è eminentemente un processo di significazione, di attribuzione di senso (e mi è cara la doppia accezione di *significato* e di *direzione* che il termine evoca in italiano) alle cose conosciute: alla sua origine vi è un gesto di scelta, e quindi insieme una certa quantità di libertà e di responsabilità. Quando penso alle relazioni inter-generazionali come a relazioni di scambio penso dunque a qualcosa che assomiglia al processo che sostiene la costruzione di un orizzonte di senso comune, non necessariamente alla condivisione di *un* senso.

Il progetto della rete *30something* ha iniziato a prendere forma l’8 ottobre del 1998, in occasione di un convegno organizzato alla Facoltà di Lettere dell’Università di Ferrara dal titolo ‘Chi ha paura dei gender studies?’. Quel convegno nasceva con un’intenzione: dare spazio, luogo e risorse alle giovani studiose (ed eventualmente ai giovani studiosi) che in quella e in altre Università italiane stavano lavorando nel campo degli studi di genere e degli studi delle donne. A rendere quell’intenzione un evento vi fu il fatto che in Italia un’occasione simile si dava per la prima volta, e che essa fu riconosciuta dalle giovani studiose che l’organizzarono e che ne parteciparono come occasione necessaria: necessaria non in sé e per sé, ma perché resa tale dal blocco delle risorse e degli spazi che in quel campo di studi le generazioni precedenti stavano esercitando dentro l’Università.

Di quel convegno io avevo saputo ‘per caso’, e vi andai per intenzione. Avevo discusso nel giugno precedente la mia tesi di dottorato a Napoli, con una commissione presieduta da Laura Balbo. Nel settembre avevo incontrato Laura Balbo a Bologna in occasione di un incontro con bell hooks e lei mi aveva presentato Laura Fantone, una sua allieva, dicendomi: ‘Stai organizzando un convegno. Parlatevi, forse ti interessa’. Vale ricordare che Laura Balbo era allora Preside della Facoltà di Lettere di Ferrara. Diedi la mia e-mail a Laura Fantone, scambiai qualche

messaggio con lei e con Anna Lisa Tota che stava lavorando al progetto del convegno, e l'8 ottobre andai a Ferrara. Mi piace ricordarlo perché l'incontro tra caso e intenzione che il generare l'occasione rende possibile, e che io sperimentai, è stata una delle chiavi portanti dello strutturarsi successivo della rete 30 something.

La sezione conclusiva di quel convegno era riservata ad uno scambio di riflessioni e ad un confronto di esperienze con le studiose delle generazioni precedenti: fu per me particolarmente interessante il vedersi manifestare in quel contesto (sia pure in forma lodevolmente contenuta) le tensioni, le irritazioni e le incomprensioni che l'insieme dell'operazione aveva sollevato nelle studiose più 'anziane'. Chi sono *queste* giovani? Che cosa vogliono? Che cosa c'entrano con il femminismo?

Non credo siano necessarie qui grandi spiegazioni per rendere l'idea di quel che stava accadendo: provate a immaginare che le vostre allieve, o le allieve di vostre colleghe, ricevano soldi e legittimazione dal/dalla preside della vostra Facoltà e senza la vostra 'autorizzazione' organizzino, nella vostra facoltà, un convegno sui gender studies, invitandovi ad esso. O, se invece lavorate nei Centri, immaginate che le giovani che avete a malapena intravisto alle vostre riunioni, o cui avete per anni chiesto (per favore) di fare fotocopie, di redigere schede, di curare bollettini, di sistemare archivi, ricevano soldi e legittimazione da una qualche vostra interlocutrice autorevole per organizzare nella migliore sala della Città un convegno dal titolo 'Chi ha paura dei nuovi femminismi?', invitandovi a esso. Se rispondete che ne sareste 'solo' felici temo siate destinate a perdere un'occasione di riflessione importante.

Nella seconda metà dell'ottobre di quell'anno, mentre iniziavamo a scambiarci e-mail per tenerci in contatto e provare a 'fare rete' e a immaginare un qualche tipo di continuazione per quel primo incontro di Ferrara, Laura Balbo fu nominata ministro delle Pari Opportunità e, da Ministro, scelse di continuare a sostenere l'esperimento, offrendo co-finanziamenti ai successivi convegni della rete *30something*. La formula del co-finanziamento si rivelò, per quella che ne fu la mia esperienza a Torino, particolarmente felice, perché non si configurava come una sorta di tutoring accudente, ma costringeva invece le 'giovani' a ri-orientarsi nel sistema delle relazioni di potere della propria Università alla ricerca di altri fondi, garantendo loro al contempo quel minimo di legittimazione e autonomia nella contrattazione che le relazioni (pure a lungo intrattenute)

con le studiose più anziane non solo non avevano mai garantito ma neppure avevano mai prospettato.

La rete *30something* organizzò tra il 1999 e il 2000 convegni sugli studi di genere nelle Università di Milano, Torino, Roma, Cosenza, e ne progettò a Padova e Napoli. L'organizzazione di quei convegni mirava sia ad aprire localmente, così come era accaduto a Ferrara, spazi e occasioni di scambio e visibilità (in primo luogo a se stesse) per le giovani studiose offrendo al contempo, ogni volta, un'occasione di confronto con le studiose delle generazioni più 'anziane'; sia a garantire occasioni di incontro nazionali per le persone che partecipavano delle reti *30something* e che interagivano prevalentemente via e-mail.

Credo che sia importante riconoscere che per ognuno dei convegni che *30something* è riuscita ad organizzare è stato determinante il felice attivarsi di relazioni inter-generazionali all'interno delle singole Università, che si sono dimostrate efficaci proprio perché hanno saputo creare una sospensione nell'ordine della realtà conosciuta, sciogliendo le condizioni del conflitto che si sarebbe aperto per il suo mantenimento. Intendo dire che per ognuno dei convegni organizzati ci sono state 'vecchie' studiose che hanno accettato di riconoscere come interlocutrici potenziali 'giovani' studiose mediando, o vagliando quando ricoprendo posizioni di potere adeguate fossero nelle condizioni di farlo, le richieste di fondi (e di spazi, e di servizi) che esse avanzavano; e ci sono state 'giovani' studiose che hanno accettato come dato di realtà che le 'vecchie' studiose non avrebbero mai, così come mai avevano prima, organizzato nulla capace di prevederle. In tutti i casi le relazioni inter-generazionali che si attivarono felicemente nell'organizzazione dei convegni di rete erano nei fatti relazioni personali pre-esistenti al progetto di convegno: molto banalmente si trattava di laureate o dottorate che recuperavano ad una diversa dimensione, ad un diverso contesto, rapporti con docenti che conoscevano da anni; e viceversa. Quando penso agli aspetti di virtualità impliciti alle relazioni inter-generazionali penso anche a processi come questo. L'esperienza di quei convegni funzionò perché le singole, 'giovani' e 'vecchie', scelsero, ognuna da sé, di mettere in gioco rapporti e competenze su un progetto che non mirava a celebrare il poco esistente ma a scommettere sull'esistenza nel presente di un molto possibile. Mi sembrerebbe un gesto di spreco, intellettuale e politico, il tentare oggi di leggere l'esperienza di quei convegni cercandovi uno 'specifico giovanile', o 'il nuovo di una generazione che avanza', o il successo di una 'nuova alleanza tra generazioni': l'elemento di novità che essi hanno portato credo sia stato invece nella ridefinizione

e nello spostamento che essi hanno sperimentato nel sistema delle relazioni tra generazioni all'interno delle Università, mostrando che era possibile aprire spazi, creare occasioni, mobilitare risorse in ragione di una convergenza di interessi non sorda ai loro conflitti.

Parallelamente all'organizzazione dei convegni, la rete *30something* ha tentato in questi anni di sostanzarsi di una qualche forma e di un qualche contenuto. E' stata un'impresa difficile, con fasi alterne (la costituzione di un'associazione, i tentativi di attivare forum di discussione in rete, i tentativi di mettere in circolazione risorse e conoscenze) e, forse fortunatamente, senza esito certo. Personalmente la ritengo un'esperienza che trova proprio nelle difficoltà che incontra gli elementi di maggiore interesse sul piano politico: la sola qualità e quantità di contraddizioni sollevate dal nostro metterci in azione e in relazione mi appare sufficiente a riempirne di senso l'esistenza e a renderla preziosa. Non è questa la sede per scendere più nel dettaglio ma vorrei tentare in chiusura di riagganciare le riflessioni svolte nella prima parte di questa relazione. Se le persone che partecipano dell'esperienza di *30something* sono 'studiose che si occupano di studi di genere, dentro e fuori l'Università' ciò significa che sono anche femministe? E' una domanda che vale la pena di farsi, anche se temo che non tocchi che a loro deciderlo e dirlo.

Posto che nella comunicazione di rete abbiamo presto scoperto che il 'non detto' tra noi significa e vale almeno quanto ciò che ci diciamo, sull'essere o non essere femministe le partecipanti a *30something* hanno mantenuto in questi anni una discreta vaghezza: credo che sottesa a quella vaghezza vi sia una saggia consapevolezza del fatto che i modi e i termini del nostro esserlo sono così differenziati da rendere inutile e non desiderabile un accordo sulla definizione. Ma se noi siamo 'femministe' ognuna a suo modo, e sappiamo di poterci confrontare e parlare proprio in ragione del fatto che abbiamo accolto come interessante il nostro non assomigliarci, e del fatto che abbiamo riconosciuto che le ragioni delle nostre differenze stanno per la gran parte nei percorsi che ognuna ha scelto da sé di sé e per sé, questo non potrebbe testimoniare che i femminismi che si sono agiti in questi anni in Italia sono più d'uno? E che il femminismo di questa, come di ogni altra generazione, è nel suo farsi piuttosto che nel proprio essere? Se così fosse la questione della tematizzazione dei rapporti inter-generazionali nel femminismo italiano meriterebbe forse di essere riconosciuta con maggiore urgenza come una questione cruciale.

Feminist Theory and Philosophy: More than a Marriage of Convenience

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FEMINIST GENEALOGIES IN PHILOSOPHY?

It has been generally acknowledged that women's exclusion from the philosophical tradition has had catastrophic institutional consequences. However, to speak about women and philosophy is much more than becoming aware of what has been excluded. How, actually, to include women, and, on conceptual level, sexual difference, into the established philosophical tradition, into the history of philosophy and history of ideas, beyond the mere "minding the gaps", or adding women authors as "the missing links" to fill in "the silences of history"?¹ How to approach "the camouflaged sexual distinction at the very heart of philosophy" (Braidotti, quoted in Klinger, 1995, p. 96)? This is, actually, the pivotal question, and it seems that, although after the period which has been recognised as a certain progress in feminist confrontations with philosophy (Klinger, 1995), remains yet to be answered.

To start with, the problem could be approached through questioning of what actually counts, or should count, as feminist theory. Institutionally and epistemologically, feminist theory is a position which keeps questioning—other—canons of knowledge, and seeks to problematise the very notion of official knowledge, of what is and what should be taught at universities, etc. But in this context, it is also necessary to put into question feminist theory itself. Namely, what is going to become legitimate feminist knowledge at a certain period of time, in specific social conditions, in a certain country, is very far from being self-obvious. For example, in Slovenia, in 1995 we have started with the publishing of a specialised feminist journal, and with organising a women's cultural festival—inviting some feminist scholars from that mythological place called "the West". What happened at one of the main sessions is probably quite symptomatic for the present state of affairs. One of the guest speakers, coming to Ljubljana from the States, has been

¹ Even the title of the last book by Michelle Perrot, who has edited, together with Georges Duby, the pivotal *Histoire des femmes* (1992, Plon, Paris) is: Women or the Silences of History (Perrot, M., (1998), *Les Femmes ou les silences de l'Histoire*, Flammarion, Paris).

saying to us: “I tell you, I warn you, don’t read Derrida, don’t read Lacan, don’t even read Slavoj Žižek, but this is what you should read instead: ...”

Of course, this example is only a caricature, but there is a real problem behind the story: how feminist thought is reproduced, how it is, actually, produced, how to envision the very production of feminist knowledge, by such a transmission—from one country to another, from one political space or cultural tradition to another, but also and particularly from one frame of reference to another. This is the question of institutionalisation, of course, but it is also an intrinsically epistemological question (cf. Canguilhem, 1979, p. 10).

In other words, in approaching the problem of what counts as feminist theory, we should first keep in mind what feminist theory is not—what has been excluded, or better still, through what delimitations and exclusions a theory has been constituted as a corpus of legitimate knowledge. In this first step of analysis, feminist theory is as vulnerable as philosophy, or any other form of knowledge, for being exposed to power relations. But what then, at the next stage, remains to be seen, is “what is specifically feminist about the denunciation of the links between knowledge and power” (Braidotti, 1991, p. 175). And this is where the difference between feminist theory and philosophy comes into play, supplementing the knowledge-power nexus with the elaboration of the specific concepts of sex/gender and that of sexual difference. On the other hand, it has been generally acknowledged that these concepts are at the core of “philosophical categories” which, despite “all the difficulties”, should be put into the very centre of philosophical analysis (Dueber-Mankowsky, 2001).

The very definition of these basic, foundational concepts (sex/gender and/vs. sexual difference) of feminist theory and feminist philosophy is, from the outset on, a reflection of a broader set of relations (and differences). It bears witness of the basic divide between, schematically speaking, the two great traditions in philosophy. Namely, the problem of “gender” as well as some other major issues in feminist theoretical debates seem to, at least to some extent, relate to the basic theoretical divide between the Anglo-American and the so-called continental philosophical tradition. I am perfectly aware of the fact that it could be rather misleading to draw such simplified and simplifying boundaries, and that perhaps, as far as feminism is concerned, one should rather speak about the divide between the United States and the European

feminism. However, although keeping in mind all the dangerous detours, the philosophical canon and the university curriculum in the Francophone or Latin- and German-speaking world actually does seem to be quite distinct from the English one, together with the impact of the latter in Northern and some other parts of Europe².

This would mean the difference between the analytical tradition in philosophy (or analytical philosophy *tout court*), and that of what, in the Anglo-American intellectual space, has been called continental philosophy, or, in epistemological scope, the difference between the philosophy of science and that of the French epistemology (the latter being close to the German tradition of the Frankfurt School; cf. Foucault, 1985, p. 6). But what I am particularly interested in, as the counterpoint to the analytical tradition, is the French epistemology, with structuralism as its immediate heir, both of them being deeply indebted to the subversive force of the Enlightenment philosophy (*ibid.*, p. 4), while at the same time established in polemics, criticism, and opposition to phenomenology and existentialism, most particularly to that of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*ibid.*).

The case of Simone de Beauvoir as the first and beyond any possible comparisons most outstanding founding mother of contemporary feminist theory can provide us with a perfect example of where—how astray—such differences, if not reflected upon and conceptualised, could have brought us.

² Of course, there is also a big difference between contemporary French, and in the broader sense Latin (in the first place Italian, see e.g. Cavarero et al., 1987; see also Braidotti's comment on it, 1994, p. 209) and the more traditionally-minded German philosophical tradition; the way the so-called "French structuralism" has been received in German universities was, during the first decade, quite scandalous, based on very superficial judgements, which seem to be even more strange for an intellectual world with such a long tradition of close reading and thorough re-interpreting. Even today, the structuralist philosophical tradition seems to remain under-represented. In the field of the feminist theory, perhaps the most notorious, but a reverse, "positive" version of the same problem, is that of inventing "the French feminism" of the three French feminists (Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous) which has actually been promoted as such, and produced as a classificatory category, not by the French, but by the Anglo-American scholars. Not just that there is a big difference between the three authors; they have also been—quite problematically—assimilated into the field of "the feminism of difference", and misrepresented, via important exclusions, as the main protagonists of feminism in France (Perrot/Galster, 1999, p. 86).

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND THE PROBLEM OF BEGINNING

Beauvoir's work has been misinterpreted by most Anglo-American feminist readers, even the most distinguished ones. As I will try to show, the misunderstanding originates from, precisely, the described unacknowledged transition from one epistemological frame of reference to another.

As Donna Haraway summarises in her review article on “gender” for a Marxist dictionary: “Despite important differences, all the modern feminist meanings of gender have roots in Simone de Beauvoir’s claim that ‘one is not born a woman’ /.../”³. To say that the notion of “gender” originates from Beauvoir is to say, in other words, that there is a direct continuity between contemporary feminist theory and Beauvoir’s founding text. Actually, this retroactive phantasy is precisely what makes *The Second Sex* the founding text of the whole tradition to come. And this is not a solitary case. Beauvoir’s work has been considered as an example of “anti-essentialism” (Schor, in Burke, Schor, and Whitford, eds., 1994)—of what we today consider anti-essentialism, much appreciated in the actual feminist debates. Not to speak about the discussions on Beauvoir’s presumed social constructivism (Simons, 1995, p. 22) which could actually be said to be among the most widely accepted topoi—not to say stereotypes—of contemporary feminist thought⁴.

In what follows I would like to show, through a close reading, why, precisely, Beauvoir’s is not the case of constructing gender, and how her conceptualisation of sexual difference is related to the philosophical crossroads, at which *The Second Sex* could be said to have first emerged. To make a first step in approaching this problem, one has to return to Beauvoir’s “Introduction” as the most programmatic part of the whole

³ Cf. Haraway, D. (1991), *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. Reinvention of Nature*, Free Association Books, London, p. 131. Curiously enough, in Haraway’s introduction to her programmatic essay on “gender”, one can find the following passage which seems to be quite relevant for our present discussion: “/.../ perhaps especially the French and British feminist psychoanalytic and literary currents, do not appear in my entry on *Geschlecht*. In general, the entry below focuses on writing by US feminists. That is not a trivial scandal” (ibid., p. 129).

⁴ As pointed out by Heinämäa (1997), even Judith Butler—as probably the most influential theorist of “gender”—fell into the same trap (cf. Butler’s essay “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*”).

foundational book of hers, to that part of it where she introduces the concept of the subject via the category of the Other.

The problem of the Other is, for Simone de Beauvoir, a problem of overwhelming dimensions; the Other figures as that basic category from which we have to start at the very first positioning of the question. Man is the subject, woman is the Other, she says; and after that the category of otherness itself is put under examination: “The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality—that of the Self and the Other (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 16; 1953, p. 16). This division “was not originally attached to the division of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical facts”, and it is “a fundamental category of human thought” (ibid.). However, as a category of the human mind, it has to be grasped on the immediate level of social reality, which is mapped by means of a quotation from Lévi-Strauss’ *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*: “/Passage from the state of Nature to the state of Culture is marked by/ man’s ability to view biological relations in the form of systems of opposition: duality, alternation, opposition, and symmetry,” their status being defined as a fundamental social category; they are “the fundamental and immediately given of *social reality*” (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 16-7; 1953, p. 17; translation modified; my italics).

Actually, there is no human community which would not define itself as an opposition to the other(s). “/.../ no community ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself. If three travellers chance to occupy the same compartment, that is enough to make vaguely hostile ‘others’ out of all the rest of the passengers on the train” (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 16; 1953, p. 17). They become suspect others: the foreigners for the natives, the Jews for the anti-Semites, the blacks for the racists, the nation for the colonists, the proletarians for the bourgeoisie. However, despite this similarity of the oppositions, of these series of differences, the original categories of the same and the other cannot be combined into the simple chain of equivalencies, they cannot be put all on the same level. There is one special element among these differences, which has a very definite place in Beauvoir’s argument: sexual difference.

Sexual difference is the one which figures as an exception, from the very beginning on. Beauvoir is quite explicit about it: there is no original event which could be compared with the Jewish Diaspora, the introduction of slavery, the emergence of the proletariat. “In these cases the oppressed retained at least a *before*: they possessed in common a past, a tradition,

sometimes a religion or a culture” (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 18; 1953, p. 18; translation modified), which, in the opposition between man and woman, is not the case: “/.../ there have *always* been women. They are women in virtue of their anatomy and physiology /.../ (ibid., my italics). In Beauvoir’s structure of argumentation, this absence of historical event/cause should mean groundedness in its opposite, biology. But the problem does not seem to be resolved with that, since while “there have always been women,” they have, “throughout history /.../ always been subordinated to men, and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change—it was not something that *occurred*” (ibid.).

Sexual difference is not history. But as an instance which is except from history, it is not biology either—despite the fact that Beauvoir uses such univocally biological terms as “anatomy and physiology” (and that she later even writes about it as a simple “biological fact”). If anything could have been most generally agreed about Beauvoir, it is precisely the fact, that the idea of “biological fact” could not be more at odds with her fundamental philosophical position as any other. Last but not least, that is also why she could have been considered as the founding mother of “gender” in the first place. And yet, despite all her endeavours to do away with biology (and, as already mentioned, despite her own definition of the difference between the One and the Other as “a fundamental *social* reality”), Beauvoir thinks she has to explain sexual difference as a simple “biological fact”: “the division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history” (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 19; 1953, p. 19; my italics).

This is the moment, where Beauvoir’s argument seems to become somehow stuck, somewhere in the opposition between biology and history, in their sharp binary either-or. And this is actually why she needs Lévi-Strauss: not as a scientific theory, or one of the scientific theories she has to rely upon, but as a conceptual means to cope with the “in-between” of this “neither-nor”. To explain it even more precisely: sexual difference is not simply biology, as opposed to history, it is beyond history, while at the same time still being part of it: “The reason why otherness in this case seems to be an absolute is *in part* that it lacks the contingent or incidental nature of historical facts” (ibid., my italics).

If sexual difference is not history, then it is so only by virtue of not being totally except from it; it is not outside of history, or better still: it is only “in part” outside. However “in part” would not mean, that its other part would have been, according to Beauvoir’s own opposition, in biology.

Sexual difference emerges with the lévi-straussian transition from nature to culture, as quoted in Beauvoir, with the emergence of exogamy, with the inaugural status of the human female as the object of exchange in the framework of elementary structures of kinship. Whereas all the diverse instances of difference and otherness (and oppression) have a past and a history, nothing of the kind can be found in women: “The bond that unites her to her oppressors is *not comparable to any other*. /.../ Male and female stand opposed within a primordial *Mitsein*, and woman has not broken it” (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 19; 1953, p. 19; my italics).

In other words, sexual difference is neither nor: neither biology, nor history, it is in between, the transition as such. There is no “before” of sexual difference, while there has *always* been an asymmetry between women and men built into its very core. That is why sexual difference is the paradigm of the opposition between the One and its Other, it is difference itself, a difference of differences, always already there, in the very transition from nature to culture, at the very beginning of the human genus. It is a fundamental fact which cannot be grounded, a kernel which cannot be explained, a heterogeneous element of the chain which is part of it and at the same time its outside, background, medium⁵. As a structure it is without origin. It is, to paraphrase Beauvoir, “always already there, but never given in advance.”

Schematically speaking, Beauvoir’s argument could then be grasped as follows: the woman does not exist (there is no feminine essence, the woman exists only as a myth, a product of male imagination, an ideological figure, etc.), but she is “the eternal Other”, “transhistorically and cross-culturally, woman consistently occupies the position of Other” (Gatens, 1991, p. 51). The woman, as the paradigmatic, primordial Other, does not pre-exist, the only thing which “pre-exists” is difference. Last but not least: this is why the term “sexual difference”, although having its roots in a different frame of reference, can legitimately be used in (re)interpretation of Beauvoir, and it is not in opposition to the fact that the very use of this term “already means a definition of the difference between the sexes” (Fraisie, 1996, p. 45; for the epistemological elaboration of the problem see Canguilhem, 1979, p. 19).

⁵ As already mentioned, that is why Beauvoir has to explain it as a simple “biological fact”, despite all her endeavours to do away with biology.

FROM “THE MISSING LINK” TO “BREAKING THE CHAIN”: PHILOSOPHY IN A NEW KEY

How, then, to include *The Second Sex*, much admired and contested in feminist theory, notoriously neglected in philosophy, into the tradition of feminist theory, as well as into that of philosophy? How to approach the problem as that of a foundational new beginning, while avoiding the ahistorical discussion about “what is living” and “what is dead”, what is feminist and what not feminist enough? How to include her into the philosophical canon, beyond the mere—although important—fact that she was a woman-philosopher, excluded from the canon because of her “feminism, as well as her gender” (Simons, 1995, p. 6-7)? And last but not least: How is it possible to return to Beauvoir after the decades of structuralism and poststructuralism, while at the same time bearing in mind its “negative”, power-knowledge, “light and shadow” Enlightenment legacy, as described by Foucault (1985, p. 6-7)?

In an attempt to give the first, rather vague, insufficiently elaborated outline of an answer to those questions, several comments should be made. First, in discussing the actuality of Beauvoir’s thinking, of her intricate relationship to contemporary feminist theory, her strong “anti-essentialist” stance should not be confused with the popular idea about the uncertain (gender) boundaries, which derive from deconstruction of the stable, the fixed, the given. Although the proposed reading of Beauvoir’s text has brought us to such an understanding of the notion of difference which seems to be rather close to the one elaborated within the structuralist tradition of thought, Beauvoir should not be understood as structuralist *avant la lettre*. As already mentioned, Beauvoir’s approach to sexual difference does not coincide with the notion of gender; on the other hand, her notion of subjectivity does not coincide with the so-called poststructuralist, postmodern, fluid, changing identities either (the attitude where the instability, the indeterminate nature, the ambiguity, are closely related to the shifting positions the subject can assume in positioning him/herself in language).

As I have suggested elsewhere⁶, Beauvoir’s perhaps conceptually most interesting idea for feminist tradition, that of “ambiguity” (of the human

⁶ Bahovec, E. (2001), “Als Feministin kommt man nicht zur Welt. Zur Aktualität von Simone de Beauvoirs Denken”, in Mouffe, Ch., and Trinks, J. (eds.), *Feministische Perspektiven*. Mesotes: Jahrbuch für philosophischen Ost-West-Dialog, Turia und Kant, Wien, pp. 128-139.

condition, of the body, of the woman, etc.), could be (re)interpreted—far beyond its existentialist and phenomenological boundaries—as that of an internal splitting. This is a category which seems to be at the very core of Beauvoir’s thinking, as well as of her legacy for feminism, and of the actuality of her work for philosophical tradition, recently put into the centre of the interest (Vintges, 1999). And it is precisely this internal splitting, so closely related to her conceptualisation of sexual difference as, precisely, pure difference without any “positive” content, this—to use a Hegelian term—inherent negativity, present in her work, through which her thinking could have been linked to a longer tradition of feminist thought: to that of Christine de Pizan, Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, while at the same time providing an epistemological break with the established philosophical tradition(s)⁷.

But Simone de Beauvoir is not just another link in the chain, she is not just another step in the progress of feminist thinking. She is also a turning point, a new beginning, a paradoxical element—a part and a whole, a rule and an exception, a beginning and a completion. It is only through her work that one can envision a tradition of feminist thought as a tradition, linked through, precisely, such a negativity, a difference, a “fissure from within”, an irreducible internal split, which has been elaborated by Beauvoir. It has been elaborated precisely in her appropriation of the concept of sexual difference, i.e. a concept in which the whole structure of contemporary feminist theory and philosophy is, or should be, grounded. Beauvoir seems to be the only one to pose the problem of sexual difference as the main philosophical problem of our time and who does not derive it, as in the case of Irigaray (1984), from introducing psychoanalytical insights into her philosophical discourse. Despite the feminist-theory acknowledgements of Beauvoir’s work for the philosophical tradition in general, the far-reaching consequences of the new beginning of hers has yet to be fully grasped.

Instead of an illusion of a continuous progress of feminist thought—in the sense of its unproblematic or unproblematized Enlightenment legacy (as opposed to that of Foucault, cf. above)—from Pizan to Beauvoir and perhaps also to Irigaray⁸, we should work more thoroughly on both a

⁷ On Beauvoir’s relation to Hegel see Lundgren-Gothlin, E. (1996), *Sex and Existence. Simone de Beauvoir’s ‘The Second Sex’*, Athlone, London.

⁸ It is interesting to note that a close reading of Luce Irigaray’s work could make us aware as to how indebted she actually was to Beauvoir. Curiously enough, the problem of the relation between the two does not really figure, as it seems, even in the main bibliographical references on Irigaray (cf. e.g. Whitford, 1991). As recently

return to Beauvoir, and a return from Beauvoir, which would go far beyond any simplifying backward projections of the present-day feminist conceptions into the past. That is how one could perhaps understand, in discussing philosophical tradition(s), Geneviève Fraisse's idea about feminist thinking as "a tradition without content" (Fraisse, 1998, p. 16).

Last but not least, this is how Simone de Beauvoir's basic insights from *The Second Sex* could be used for the exposure of the conceptual impasses, blind spots, and limitations of philosophy in general, and of structuralism in particular: precisely in its (non)elaboration of the idea of the basic asymmetry of sexual difference, of its oppressive character, which Simone de Beauvoir so persistently and groundedly insists upon. In introducing sexual difference into the very beginning, the zero level of subjectivity, Beauvoir, at first glance, seems to be somehow Freudian. But as already pointed out in a recent polemic, *The Second Sex* should not be reduced to exposing Beauvoir's theoretical closeness to Lacan, "as if her own thinking would not be sufficient to itself to be appreciated" (Galster, 1999, p. 10). In other words, it is the very insistence of hers, of putting sexual difference into the first starting point of her writing, into the first conceptualisation of the subject and its Other ("there has always been women"), as well as her insistence on the irreducible asymmetry of sexual difference ("they have always been subordinated"), which seems to be at the core of the originality of her work and its significance for subverting the philosophical—and feminist—"official knowledge".

To include Beauvoir, as a feminist author, into the philosophical tradition, the originality, even revolutionary character of her encyclopaedic work, "no-less foundation shaking" than that of Descartes (Bauer, 2001, p. 18), would first have to be generally acknowledged. Consequently (actually at the same time, in the same epistemological gesture), the notion of the philosophical tradition itself would have to be changed—and, I would say, changed quite dramatically. Beauvoir did write philosophy in a new key. One cannot but agree with Toril Moi's somehow strongly-put statement, that "no feminist has produced a better theory of the embodied, sexually different human being than Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* /.../ Lacan returned to Freud; it is time for feminist theorists to return to Beauvoir" (Moi, 1999, p. 5).

pointed out by Debra Berghoffen at the annual Simone de Beauvoir Conference at Oxford, this seems to be quite extraordinary for someone so deeply engaged in conceptualising the very problem of female genealogies.

Since it was Beauvoir who opened up new ways to appropriate the philosophical tradition, new ways in opening up the philosophical tradition would be needed to “assimilate” her philosophical “meditations” into its hard core. Beauvoir should be considered as a paradoxical thinker, her position being the one at the crossroads. In philosophy, this means at the crossroads between existentialism and structuralism, emerging at the time of *The Second Sex*, and at crossroads at which, as pointed out, *The Second Sex* first emerged, and from which also the actuality of Beauvoir’s thinking emerges⁹. In feminist theory, this means not only being a kind of Virginia Woolf’s outsider of the established thinking tradition, but—should I say—a feminist Robin Hood: an outlaw which, beyond any marriage of convenience, has to become an in-law.

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⁹ My point here is precisely that Beauvoir has to be put at the crossroads between existentialism (in its relation to phenomenology) and the emerging structuralism (and not in their opposition, as Foucault would like to have it—not in relation to Beauvoir, of course), by studying thoroughly her own way of transgressing the very opposition, and her own elaboration of the epistemological break between the two by, precisely, positioning sexual difference at the very heart of the problem of women’s oppression, as well as at the very heart of philosophy.

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The Pedagogic Dimension of Women's and Gender Studies

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(Translated by Tobe Levin)

1. WHAT ARE WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES?

Women's and gender studies arose in the context of the new women's movement. The field has always been politically-oriented and emancipatory, aiming to contribute to women's liberation by means of analyzing inequalities and differences.

Women's studies emphasizes the importance of sisterhood, linking the personal and the political. It censures the false separation between private and public spheres and focuses on diversity with regard to 'race', ethnicity, class, age etc. while analyzing and criticizing the oppression of women as a group. Women's studies also looks at women's historical and contemporary experience as well as the meaning of a feminist consciousness (see Robinson 1997, 3). In the nearly thirty years since the field was founded, numerous feminist discourses have been developed and superseded: feminism of equality or difference, structural categories woman/gender and the distinction between gender and sex, for instance. In Germany and elsewhere, the focus of women's studies has shifted to the category gender and an analysis of gender relationships.

Identifying a "symbolic system of dual gender" („*System der Zweigeschlechtlichkeit*") (Hagemann-White 1984) the eighties explored the subjective component in human behavior, calling it "doing gender": "Gender isn't something we 'have' or 'are' but something we do" (Hagemann-White 1993, 68). The objective conditions and social basis for contradictions in women's lives were brought together in the concept of "double socialization" („*doppelte Vergesellschaftung*") (Becker-Schmidt 1987). This theory of "gender as a social category" looks at the patriarchal and economic structure of domination and works out the systematic moment of women's oppression—focusing in particular on the division of labor in the work force and the family.

Then, in the early nineties, the "Gender Debate" set out on quite a different track. What started it all was Judith Butler's book (Butler

1990/German edition 1991), which provoked heated controversy. Should the category “gender” be dissolved? The suggestion that we can’t really distinguish between sex and gender, and the idea that the material body can be declared a fiction first configured as meaningful and thus called into existence by discourse itself, encountered significant opposition but also proved to be extraordinarily productive, causing a paradigm shift in research and teaching in women’s and gender studies which has left many traces.

From the start, women’s and gender studies have not only developed their own discourse but contributed to a more general critique in the humanities and sciences. This occurred not only as a result of academic habits of mind but was given impetus by the new women’s movement that demanded a rethinking of modern science, academic institutions and relations of power (see Lang/Sauer 1997; Kraus 2000). Pioneering new fields of knowledge while at the same time performing systematic critiques of existing knowledge and epistemologies—this is both the accomplishment of and the difficulty with women’s and gender studies which must master its discipline in duplicate: on the one hand, practitioners must know the main- or malestream canon and deal with it critically; at the same time, women’s and gender studies must point out those blind spots where knowledge has been suppressed or erased, and develop innovative approaches.

2. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF WOMEN’S AND GENDER STUDIES

Hand in hand with the development of women’s and gender studies has been the continual effort to anchor its results, theories and methodology in university research and teaching.

Research on women and women’s studies experienced a spontaneous birth in the universities toward the end of the seventies. In Germany shortly thereafter first attempts were made to institutionalize these initiatives: one important step toward recognition was the founding of regional working groups for feminist academics at various universities and the setting up of committees to co-ordinate course offerings within the disciplines. Creation of women’s studies professorships (today we have 74) and the launch of interdisciplinary centers led step by step to an institutionalization of Women’s and Gender Studies within German universities. This nearly twenty-five year history has been characterized

in research on higher education by its initial culture of opposition which soon became interventionist (Kirsch-Auwärter 1996; Müller 1997) and as a move from women's to gender studies (Braun 1995). We can observe four phases in this development: 1. The initial phase, intimately connected to the women's movement and tending to remain more or less outside the institution; 2. The phase of invasion into and anchoring within the university, marked by discussion of autonomy versus institutionalization; 3. The professionalization phase in which women's and gender studies have been increasingly coordinated and stabilized by means of the first generation of active women's studies professorships (Hagemann-White 1995, 23-41); and 4. The so-called institutionalization phase (Bock 1998, 106), in which women's studies majors and certificate programs have been set up, beginning in about the mid-90s and not yet completed today.

The advantage of institutionalisation doubtlessly lies in making women's and gender studies visible. In the best of cases supportive networks within the university are built up and, at the same time, they have positive political effects outside the academy. Nonetheless—and this is frequently discussed in Germany—separation into departments as a quasi-discipline risks marginalizing and ghettoizing the field since 'normal' departments can then feel 'relieved' of their responsibility to integrate women's studies. Another problem however remains academic recognition, since many women's studies programs choose courses from a conglomerate of various disciplines and available resources.

3. CURRICULUM-PARADIGMS

Institutionalization of women's and gender studies goes hand in hand with changes in curricula and reflection on given theories and methods. Three preconditions for a successful curriculum are often suggested:

a) Interdisciplinarity

Women's and gender studies are concerned with the changing relationship among ideology, patterns of thought, and social reality. To deal with this complexity, interdisciplinarity is especially productive. It takes an issue or an area to examine from various standpoints applying different theoretical and methodological approaches moving beyond the traditional, rigid boundaries of the disciplines. Some authors stress, that a critical interdisciplinarity may be understood as a postcolonial strategy which is conducive to cross-cultural insight (Pryse 1998).

Interdisciplinary seminars are also ideal for teaching feminist thought, its history and basic concepts, as well as themes in women's and gender research. But in addition to interdisciplinary pathways, women's and gender studies also need a self-reflective approach to the various disciplines that are home to lecturers and students. Familiarity with one's own discipline is part of standard university expectations and essential for professional qualification. Maintaining disciplinary competence is of further importance in order to remind the fields of their long-term responsibility to integrate the insights of women's and gender studies into the basic canon, making it integral to any curriculum.

b) International perspectives / Cross-Cultural Analysis

Feminism, women's research and the women's movement have all—historically and at the present time—developed within an international context. To compare developments cross-nationally can be fruitful not only for analysis of various thematic areas in women's and gender research but also in terms of theoretical and methodological dimensions, for instance, inquiry into epistemological concepts, that is the question whether despite national difference we find internationally certain elements in common such as the movement away from universalistic notions toward differentialist theories.

Against the background of a broad, contemporary debate about globalization, for example, women's and gender studies cannot ignore social context and developments. Modernization and social change can be viewed at the start of the new millennium as a transnational interweaving of labor, economics and communication. For any analysis in the social sciences or popular culture, tensions in the relationship between the local and the global have become increasingly interesting. Here, too, a transnational, comparative, cross-cultural approach in women's and gender studies is appropriate, in particular when issues arise such as democracy, the universality of human rights, social movements outside established political parties or transnational media and their influence on cultural differences. As mentioned before, there exists a close relationship between interdisciplinary methods and cross-cultural analysis: Interdisciplinarity “produces an intellectual flexibility that is conducive for cross-cultural border-crossing” (Pryse 1998).

c) Diversity

The effort to take such questions into consideration when developing curricula presents a theoretical and political challenge and leads to the third premise: diversity. The most recent research in women's and gender

studies is by definition concerned with questioning borders and boundaries, which have been instrumental in power relations. From this perspective it should be self-evident that questions of inclusion and exclusion need to be researched in terms of the political, social, ethnic and cultural conditions that pertain to them. Tensions in the sisterhood, that is, what women share and what divides them, must also be examined, and not exclusively with a gaze derived from the U.S. American or western European context.

It is important—for students and teachers—“to work creatively with differences between women, and to struggle to analyze and overcome racism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, both in the classroom and the academy.” (Robinson 1997, 12) If we conceive of feminist theorizing as an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural project and stress its political relevance, then feminist theory, to explore what divides or joins women, must link to other theoretical traditions such as post-colonialism, men’s studies and queer studies etc.

4. AN EVALUATION OF TEACHING BOOKS

In the ATHENA network a panel of experts analyzed the use of teaching books in European countries. They found out, that women’s and gender studies in western European countries are not homogenous, on the contrary: various conditions, requirements and forms of institutionalization lead to more different than common practices in education and research. In view of these differences it is not surprising that the analysis of the use of teaching books in Europe leads to an interpretation that sees a connection between the degree of institutionalization of women’s studies and the use of teaching materials. In the ‘highly organized’ countries, mainly in England, interdisciplinary introductory teaching books are frequently created and published to serve as teaching materials in the introductory programs. In countries with a lower degree of institutionalization these sorts of books are (still) almost non-existent.

But this statement about the *existence* of teaching books is not identical with the intensity of their *use*. The answers to our questionnaires show, that in all, in the ATHENA network participating countries, there exists a particular distance and scepticism towards teaching books. Most books are criticized as they seem to have too many deficits and gaps. Nearly all answers to the questionnaires show that the teachers prefer ‘handmade’

and actual teaching materials, i.e.: a reader which contains articles from feminist journals, articles from anthologies etc. On the other hand they use books which seem to be fruitful for theoretical and methodological discussions or monographies which have become ‘classics’ for the theory of feminism.

Some Conclusions are: “According to the national reports based on the questionnaires, we can conclude that there exists a wide variety in teaching material. There are some hesitations towards the idea of developing one European textbook. Especially the notion of diversity, and the differences in teaching practices are highly relevant in the context of Europe. Considering existing textbooks many teachers point to the Anglo-Saxon dominance, and the habit of presenting a ‘universal’ body of knowledge, that is in fact a representation of discoveries by white western feminists. This can be the case, even if a text book addresses the issue of diversity in the main text; the subtext might tell a different story. The genealogy of feminism and of women’s studies is very diversified throughout Europe. Based on our investigations, we can draw the conclusion that diversity (in social, biographical and educational perspective) and the possible unacknowledged consequences of canonisation of knowledge are important issues to address the moment when new forms of teaching Women’s Studies are designed. A new textbook for European Women’s Studies can be part of new forms of teaching.” (Brouns et.al. 2000, 49)

The questionnaires named some criteria for an “ideal” textbook: A satisfying teaching book should profile an international perspective, present a broad variety of theories and methods and work out the connection between feminist theory and feminist movements. It should observe the following didactic criteria:

- a) An overall vision of the wealth of feminist thought and science;
- b) A tool for critical thinking;
- c) Allowing students and teachers to reflect on diversities;
- d) A comparative and international perspective;
- e) High didactic quality.

(Brouns et. al. 2000, 44)

5. DIDACTICS OF WOMEN’S AND GENDER STUDIES

A basic question in women’s and gender studies is whether ‘another’ field of teaching and research, needs ‘other’ curricula and ‘other’

pedagogical tools and methods and if so, which ones. Feminist teaching, learning and research have been influenced by their questioning of conventional, canonized knowledge with its alleged objectivity and truth. A possible corrective has been (will be) the category of experience as central and innovative.

Experience and Learning

It's been nearly thirty years since authors Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge published a book about the civic sphere and experience (Negt and Kluge 1972). They contradict the model of a bourgeois public as *the* (only) political one (Habermas 1962/ 1990) and replace it with their view of an 'other', 'lively' and, at that time, proletarian public. In doing so, they rely on the idea of experience: life experience of oppressed and/or marginalized groups resulting from social exclusion or conflict can be articulated as experiences of injustice and can be generalized to cover a broader political reality. This is the starting point for their reflections.

The women's movement (and the student movement) in the 70s made explicit reference to this and other theories (see for instance Paolo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed). They saw experience as a unifying and politicizing resource, important for collective learning. In practice this took the form of consciousness-raising groups as formed in the USA (Frauen 1975). To recognize a shared experience of oppression and to learn from it was the theory behind feminist awareness-raising in the numerous newly-founded women's centers. The consciousness-raising groups represented feminist analysis, organizational structure, practical methodology and a specific means for producing a feminist public, and at the same time exemplified the attempt to organize and politicize the contradictory experience of women's lives.

That this exchange within the group or social movement placed a higher value on discovering similarities rather than differences, and that this process meant exclusion of that which was different, were recognized as disadvantages fairly quickly. That reliance on the personal didn't always lead to politicization but often enough remained mired in publication of intimacy marked the limitations of the concept (Cohen 1994). In the last few years women's and gender studies have been increasingly concerned with working out how identification with the women's movement can channel contradiction and lead to a narrowing of potential diversity. How difficult it is for marginalized groups, beyond representation, to bring their claims to public attention and engage in political struggle, and to

integrate their aims has been addressed most directly by post-colonial critics (Spivak 1988).

At the same time a certain understanding gained acceptance, that experience can't be counted as real or authentic and therefore can't serve to "prove the truth." Joan Scott examined the relevance of as well as problems with the category of experience to reveal hidden dangers in attempts to examine it (Scott 1992). She emphasized the discursive character and social constructedness of experience, and the need to historicize and deconstruct it. There's no direct line from authentic experience by way of raised consciousness toward, for instance, a common class identity or so the author concludes.

Recent pronouncements concerning themes involved in feminist pedagogy have little to say about these ambivalences. While preparing this talk I was surprised to discover that experience, consciousness raising and liberatory pedagogy still remains so central in publications on women's and gender studies. Experience serves as a guarantee for politicization and for democracy in learning, capable of challenging the hierarchical structures of power traditional in the university (Griffin 1994). Experience also represents that dimension which ties feminist pedagogy to political action (Kurth 1994). It appears that many people in women's and gender studies still see their main task in doing feminist consciousness-raising work and agitation (see also Brown 1997). And they want to be doing that, even though a younger generation of academic women, at least in Germany, is demanding a de-politicization of gender studies, that is, they would like the field to relinquish its efforts toward women's advancement within the university and other institutions (Annuß 1999).

Despite the fact that the category of experience has, so to speak, lost its innocence, it still can be seen as an important component of communication and social practice capable of promoting identity and encouraging individual and collective learning. It can take those excluded from discourse as its theme and it can lead to politicization. Also feminist models of pedagogy based on dialogue and responsibility for one's own learning don't have to be seen as superfluous.

Nonetheless, teachers have got to face those who raise questions about seminars with 100 and more participants, with men and women of different social backgrounds and skin colors: is an emphasis on experience, empathy and politicization timely and effective under such

circumstances? It may be suspected that such an emphasis might, instead, make women's studies seem as though it were taking place not in the university but on another planet.

The observation of bell hooks (1994, 160) should be discussed, that liberatory pedagogical practices, the models of dialogic and negotiated learning, are undermined by overcrowded classrooms. Also it may be asked, how the curricula of women's and gender studies are related to the domain of the 'vocational', to the career opportunities of women's studies graduates. And last but not least we should analyze how the usual focus on women's life and experience still fits in mixed and mainstream classrooms.

Conclusion

In my view, and in light of reform efforts within the university, it's time to reassess women's studies. Questions regarding the core curriculum (what bodies of knowledge are relevant and why?), the teaching agenda, teaching tools and learning methods belong to this discussion as much as the basic questions of women's studies' usefulness and applicability and what good it is in praxis (see also Dever 1999). Above all it seems important to me to discuss more emphatically transmission of the relevant disciplinary tools. Women's and gender studies should not overemphasize feminist knowledge but rather be concerned with research excellence, not only nourishing our students' political and social competence but also ensuring that the next-generation-researcher will change the academy itself, from the inside out.

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A Few Remarks on Gender, Men's Studies, and a Possible Republic of Differences

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It is really unfortunate that my very good friend Maurizio Vaudagna cannot be here today. As a professor of American History and one of the few male Italian scholars to use the categories of gender and, more specifically, of men's studies, along with the more established ones, he would have been the best person to speak about the political relevance of gender studies from an interesting angle that would perfectly integrate what has been discussed today. Maurizio is currently leading a two-year national research team, financed by the Ministry of the University on "Public and Private in Twentieth-Century American History: Family, Subjectivity, and Public Life in Comparative Perspective". To give you an idea of Maurizio's own perspective, one of his specific contributions deals with "Victorian Virility, Democratic Emotionalism, and Patriotic Citizenship in Franklin D. Roosevelt's *Fireside Chats*". Since my field is American Literature, my contribution to this research concerns canon formation in the pivotal critical work of F. O. Matthiessen (1902-1950), where leftist political activism, professorship at Harvard, and a sexual proclivity that had to be kept private mingle and clash in a finally dramatic way that led Matthiessen to suicide, at the dawn of Cold War and McCarthyism. Part of the Proceedings of the final Conference on Public and Private (held in Turin in May 17-19, 2001) will appear in Italian in *Acoma, Rivista internazionale di studi americani*, VII, 21, estate-autunno 2001. The rest in English in a volume published by Otto, Turin, 2002.

Coming to the general theme of today's meeting, the circumstance of finding myself one of very few men in a large roomful of academic women makes it easier for me (and perfectly appropriate for the occasion, I believe, as an act of restitution) to adopt an autobiographical mode of address that women have taught me (authorized me) to use.

My first gesture of gender studies activism materialized around 1990, in Messina, Sicily. Empowered by the fact of holding a new chair of American Literature in that University, and having therefore acquired some sort of authority in the profession, I suggested to Maurizio and Marina Camboni (long-time feminist and also chair of American Literature) that we propose the theme of gender for the biennial

Conference of the Italian Association for American Studies, due in 1991, and that it be held in Messina, in a Sicilian stronghold of patriarchal culture. Gender had never yet been fully considered in our Association, and many of us felt it was high time to do it. Maurizio and Marina were rather hesitant at first, wisely pondering the “natural” unadventurousness of our Association and of its current President, but we finally decided to try. The President happened to be a woman, and yet, when another hand was raised from the floor suggesting a different theme, she was heard to say “Thank God there’s another proposal”. Nevertheless, the Assembly voted for “Gender”. Liana Borghi was on the Board, and became a precious guide for the steering committee. Rosi Braidotti landed in Messina as one of our three leading speakers, and it was love at first sight. The Conference turned out very lively indeed, at times even riotous, and it registered an unprecedented number of contributions: fifty-five. We had fun. The proceedings of the Messina Conference, mostly in English, are collected in the volume *Methodologies of Gender*, ed. by Mario Corona and Giuseppe Lombardo, Herder, Rome, 1993, pp. 622.

As a result of all these interactions, now that I have moved back to my native North, and teach at the University of Bergamo, I have set up a Center of Studies on the Languages of Identities, informally logo-ed “Centro Zebra” because of its variegated symbol. Liana Borghi is of course on its National Board, and Rosi Braidotti on the International one. The inaugural Seminar (May 18, 1999), held by the Italian promoters, has produced five interconnected essays on literary subjects (novels or poems by Vittorio Pescatori, Adrienne Rich, Henry James, and Louisa May Alcott) designed for an Italian audience and collected in *Incrocio di genere. De(i)stituzioni, transitività e passaggi testuali*, a cura di Mario Corona, Edizioni Sestante, Bergamo 1999. The second Seminar, on national identities (mainly British, but also U.S. and Italian), was organized by Alessandra Marzola in March 2000. Its Proceedings (partly in English) are presented in *Racconti di identità*, a cura di Alessandra Marzola, Edizioni Sestante, Bergamo 2001. A new research group, vaguely affiliated to Zebra and led by Stefano Rosso (University of Bergamo) and Giorgio Mariani (University of Rome), will make its debut at Bergamo on November 29-30 and December 1, 2001, with a Conference on “The Seductions of Violence”. Masculinities at war will be on the forefront.

All these initiatives answer a deeply felt need to integrate areas of research that have been fruitfully cultivated in the United States and elsewhere for the past thirty years in a necessarily separate way. We

would also need to have gender notions circulate more widely in larger areas of Italian culture, but that is a difficult target. Italian feminism can by now boast a very rich experience, even in the traditionally male domain of philosophy (Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero). Even a few gay studies have achieved international visibility (I'll just mention Mario Mieli's *Elements of Homosexual Critique*, originally published in 1977). Gender notions have been intrinsic to Italian anthropology from the beginning as a matter of course, and have more recently entered the field of sociology as well, but with very few exceptions Italian literary and historical culture at large has been and still is reluctant to perceive the relevance of the huge work done on gender, and to apply its results to Italian situations. At least three of our most consolidated cultural traditions seem to unwittingly conspire against gender and difference, in what I have called "an unholy alliance": humanism, catholicism, and marxism¹. Universalism appears to be their common assumption, though declined in specific and sometimes conflicting ways. If our work here in Italy seems harder than elsewhere, the problem of a possible integration of differences is bitterly disputed in the United States as well: witness the diffidence that permeated the Conference on Aesthetics and Difference, called by Emory Elliott at the University of California at Riverside in 1998, where the champions of aesthetics and of multiculturalism kept to their own parallel paths. Yet, an integration of differences, a universal negotiation of a republic of differences (vs. an "anything goes" attitude, that would make of multiculturalism a sort of undifferentiated supermarket) is probably going to be a priority theme in women's and men's agenda for the coming years. In this direction, I would mention the work of Satya P. Mohanty in the United States, who has been raising questions about the possibility of objective values in literary theory², while in Italy Giacomo Marramao, a political philosopher, is addressing wide-ranging issues of different citizenships in a multicultural and globalized world³.

¹ I briefly presented the issue in "Une difficulté italienne" (*Liber*, no.30, mars 1997, p.11), and elaborated it in "Resistance to Difference in Italy: The Unholy Alliance of Humanism, Catholicism, and Marxism", to be printed in the proceedings of *Aesthetics and Difference: Cultural Diversity, Literature, and the Arts*, University of California at Riverside, October 22-24, 1998. In Italian: "L'empia alleanza. Umanesimo, cattolicesimo e marxismo contro la differenza", in *Estetica e differenza*, a cura di Paola Zaccaria, Palomar, Bari, forthcoming.

² Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, Cornell University Press, 1977.

³ Giacomo Marramao – Angelo Bolaffi, *Frammento e sistema*, Donzelli, Rome 2001.

Speaking from the inside as an “outsider”

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GENDER, SPACE, ARCHITECTURE. AN INTRODUCTION

Research on gender and architecture first started to appear in the late 1970s, largely written by women and from an overtly political feminist angle. Until recently much of this work has remained internal to the discipline, concerned largely with the architectural profession and issues concerning the ‘man-made’ environment¹. Published in 1992, Beatriz Colomina’s edited volume. *‘Sexuality and Space’* was the first collection of work to bring ideas about gender generated in other fields—such as anthropology, art history, cultural studies, film theory, geography, psychoanalysis and philosophy—to bear on architectural studies. What such work provides is an interdisciplinary context for a gendered critique of architecture, one which expands the terms of the discourse by making links, through gender, with methodological approaches in other academic disciplines. Gender theory, often drawn from other fields of study, provides useful tools and/models for critiquing architectural culture—design, theory and history.

Traditionally, architecture has been seen as the design and production of buildings by professional architects, which are then discussed by critics, theorists and historians as completed, self-contained objects in terms of style and aesthetics. Marxist critics have extended this field of discussion by examining buildings as the products of the processes of capitalism and architecture as an articulation of the political, social and cultural values of dominant classes and elite social groupings. Although such work has

¹ “Be it acknowledged: The man-made environments which surround us reinforce conventional patriarchal definitions of women’s role in society and spatially imprint those sexist messages on our daughters and sons. They have conditioned us to an environmental myopia which limits our self-concepts ... which limits our visions and choices for ways of living and working ... which limits us by not providing the environments we need to support our autonomy or by barring our access to them. It is time to open our eyes and see the political nature of this environmental oppression!” (‘Women’s Environmental Rights: A Manifesto’ from *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* (1981)).

seldom focused on gender difference specifically, many feminists have drawn on the critical methodologies developed through a class-based analysis of architecture in order to consider the ways in which systems of gender and class oppression intersect with one another and with systems of racial, ethnic and sexual domination.

Most recently, architectural criticism has recognised that architecture continues after the moment of its design and construction. The experience, perception, use, appropriation and occupation of architecture need to be considered in two ways: first, as the temporal activity which takes place after the ‘completion’ of the building, and which fundamentally alters the meaning of architecture, displacing it away from the architect and builder towards the active user; second, as the reconceptualisation of architectural production, such that different activities reproduce different architectures over time and space. By recognising that architecture is constituted through its occupation, and that experiential aspects of the occupation of architecture are important in the construction of identity, such work intersects with feminist concerns with aspects of ‘the personal’, the subject and subjectivity.

Furthermore, in the light of poststructuralist readings of architecture, we must consider that architecture is always in part a representation. As well as existing as a material, three-dimensional object, architecture also exists in the form of architects’ drawings (for example, plans, sections, elevations) and publicity periodical disseminations (for example, written descriptions and photographs). Architecture also appears indirectly in various forms of cultural documentation, all of which contain representations of gender as well as class, sexuality and race. Considering architecture in this way allows architectural practice to be thought of as buildings, images and written scripts, as well as designs, theories and histories and their various intersections. This position can be and has been subjected to gender and feminist critiques, which show that architecture is gendered in all its representational forms.

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First published in 2000, the book “Gender Space Architecture”, An interdisciplinary introduction, edited by Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden, provides a comprehensive introduction to issues of gender as they pertain to architectural studies. Including a range of key texts from both within and outside architecture published over the last twenty years, this book aims to provide a clear framework by which to investigate the subject, that is the intersection of gender, space and architecture, an interdisciplinary context for a gendered critique of architecture.

RETHINKING ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

The framework sketched above has raised two main issues for the practice of architectural history: first, new objects of study—the actual material which historians choose to look at; and second, the intellectual criteria by which historians interpret those objects of study. An important body of work coming out of US scholarship, specifically East Coast universities such as Princeton, and publications such as *Assemblage* and *ANY*, highlights the relevance of such methodological issues. Critics such as Beatriz Colomina, Zeynep Celik and Mabel Wilson, have focused on developing sustained feminist critiques of the traditional male canon. Using feminist interpretive techniques, they place issues of gender, race and ethnicity at the heart of the architectural practice of such male masters as Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier.

Simultaneous to the emergence of differing feminist positions concerning class, race and sexuality, architectural history has become more critical of how patriarchy, capitalism, heterosexism and racism operate in the production of architecture. Theoretical approaches suggest new aspects of architecture to explore theory and suggest new kinds of interpretive modes. Feminist theory as a critical theory informs architectural history. Drawing on the work by queer theorists as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose notions of ‘performativity’ have provoked those in spatial disciplines to look at ‘place’ as a critical location for ‘performing’ gender.

PLACES THROUGH *THE* BODY

Consequently, there is a growing need to look at the relationship between bodies and places, not because of an academic requirement to sort out paradoxes, but because the ways in which we live out body/place

relationships are political. Sure, we all have bodies. but the idea that we *have* bodies—that bodies are a possession that the individual has—is culturally, historically and geographically specific. Further, the impression that the individual is located *in a body* and that being in a body is also about being in a place warrants further scrutiny. It turns out that our universals—the body, the body in place, being in place—are actually unique, specific, singular. Paradoxically, then, at the same time that we all have bodies, none of us has the same body as anyone else; conversely, at the same time as we live in a particular place, no place is completely isolated from everywhere else (even Robinson Crusoe’s island was connected to other parts of the world — just not very often!).

Our bodies are unique, yet everyone else has a body too. If our bodies and places are unique, then this implies that only we can experience the world in the way we do — but, since other people have bodies and can live in the same places, our experiences cannot after all be unique. The argument is moving in circles. Both bodies and places need to be freed from the logic that says that they are either universal or unique. Instead, it would be better to think of the ways in which bodies and places are understood, how they are made and how they are interrelated, one to the other—because this is how we live our lives—through places, through the body.

In her thought-provoking article, “Notes towards a Politics of Location” (1984), Adrienne Rich begins to doubt Virginia Woolf’s claim that women have no country and that women’s country is the whole world. Instead of “globalizing” the experience of “woman,” Rich argues that she does have a country and that, much as she might wish it otherwise, she cannot simply divest herself of her geographical location. If an appropriate feminist politics is to be devised, Rich says, “I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create” (1984: 212).

She urges that an analysis of these intersections of gender of race, sexuality and politics in place begins with an analysis of “the geography closest in – the body. Here at least,” she continues, “I exist” (1984: 212). Of course, there have been many studies of the body in a wide range of disciplines,’ and geographers themselves have sought to incorporate the body into their studies of lived place and spatial relationships. Nevertheless, cultural geographers have recently been intrigued by the idea of the geography closest in. For Rose, Rich’s arguments suggest that

the female body is a site of struggle. Rich's cartography of the female body maps out a particular political terrain:

The politics of pregnability and motherhood. The politics of orgasm. The politics of rape and incest, of abortion, birth control, forcible sterilization. Of prostitution and marital sex. Of what had been named sexual liberation. Of prescriptive heterosexuality. Of lesbian existence. (Rich 1984: 212-13; see also Rose 1993: 29)

For Rose, the body is placed "geopolitically": its location is marked by its position within specific historical and geographical circumstances. It matters, to Rich, that she is a citizen of the United States of America and beyond.

Meanwhile, black politics at home made Rich acutely aware of her whiteness, while in Nazi Germany she would not have been white enough. For Rich, it is not enough to assert some kind of universal feminist struggle, but to recognize the specificities of women's struggles in their situatedness, their location in history, on the map. "This body. White female; or female, white" (Rich 1984: 215). The distinction may seem trivial, but Rich talks about the ways in which white and black babies were separated into separate wards in the hospital where she was born. In the first instance, she was marked by skin colour, by blood. She was white and female: children marked by race and sex: "To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It mean recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go." (Rich 1984: 215-16)

The body is both mobile and channeled, both fluid and fixed, into places. It is not only the "geopolitics of the body" but also the politics of connection and disconnection, of rights over the body, of the body as a site of struggle. Rich maps out her connections to the world, maps out its territories, and shows where she is within these connections and territories. This cartography of places through her body reveals that ways in which she is positioned through her body, but also how her body becomes capable of imagining these connections and territories differently. Thus, Rich moves fluidly through spatial registers because her mappings of connections, of territories, subvert commonplace understandings of places as bounded, sealed areas. She shows that these spatial registers—these geopolitics of the body—are produced through unequal power relations, between men and women, between blacks and whites, between heterosexuals and homosexuals, between one nation and another.

Beginning her analysis with the body allows her to map her place, to map out a history of spatial registers: points, connections, dislocations, boundaries, territories, countries, regions, power blocs. Her aim: to bring politics down to earth, to create a ground for struggle (1984: 218-19).

The meaty body is where Rich wishes to ground politics. However, it remains an uncomfortable place. Rich's geography closest in is meant to stretch out to incorporate others in struggle and, because the geography of the body is closest in, it is also the ground on which to fight for women's rights. In this, Rich herself marks the body through exactly the same power relations she is hoping to overthrow: she is "woman," "Jew," "lesbian"—there are not many other places to be. Rich's use of fluid spatial registers suggest other ways of thinking places and bodies. The body is not simply the bearer of some pre-given cultural categories. For Grosz, "the body cannot be understood as a neutral screen, a biological *tabula rasa* onto which masculine and feminine could be indifferently projected" (1994: 18).

Rich argues that her white skin has taken her places and stopped her going to other places, but Grosz would also insist that the privileging of skin or of whiteness or of white skin is a particular relationship, interlocked with other hierarchical forms of power, that make the body in other ways. For Grosz, the body also exists beyond social relations and the categories that social relations impose on the body. While medical science has been dominated, since the end of the eighteenth century, by the idea that the sexes are opposite (see Laqueur 1990), Grosz wishes to argue that bodies are unstable and indeterminate. Such medical knowledge might have permitted the better treatment of diseases specific to women, but it has also perpetuated a particular kind of understanding of the relationship between men and women: they are opposite, opposed. Yet men and women have more in common with each other than with any other "thing". For Grosz, this suggests an alternative understanding of embodied difference: rather than being opposites, people might instead be "neighbors". Not one sex, nor opposite sex, but neighborhood sex: a thousand sexes, a conurbation of sexes.

From this perspective, sex, gender, race, skin, blood are indeterminate and unstable signifiers of the differences and similarities between bodies. This understanding provokes questions, not about the real make-up of bodies, but about how bodies are really made-up. More and more, it seems as if the relationship between bodies and places is like not only

Alice's journey through Wonderland but also Dorothy's trip down the yellow brick road to the Wizard of Oz.

Alice's body was never stable enough to qualify as being that of a little girl: she shrunk, grew, was in place and out of place. Alice, in Wonderland, never quite fitted in. Though she tried to understand, her bodies and their places never stabilized long enough to make any real sense, though sense there was of a kind. Dorothy was transported in a whirlwind of dreams to a strange land where she never follows its strange logic, partly maybe because all the male characters appeared to be missing something vital. As she crossed from one place to another, Dorothy refigured and unmasked the charade of bodies. Eventually she gets to her goal, but even the Wizard turns out to be a sham; seemingly all powerful, but only while he was hidden. Alice and Dorothy, hand in hand, point to the fragile illusions through which the endurances and solidities of bodies and places are built.

Bit by bit, bodies become relational, territorialized in specific ways. Indeed, places themselves might be said to be exactly the same: they, too, are made-up out of relationships, between within and beyond them; territorialized through scales, borders, geography, geopolitics. Bodies and places, then, are made-up through the production of their spatial registers, through relations of power. Bodies and places are woven together through intricate webs of social and spatial relations that are made by, and make, embodied subjects.

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