ANGLO SAXONICA

REVISTA **ANGLO SAXONICA** SER. III **N. 6** 2013

ULICES • CEAUL
University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies
Centro de Estudos Anglísticos da Universidade de Lisboa

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CONTENTS / ÍNDICE

WOMEN STUDIES

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Introduction

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Introduction

This special issue of *Anglo Saxonica* came about when ULICES organized the international conference *Women and the Arts: Dialogues in Female Creativity in the US and Beyond* (Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon, June 15-17 2011), having invited Sandra M. Gilbert to be one of the plenary speakers. Isabel Fernandes, director of our research center, asked Gilbert to co-edit, with the conference organizers, an issue of the journal dedicated to feminism, and she generously accepted the challenge. This is the result of that ongoing cooperation.

Under the generic title "Feminisms Today and Tomorrow", we have brought together the contributions of scholars coming from different geographical, academic, and cultural backgrounds, covering a range of perspectives, including philosophy, theology, literature, culture, and the arts. Unfortunately, the fact that the texts were to be written in English led to the exclusion of some voices, since there were several invitees who did not feel at ease presenting their ongoing research in a second language. Maybe this is a sign that it is time for us to start questioning the impact of linguistic imperialism in the academy these days. Still, though the majority of the contributors come from English-speaking countries and are women (which makes us wonder if this territory is still a woman's world), I believe the volume gathers diverse and compelling works by scholars who share their latest feminist research, allowing us to perceive common threads and identify recurrent thematics, yielding an overview of what unites us and what makes us different.

Diana V. Almeida
ULICES – University of Lisbon
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It is a pleasure to have been asked to join with Diana V. Almeida in the project whose fruits we offer you here. Around the world, as these essays show, feminist theory and scholarship is alive and well. The movement that had its origins centuries ago in the impassioned early modern writings of Christine de Pizan and Sor Juana de la Cruz, and more recently, in the twentieth-century treatises of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, has gradually transformed private and public spheres from the nineteen seventies to the present. Now, with women's studies and gender studies programs firmly established on many campuses – for instance, in Latin America and Australia, in Europe and the United States, in India and Japan – and with women entering formerly male-dominated professions in increasing numbers, we can begin to believe that feminist activists have been successful in their efforts to change the traditional hierarchies of our culture. Yet as the incisive analyses offered here indicate, there is still much work to be done. Such fields as philosophy and theology, art history and literary criticism, anthropology and sociology – all represented in this issue – continue to pose problems that need to be addressed by revisionary thinkers like the ones whose work we collect here. Below we present abstracts of their essays, which should dramatize the range and ambition of their research. But it is a privilege to publish all these articles in their entirety, in a single lively issue of *Anglo Saxonica.*

Sandra M. Gilbert
Berkeley, California, United States

In "Difference and Hierarchy Revisited by Feminism", Irene Ramalho Santos draws on a plurality of sources to study the historical and philosophical origins of the subaltern position that for over two millennia has been attributed to and assumed by women in Western culture. Considering a wide range of examples drawn from the contemporary media that testify to the prevalence of sexist and misogynistic practices all over the world, the essay questions the ways difference has been conceptualized over the centuries and inserted into a hierarchy that establishes the predominance of a normative subject and debases alterity.

According to Page duBois, in the fourth century BC a substantial epistemological change took place from a mythic and poetic approach to a logocentric consciousness that ceased to be based on analogy and polarity and became rooted in differentiation and dominance. Since the Platonic and Aristotelian concepts of sexual differentiation have remained central to this day and give philosophical discourse a phallocentric bias, representing female subjectivity becomes complicated, if not, as several feminist theorists have asserted, impossible within patriarchal language.

Ramalho Santos considers several theoretical approaches to this issue and analyses their shortcomings, especially since some of them resort to non-Eurocentric but still male-centered views, such as the uBuntuu or the quechua philosophies. A few feminist movements, namely Mujeres Creando and the Combahee River Collective, exemplify activist stances that refuse to idealize indigenous worldviews but are able to integrate their positive contributions, taking into consideration a myriad of categories of difference that help to individualize and situate subjectivities. After all, following Rosi Braidotti's conceptualization of (sexual) difference, feminism nowadays tends to envision identity as a nomadic, nonhierarchical project that relies on the intersection of knowledges, in an ongoing process of reciprocal translation, based on an ethics of resilience and sustainability.

In "Making a Difference with Difference", Anna Mercedes proposes a feminist phenomenological epistemology that conceives identity as the result of a network of relational experiences lived by an embodied self. The concept of difference is paramount in this theoretical frame, since it admits the emergence of diversity and contrast, avoiding an essentialist and imperialistic perspective towards alterity that either tends to be assimilated to or modulated by the hegemonic norm. Underscoring the historical "temptation" of Christian doctrine towards a rhetoric of oneness that was instrumentalized as a strategy of political consolidation, the essay defines the dangers of this totalizing perspective and suggests a theology of difference founded on the notion of incarnation.

Indeed, incarnation presupposes the materialization of singularity and potentiates the activation of lived coalitions that allow for and stimulate the flourishing of differences. This practice is thus presented as a spiritual exercise that counteracts a universalizing and homogenizing tendency

by stimulating openness to the flux of ever-changing subjectivities. Feminism itself was born through, and is still nurtured by, this relational claim, which conceives the self as a permeable entity shaped by spatial and power dynamics. Arguing for a perspective that enables the emergence of differentiation as a source of empowerment, Mercedes foregrounds the need to perceive these communal exchanges with a consciousness of the implicit power lines that delineate differences and may consubstantiate recurrent contexts of exclusion.

Hence, while not ignoring the patterns that inform and sometimes deform these dynamics, this particular approach does recognize that difference is compositional, for each one of us, and is constantly being reshaped by confluences of relationships and by a plurality of interchanges between communities. Since difference ceases to be a substantive category, it implies openness to vulnerability and the acceptance of risk as part of this ever-shifting play of selves, which ultimately will encourage the revelation of our uniqueness.

In "Equivocation, Translation, and Performative Interseccionality: Notes on Decolonial Feminist Practices and Ethics in Latin America", Claudia Lima Costa adopts the perspective of cultural translation to consider the relationship between contemporary Latin American feminist theories and postcolonial criticism. This analytical protocol evokes the concept of translation as a productive tool that not only acknowledges the asymmetries of power and the fluidity of the modern world but also seeks to promote a dialogue that recognizes difference and honors the ancient systems of knowledge ("saberes próprios") of the Latin American peoples.

According to Quijano, the "coloniality of power" was built on the interconnected fictions of gender (patriarchy and heteronormativity) and race, which also implied the predominance of a binary world view that established an irrevocable opposition between nature and culture and posited the Western male as the normative model of subjectivity. The so called "earth practices" are one of the current strategies of resistance to this worldview. In fact, they imply an epistemic rupture with the anthropomorphic perspective, including nature in the political realm. Besides, they call for another type of reflective stance, based on the recognition of the need to slow down reasoning, in order to really be able to listen to other

opinions and to have time to think before responding. This is especially important because some conceptual categories are equivocal when used by different interpretative communities and require a careful translation that will allow for meanings to travel safely between particular spaces and peoples and across multiple boundaries.

Based on the concept of body as an assemblage of categories in the process of becoming, material feminisms offer a similar approach, since they underline the dynamics between the material and the discursive, proposing the ontological articulation of the traditionally exclusionary categories of nature and culture. While reclaiming the materiality and situatedness of the body, they also recognize that corporeality is dependent on its constitutive discourses, explicitly on the interface between technology (the material apparatuses that draw new contours to the body) and ideologies, which is very striking in the case of the fetus and the abortion discussion, for instance.

Finally, pointing out the barriers that feminist texts and practices face in the travels between South and North America, Lima Costa emphasizes that the decolonization of knowledge asks for transnational ethics and performances that celebrate alternative histories, ontologies, and paths of action. These dynamics are illustrated by Morimura's parodic recreation of Manet's *Olympia*, in a strategy of sardonic appropriation that opens up interstitial spaces of difference.

In "Beauty Incarnate: A Claim for Postmodern Feminist Theology", Krista E. Hughes maintains that beauty should be considered a crucial theological category, based on a more inclusive understanding of incarnation as the corporeal manifestation of God in every particular individual. This essay pinpoints three sources for the aesthetic penchant in present-day ontology: i) feminist theory, with its emphasis on an embodied subjectivity that questions the patriarchal dichotomies of self-other and body-mind; ii) affect theory, with its insistence on the intercorporeal and performative nature of identity, valuing vulnerability as *the* state of openness that allows for an encounter; and iii) process philosophy, with its focus on a sensible-relational network of dynamic entities who co-create beauty as they resolve the discord implied in the flux of becoming.

Thus, the norm for beauty should not be Christ crucified because, as other feminist thinkers also argued, the crucifixion has been associated

with self-sacrificial suffering that was (mis)used to disempower marginalized groups, specifically women. Instead, contemporary theological aesthetics may assume a panentheistic perspective and, exploring the depictions of Jesus in the Gospels, appreciate the way these images of embodiment weave a relational life-story that celebrates particularity and multiplicity. Indeed, the divine incarnated in this particular being in order to illuminate our common divinity and honor our physicality, as the episodes of the woman anointing Jesus's feet in parallel with the master washing his disciples' feet clarify.

Hughes also asserts that the wounds still marking Jesus' body after resurrection add another layer of significance to the New Testament, depicting the wholeness of human experience, where the process of healing testifies not only to vulnerability but also to our capability to grow out of and through pain. Consequently, beauty as a form of action (as the aforementioned examples from the Scriptures illustrate) heals, for it is co-created in the encounter of strong and vulnerable beings, encompassing the spectrum of joy and sorrow.

In "Feminism meets the Big Exhibition: Museum Survey Shows Since 2005", Hilary Robinson points out that between 2005 and 2011 major museums and galleries all over the world gave an extraordinary visibility to art created by women. Contemplating four of these exhibitions, the essay purports to analyze the rationale behind these events, in particular the extent to which they were informed by a feminist perspective and the type of Art History representations they produced. It is also worth noticing that all these exhibitions were presented as surveys (assuming a broad scope), all arose from a feminist agenda (established either by an overt curatorial motivation, by the chosen art, or by their catalogues), and all took place in an historical context characterized by the canonization of women's movements and their artistic practices.

WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2007) staged an encounter with many key feminist works that had previously been confined to the pages of small-circulation art magazines, giving the visitors the opportunity to relate to the "real thing". The curatorial categories invoked by the curator Cornelia Butler are non-activist though, since she does not conceive of feminism as a

political framework that asks for vigilance and action. To prove her point, Robinson highlights the logics of exclusion presiding over the curatorial choice of works and artists — these seem to ignore basic feminist tenets such as the need to revise the relationship between the politics of the art world and the patriarchal structures that inform them. In contrast, Xabier Arakistain, the curator of *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 Years of Art and Feminism* (Bilbao, 2007), provides an historical context of the feminist movement and problematizes the rules of canon formation and the logics of the art market, assuming an openly activist position. An equally interesting example is the catalogue of *REBELLE: Art and Feminism 1969-2009* (Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem, Netherlands), which was published after the opening of the exhibition and documented several events and performances that were programmed in the meantime. *REBELLE*'s curator, Mirjam Westen, underlined the fluid dynamics of contemporary feminist art and avoided assuming a geographical center, inviting the viewer to establish a dialogue between continental and national borders. *elles@centrepompidou* (Musée National d'Art Moderne, 2009) offered the widest and longest survey, including only pieces from the museum's collection, which shows its long-term commitment to investing in work produced by women. In the catalogue, the curator Camille Morineau pointed out the ambiguity (and the importance) of the category of difference in French feminist thought, since the republic is based on the universalist motto "liberté, *égalité*, fraternité". In contrast to the material presented in the exhibition, Morineau avoids political commitment and seeks to structure the visitor's experience mainly by the existential category of "being a woman", without interrogating its broader cultural implications.

Robinson concludes that the current principles of canonization, exemplified by the exhibitions under scrutiny, tend to separate feminist aesthetics from their philosophical and political contexts. Thus, these methodological approaches domesticate art produced by women, enclosing it within a rigid archival category, while it is of the utmost importance to keep this classificatory system open to discussion and to reappraisal.

In "Finding Her Place: Success, Space, and Subjectivity", Mary Eagleton explores the relationship between spatiality and (inter)subjectivity in several literary texts, mapping out the social history of the UK from the

1920s to the new millennium and investigating how women's struggle for equal access to the market place has challenged and reshaped their identity constructions.

A Room of One's Own and *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf's fictional essays, are paired with Margaret Drabble's novel *The Peppered Moth*, which introduces the social class variant into the problem of women's exclusion from the higher-education establishment, namely Cambridge. While separatist all-female spaces provide a provisional sense of empowerment to Woolf's protagonists, Drabble's scholarship girl is not able to negotiate the symbolic gap between "home" and "away", since her sense of marginalization cuts deeper — it is hierarchical, not lateral, and marked by a lack of social contacts, cultural capital, and funds. David Lodge's sequential novels *Nice Work* and *Thinks* also depict the academic context through a female character that benefits from the 1970s legal emphasis on equal gender opportunities, but then has to adapt to the neoliberal utilitarian concept of the university as a managerial system measured by "objective" outputs. In that very competitive universe, this figure becomes a "top girl", the perfect late-modern subject dominated by the hegemonic narrative of self-making, which masks competition as choice and capitalizes on gender as an imperialistic asset (i.e. women's liberation is presented as the proof that Western democratic regimes must be universalized). In another rewriting of the tension between distance and proximity, Zadie Smith's *NW* also problematizes the identity politics implicit in the demagogic claims of success. Indeed, this novel dismantles the female protagonist's self-assurance and shows how her performance has inscribed her in the global space of capital but has robbed her of the spatial relations of intimacy.

Neoliberal ideological constructs tend to appropriate feminist discourse, claiming that gender, racial and class equality depend merely on the individual's resolve to succeed. Nonetheless, as Eagleton demonstrates, not only literary texts but also contemporary statistics show that access to key social spaces, such as the university and the high courts, is still disproportionately marked by gender.

"The Porn Wars Redux: What Can Young Feminists Learn from the Porn Wars, and What Can Those Veterans Learn from Younger Feminists"

emerges from a dialogue that involves two younger researchers, Amanda Kennedy and Cheryl Llewellyn, and an older sociologist, Michael Kimmel. They map the debate on pornography in North America, mainly in the U.S., since the mid-1970s, showing how the extreme positioning of the anti- and pro-feminists has given way to a more dialogic stance that seeks to include other voices and perspectives.

Many of the early critics of pornography equated it with violence against women and believed that the consumption of this type of imagery would perpetuate misogyny. Hence, they called for government regulation of the issue, sometimes establishing problematic coalitions with religious conservatives, which further tended to alienate them from those who argued that pornography could help to liberate women from sexual repression, as long as it played by safe and fair rules. The new technologies have made pornography almost ubiquitous, eroding the lines between consumer culture and the sex industry, with commercials and music videos becoming more and more sexually explicit. Therefore, feminist critics tend to approach this topic through a more inclusive lens, recognizing that there are many genres of pornography, some of which deliberately empower women, especially when they are produced by female pornographers or when they involve women porno-stars who seek to depict sexual interaction and female desire in a positive light. Besides, one should also take into account the fact that identity is not a monolithic concept; on the contrary, it involves different subjectivities situated and informed by a myriad of factors (gender, race, class, etc.).

All these considerations prompt Kennedy, Kimmel, and Llewellyn to formulate a set of questions calling for further empirical investigation, including, for instance, the diverse perspectives assumed not only by the female and male consumers of pornography but also by the male and female producers and actors involved in this industry. The landscape of lived and dreamed bodily encounters and the contours of erotic desire will certainly be reshaped by these new speculations.

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Difference and Hierarchy Revisited by Feminism

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Difference and Hierarchy Revisited by Feminism

I have created a man as Yahweh has
The Book of J. (65)

I borrow my epigraph from *The Book of J*, in David Rosenberg's translation and with an introduction and comentary by Harold Bloom. The proud speaker is Hava (Eve), after having given birth to her first child, Cain. Considering that the first creation was Yahweh's shaping "an earthling from clay" (*Book of J* 61), Eve may well boast of her more sophisticated feat. In his ingenious interpretation, Bloom argues eloquently that, given the biblical representations of women we have as compared with those of men, the author of the passages of the first five books of the Bible attributed to J was a woman. The critic justifies his reading by beginning to invoke his profound knowledge of the Bible (including all its authors or sources: J [the Yawist], E [the Elohist], D [the Deuteronomist], P [the Priestly], and R [the Redactor]). He summons as well his great familiarity with western literature, his expertise and imaginative skills as a literary critic, and his many "years of reading experience" (*Book of J* 10). J, says Bloom, could not but have been an aristocratic, talented, highly educated woman of Davidic descent, perhaps Solomon's daughter, living, the critic surmises, in the reign of Rehoboam of Judah, and thus a contemporary and possibly close friend of the author of II Samuel. Bloom is no believer; for him the stories of the Bible are fictions, some of them of the highest literary quality. His interpretation of the *Book of J* is, therefore, nothing but a *literary appreciation*. According to Bloom, *The Book of J* is a poetic masterpiece, "comparable to *Hamlet* and *Lear*, the *Commedia*, the *Iliad*, the poems of Wordsworth, or the novels of Tolstoy..." rather than "to the Koran or the Book of Mormon" (*Book of J* 11).

The sexual identity of J is of slight interest to me. I do sympathize with Adrienne Rich when she cries out, while expressing her utmost admiration for Wallace Stevens's "The Idea of Order at Key West," "If a woman had written that poem, my God!" (Rich 116) But the truth is that the poem in which a woman-singer is granted so much poetic power and agency was written by a great male poet (a strong poet, Bloom would say). There are plenty of examples of this, Saramago's Blimunda being one of them. In order to understand why this is so, you just have to reread the ironies in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Without access to proper education, adequate income, independence, breathing space, and the suffrage, in a word, without the sense of dignity that comes with equity and full citizenship, only very rare and exceptional women (like the former American slave Phillis Wheatley, for example) could act and feel like free, creative individuals in our culture, even if their exceptionality does prove the capability of every woman. Three thousand years earlier, a cultivated, sophisticated J, whether male or female, also sang of powerful women, women who were capable of fending for themselves, in sharp contrast with lesser males, including undistinguished patriarchs and even a petulant, peevish, child-like and undoubtedly male Yahweh. Only a woman writer, Bloom insists, could have given us such wonderful portraits of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and especially Tamar, in contrast with the ironic and rather lame pictures of, at most, trickster patriarchs (did not Jacob rob Esau of his birthright?). Explicitly risking feminist charges of essentialism, Bloom goes so far as attributing to "female genius" J's ironic portrayal of Yahweh as a capricious, if not downright flawed, human creature with more than human powers. If among the earliest representations of biblical characters there are such strong women, no suggestion of (sexual) difference and consequences thereof being ever mentioned, how could our culture have produced a society so firmly based on (sexual) difference, a patriarchal, misogynous society, in which women consistently appear downgraded and are definitely considered secondary, ancillary, and downright inferior and discardable? Of course, women are not the only people discriminated against and oppressed by status and hierarchy in our culture. Like sex, also class, race, ethnicity, caste, religion, occupation, sexual orientation, health, or age, for instance, are factors of discriminatory differentiation, often with devastating consequences. Feminist theories and struggles cannot but take

into account the vast system of domination and inequity of contemporary societies, of which sexism is just one form. But I am concerned here with the overall subalternity of women in the western culture and with why, how and when this subalternity came about and went on to gain theoretical grounding. Apparently, not in the very first version of the Torah, the patriarchal era not quite in place yet, as we can see in J's imaginative creation, but certainly in the Redactor's final version (as e. g. in the discriminatory purification laws of Leviticus 12.1-5),[1] and especially in the New Testament, Leonardo Boff's compelling re-interpretations of the Virgin Mary as the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit notwithstanding (Boff 2003).[2] Paul's neoplatonic 1 Corinthians 11.3 puts hierarchy in place for Christianity: "the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God". Drawing on the work of classicist Page duBois, I submit that a similar change occurred in ancient Greece, one other major cradle of western culture.

That women in global modernity under advanced capitalism do not own their bodies and minds as their own, or do so only at great risk, are systematically silenced or victimized in the media, continue to be considered minor and inferior, and are often treated as less than dirt, is easily demonstrated. To come up with plenty of examples, you just have to follow the news and the media worldwide, in which, at any rate, the visibility and active presence of women compared to those of men is 27%, not to mention the fact that very often the images of women in the media are stereotypical and degrading. (Altés 2013; *Il corpo delle donne*) A more insidiously perverse form of recent media violence against women is the infamous Blachman TV show in Denmark that consists of a host and his male guest judging the body of a stark naked woman standing still and

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[1] As I write, Jewish women are still fighting in Israel for the right to pray, on a par with men, at the Western Wall (cf. NYT 10 May 2013); by the same token, women in Roman Catholicism are still barred from priesthood.

[2] For a feminist critique of biblical repesentations of women, see Santos (2002) and Ramalho (2001). For feminist interpretations of the Bible, see Fiorenza (1998). Portuguese feminist theologians have frequently addressed this issue as well. See, e.g., Toldy 2010, 171-184.

mute before the two men and just listening to their comments (Bahadour). In the United States, where, as Katha Pollitt reminded us recently, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was never adopted, women in the military are sexually harassed, if not raped, on a regular basis (Pollitt, "ERA"; Risen). Rape and exploitation of women in Europe have always been common. Glamorous men of wealth and social privilege have always been known to take advantage of vulnerable, young girls with impunity, as we learn once again with the recent sexual abuse scandal of BBC television presenter Jimmy Savile (*The Other Side of Jimmy Savile*). And yet the media these days pay more attention to what is happening in "less advanced" societies.[3] In India, women and even girls as young as 4, 5, 9 and 11, are regularly raped, tortured, and often murdered as a matter of course (Rahman).[4] In Brazil, sexual assaults in transit vans have suddenly gained media notoriety after an American student was brutally gang raped in Rio de Janeiro (McDonough). In Africa as well, rape of "sub-human women" by "out-of-control men" has become "ubiquitous" in the culture, as three commentators recently put it in a consciousness-raising newspaper article (Tutu). The so-called Arab Spring did not bloom for women, whose citizenship rights, if granted, would be perceived by the patriarchal, Muslim authorities in Egypt as seriously threatening consensual, male supremacy (Kirpatrick); Tahrir Square, once the symbol of fight for freedom and democracy for all, has become the stage of brutal violations of women's rights, dignity, and physical integrity (Terror in Tahrir Square). In Liberia, female students are fighting for their scholarly probity in schools where academic success is dependent on sexual favors, a phenomenon not yet totally nonexistent in "more advanced" societies. In Israel, Jewish women immigrants from Ethiopia have been forced to undergo birth control

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[3] On 17 March 2013, *The Guardian* reported the rape of a 14-year old girl on a Glasgow bus; on 28 March 2013, the same paper reported the conviction of two American high school football players for raping a 16-year old girl; the infamous Oxford paedophile gang, accused of grooming, raping, and sexually exploiting teenage girls for years, was finally condemned in the UK, as reported by *The Independent* on 15 May 2013. But see how racism conditions media reports on violence against women (Harker).

[4] During the past few months, the media have reported too many cases of extreme violence against women in India, including rape and murder of small children.

injections, presumably to prevent the wrong kinds of Jews from multiplying in god's country (Brogan). In Indian Reservations in the United States, one in three Native American women is raped over her lifetime, although many Native women are too demoralized to report the crime (Erdrich). In academia, women do not fare much better, as witness the recent misogynist attacks on the Cambridge classicist and intellectual Mary Beard (Orr). The same is true of successful female business executives, like Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's Chief Operating Officer (Pollitt, "Who's Afraid"). Even successful women writers have complaints about persistent sexism in the field (Kogan).

Male violence against women is rampant everywhere, as newly reported by Rebecca Solnit ("a rape a minute, a thousand corpses a year") (Solnit). In war zones, conflict situations, and refugee camps, women are even more vulnerable to all kinds of violence, including sexual violence (*Sexual Violence Research Initiative*). Add to all this sexism in the workplace, that is to say, the sexual harassment of women in the workplace by men holding positions of power over them: employees in the office or even domestic help in the family home hounded by their bosses or masters of the house and often complying for fear of losing their jobs, or just for the interruptive thrill of an exciting moment of pleasure in a dreary life of nonstop drudgery work. The logic of such sexual behavior seems to be that male supremacy is an undisputed fact, male will and desire come first, male power authorizes anything, and females are supposed to be always there docilely to oblige. The well-known formula for such aggressive masculinity, still widely sanctioned by the culture at large, is "boys will be boys".[5] And who is to blame women who benefit from the situation by manipulating male desire and prepotency to their own advantage? My question is: how did we get to such a misogynous display of sexual difference which, by debasing, decharacterizes and dehumanizes women?

I argue in this paper that at some point in the western culture the conceptualization of difference literally made the difference, and that the idea of hierarchy was the motor behind the revised notion of difference. Western philosophy has amply discussed the concept of difference from

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[5] See Bordo, esp. 229-264 ("Gentleman or Beast? The Double Bind of Masculinity").

many different angles — from Leibniz and Kant to colonialist thought and anti-colonialist resistance, and to critical theory, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and postcolonialism — but perhaps not enough attention has been paid to how the concept came under the aegis of hierarchy, as is still the case today. That in Leibniz's identity of indiscernibles difference was actually what defined identity is still a major tenet of the intellectual and social structure of our culture. Identity needs difference in order to be itself. But since identity (the selfsame) in the western culture establishes itself early on as the defining subject, difference cannot but be the defined object (the so-called Other). Hence, different, in the culture, has always meant inferior, often with dire consequences: think Holocaust — and many other forms of genocide of which the West can boast.[6] Recently, in the context of postcolonial thinking, the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos has dealt with this issue from the point of view of equity, that is to say, by calling for equitable, multicultural (I would add, multisexual) (human) rights. Santos argues that people and peoples have the right to be equal whenever difference demeans or renders them inferior; and that they have the right to be different when equality de-characterizes or neutralizes them (Santos, "Por uma concepção", 30). But what if avoiding neutralization strands people and peoples in inferiority or subalternity? My concern is that "difference," as we have come to understand the concept in the western culture, may well be impossible to disengage from the concept of hierarchy. Hence, in part, the reluctance of many feminist theorists to accept the designation of sexual difference(s) and their adoption of "gender" instead. However, the latter "non-concept," as Rosi Braidotti calls it, has its own problems, of which more below.

I propose, then, to travel with Page duBois back to a time in the western culture when difference, including sexual difference, was not the issue because hierarchy was not yet in place, a time in which human beings might be described, rather than by difference, by diversity — the "infinite variety" that centuries later Shakespeare's Enobarbus found in Cleopatra alone. In her work as a whole, and more specifically in *Centaurs and Amazons*, duBois explains the emergence of hierarchy in ancient Greece

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[6] Of course, the West is not the only culprit of genocides in the world, but it is my major focus here.

and the consolidation of what is still understood today as the proper ordering of human society: the male at the top, then the female, then the child, then the slave, then the barbarian, and finally the animal.[7] duBois does not ignore the perennial existence of misogyny in ancient Greece (e.g. *Sappho Is Burning*, 32). What she argues forcefully is that in the fourth century BCE there was a shift in the history of western culture, a change from a previous mythic, literary, poetic consciousness, based on analogy and polarity, having harmony of reasoning and feeling, and concerned with the right conduct of the entire life of the city, to one that gave precedence to the logos and rationality, focussing on the Greek male as the subject of the city and concerned with an elite. Basically, it was a shift from an imaginative, all-encompassing discourse in the fifth century BCE to a hierarchical, discriminating, philosophical discourse in the fourth century BCE. In other words, there was a major change from Aeschylos' tragedy of and for the democratic city to Plato's and Aristotle's elitist discourse. This is when the idea of difference — sexual, racial, and species difference — was understood as a difference that had nothing to do with infinite variety and everything to do with hierarchization and stratification. The new social, civic ordering was no longer based, as before, on polarity and analogy but rather on hierarchical differentiation, subordination, and dominance. Platonic and Aristotelian notions of superiority and subordination established the great chain of being. In this new, hierarchical model of the city, the Greek male was the undisputed subject at the center of the polis, while the female was gradually conceived of as subaltern and not really a part of the polis. Sophocles' *Antigone* shows how women came to represent a dangerous force for finding themselves ambiguously both inside and outside the city, a threatening force that needed to be conceptualized in order to be regulated and controlled — or even silenced. Lacan's understanding of the silencing of Antigone in Sophocles' tragedy as the "inception of culture itself" is duly critiqued by Judith Butler in *Antigone's*

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[7] *Centaurs and Amazons*, passim, but see especially chapter VI ("Hierarchy"). In what follows, it will be clear that neither I nor duBois take seriously the theories of prehistoric matriarchy and gynocracy, inspired by such different scholars as Johann Jakob Bachofen, Erich Neumann or Maria Gimbutas. This issue is critiqued by Cynthia Eller in *The Myth of Matriarchal Pre-history*.

Claim (47). Françoise Meltzer, in turn, understands "culture" thus identified as the emerging "architecture of patriarchy," in which indeed autonomous women could have no place.[8] In the *Phaedo* (117d), Socrates' wife, Xanthippe, had to be removed from the scene, not so much because she was giving passionate and noisy vent to her pain at the prospect of Socrates' death (after all, Socrates' friends also end up weeping uncontrollably right before he drinks the poison) but rather because, in their corporeal mortality, "women interrupt the scene of philosophy," where immortality is being discussed, and "disturb the tranquility of the scene, reminding the dying of the body and of loss" (*Sappho Is Burning*, 88-89). Elsewhere, duBois reminds us that "women do not speak for themselves in philosophical discourse in antiquity," and are perhaps best understood in the fourth-century BCE Greek polis as part of the category of slaves (*Slaves and Other Objects*, 193). In fifth-century BCE Greece, grants duBois, male citizens already knew they were different from females, barbarians, slaves, and animals; but only fourth-century BCE philosophers told them they were superior and reassured them of their supremacy. A major goal of the Greek male becomes then "to dominate the female and her body, to control its potentiality, to subdue it to his interests" (*Sowing the Body*, 147, n. 29).

The status of women in our culture has not changed much since the philosopher announced, in the *Timaeus*, that cowardly and unjust males would disgracefully become women at their second incarnation (90e-91a) (cf. *Centaurs & Amazones*, 135). Aristotle's overall views on women, clearly seen as *not-men*, leave no doubt that women are inferior creatures, belonging to a lower degree of nature's ladder (*scala naturae*). To say that women are *not-men* is not the same as simply to say that women are not men. Of course, women *are not* men, as men *are not* women either — fifth-century BCE Greece knew it. They are *different*, even if the two phrases — "women are not men" and "men are not women" — came to convey distinct meanings. The difference therein established already implies hierarchy, as shown, for example, in the long journey of women in pursuit of economic citizenship in twentieth-century United States: because they

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[8] Cf. also duBois, "Antigone and the Feminist Critic". In her most recent book, *Out of Athens*, duBois usefully surveys modern, influential readings of Sophocles' *Antigone*.

were not men, women were, often still are, *barred from* certain jobs; because they were not women, men were, often still are, *exempted from* certain obligations.[9] Myths of femininity and masculinity have conspired with social structuring to justify separate spheres, in labor legislation as in many other sectors of social life. Recent scientific theories presuming genetic differences between the male and the female brain (what I would term *scientific sexism*) carry the same danger of stereotyping and discriminating as the old scientific racism and classism revived in the 1990s.[10] There is also what Jessica Valenti has recently termed "organic sexism," that is to say, the "theory" that women are "natural" and should therefore reject such an "unnatural" practice of "invasive machinery" as contraception and keep busy constantly watching diaperless babies from a few months old (Valenti). In her work on the pervasiveness of racism in modern western societies, Ann duCille coined the term *periracism*, the prefix peri — meaning *before*, *after*, and *around*. Feminists could do worse than adopt the concept of *perisexism* to describe the ubiquitous discrimination against women in modern cultures (duCille).

As duBois cogently argues, the hierarchical ideas of (sexual) difference formulated by Plato and Aristotle continue to define relations of dominance and submission in philosophical discourse today. That is why, to this day, feminist theoreticians have difficulty finding the words to speak *woman* outside the male hegemonic, hierarchizing, philosophical discourse. As Drucilla Cornell puts it, borrowing from Marie Cardinal, the problem resides in not easily finding the "words to say it" (Cornell, "What Is Ethical Feminism", 78).[11] Even as Cornell — alongside such eloquent western feminist theoreticians as Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, or Rosi Braidotti — is determined to find such words, I suggest her

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[9] Cf. Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, esp. chapter 6, "What's Fair?"

[10] I am referring to the bell curve controversy following the publication of Richard J. Herrenstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve*, in 1994.

[11] In this essay, Cornell summarizes her ideas of ethical feminism. Cf. Marie Cardinal, *Les mots pour le dire* (Paris: Grasset, 1975). Cornell refers to an English translation of Cardinal by Pat Goodheart, *Words to Say It* (France: Van Vactor and Goodheart, 1984), to which I have not had access.

job (our job), however difficult, may actually be much easier to accomplish than the task of overturning the age-old misogynous mentality that goes on rendering women objects of male indulgence in the culture at large. Indeed, I do submit that one task will not be accomplished without the other — which calls for the mutual engagement of theorization and activism.[12]

As a first step in her undertaking, Cornell proposes what she calls "ethical feminism". Drawing heavily on psychoanalysis and deconstruction, especially Lacan and Derrida, to analyze the way in which social reality is engendered by unconscious fantasies, Cornell offers "ethical feminism" as a theory and a critique to change the laws of sexism that condition the lives of concrete women. The first and most important principle of ethical feminism is precisely to reject the negative, classical definition of women as *not-men*. Such a gesture means to suspend the various "fantasies of femininity" in the culture, denounce "gender hierarchy," question "rigid gender identity," open up the meaning of "referentiality," and call for "a nonviolent relationship with the Other" (76). That Cornell insists in not denying "that there 'are' women" who suffer as objects of rape and sexual abuse may point to her anxiety about problems with her own notions of "referentiality", "aprotropaic gesture" (77), and "nonviolent relationship with the Other" (78). All of these notions, indeed, may imply the imperceptible disappearance of women: referentiality, by so diluting the contours of women as distinct beings as to erase concrete women; the apotropaic gesture, by so diversifying the feminine within sexual difference as to render representation impossible; nonviolent relationship with the Other, by maintaining the notion of an Other that necessarily entails the opposite notion of the Same. Stuck with hegemonic Same and subordinate Other, the words simply to say "it" do not yet seem within Cornell's grasp at all.

Perhaps no new words are needed, beyond the understanding that the language we supposedly have as our own to master rather masters us instead, and that we cannot but be always aware of this situation. Perhaps all we need is to keep fighting not just to eliminate the persistent misogyny in the culture at large but to change the resilient social conventions of male

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[12] Activism implies a learning process and thus begins, to my mind, with example and pedagogy.

superiority and female inferiority that since the forth century BCE refuse to stop prevailing in contemporary societies, no doubt also because women, for various reasons, may well be the very last human beings to yield the relative comfort of the *status quo* and willingly accept and adopt change. Just consider the numbers of women all over the world who refuse to report the many forms of overt and covert violence against them. Fear of the unknown no doubt gives us all pause, and vulnerable women most of all, especially as women continue to be routinely disbelieved and disrespected when reporting domestic violence or instances of rape. Too many specialists (Freud, Lacan) have told women that they are lack, fullness of being residing somewhere else. Too many structures of real and imaginative power have so intimidated women as to render them weakness itself. Hamlet's phrase — "Frailty, thy name is woman" — still carries today all possible senses of the word "frailty". How can women speak and be spoken of out of such negativity? I do not think Cornell's efforts in this essay, however brave, are good enough. To ask for "the truth of woman" (98) is to idealize women and find no truth at all. As she herself concedes, here Cornell "leaves us with no escape" (91).

A recent lecture by Cornell, easily accessible online, shows her engaging in further efforts to deepen and strengthen the concept of ethical feminism, first, by elaborating on the ideas of nonviolent relation to the other and cultural inter-translation and reciprocity she borrows from Gayatri Spivak and Judith Butler; and second, by resorting to the African philosophy of uBuntu. (Cornell, "Rethinking Ethical Feminism").[13] In her talk, Cornell explicitly refers to Butler's notion of precarious life to reconfigure the relationship with the Other as always shaped by responsibility and obligation, particularly when (as Butler puts it in a book written right in the midst of the security hysteria in the US after 9/11/2001) the Other is constituted "by others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know" (Butler, *Precarious Life* xii).[14] Cornell also invokes Spivak's denunciation of the dehumanization of certain human beings, such as "the third-world [female] subject," who are not

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[13] On African philosophy and uBuntu ethics, see Ramose.

[14] See also Butler's *Frames of War* esp. the introduction, "Precarious Life, Grievable Life".

recognized as human by hegemonic representations and therefore are not heard — nor can they speak (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"). Spivak, whose mother tongue is Bengali and is a fine translator herself, has written extensively on cultural translation and the politics of translation, though the exchange between Butler and herself about the language of the nation is also pertinent to the translatability (or untranslatability) of being, culture, and politics (Butler/Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation State?*).[15] More recently, the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos on intercultural translation provides a much broader understanding of cultural intercommunication, wary of hierarchization under the rubric of caring, differing and sharing, and thus capable of favoring interactions and strengthening alliances among various social movements fighting against capitalism, colonialism, sexism and heterosexism, and for social and cognitive justice, human dignity or human decency. (Santos, "Intercultural Translation").

In any case, by revisiting her "ethical feminism" with Spivak and Butler, Cornell has more productively situated feminist struggles in the context of struggles not just about the subordination of women but the broader ethical and political struggles against racism, capitalism, neo-colonialism, and imperial domination. The more innovative, though to my mind also more problematic, aspect of her more recent work on ethical feminism concerns her use of uBuntu philosophy. As the director of the uBuntu project in South Africa, Cornell became evidently attracted to a humanist, African philosophy that stresses the values of community and interconnectedness, hospitality and warmth towards strangers, collaborative work and sharing of prosperity, freedom uncoupled from responsibility and obligation, care and forgiveness, and mutual tolerance. Not favoring "tolerance" myself (see below), for "mutual tolerance" I would read "mutual translation". Cornell does a good job at translating uBuntu ethics into the struggle to stop the process of othering and overturn hegemonic institutions that deny the meaning of anyone as fully human. I have no argument with this. What puzzles me, however, is Cornell's silencing of a major characteristic of uBuntu philosophy: deference to hierarchy. At the top of the uBuntu hierarchy that decides what is good are either the

[15] See also Spivak, "The Politics of Translation" and "Translation as Culture".

ancestors, traditional healers like sangomas, elders, parents, or *men*. Never *women*, unless they are sangomas. Cornell's fascination with the fluidity and performativity of being she culls from the African stories of inter — and trans-sexuality she weaves into her lecture is quite understandable. It does sound like "queering," or at least Butler's sexual "performativity," come true (Butler, *Gender Trouble*).[16] However, from my perspective, the emphasis given to hierarchy in uBuntu philosophy suggests dangerously that tolerance (of difference) may have the pejorative meaning I once ascribed to the concept, when I insisted that you only really tolerate what is intolerable. (Ramalho, "Tolerância — Não!"). I think Cornell needs to address this problem seriously, particularly in view of the recent testimony, mentioned above, about "sub-human women" and "out-of-control men" in South African culture (Tutu). Not to mention the virulent heterocentrism that has been responsible for several cases of "corrective rape" of lesbians in South Africa.

To my mind, Drucilla Cornell's reformulation of ethical feminism from the viewpoint of uBuntu philosophy is no more than an aproach to the larger problem of the pervasive discrimination against women in general in global modernity. Other non-western philosophies, those, for example, developed among indigenous peoples in Latin America for ages, such as the quechua concept of sumak kawsay/buen viver (actually inscribed in the Constitutions of Ecuador [2008] and Bolivia [2009]), are equally inspiring. But what I learn from beautiful descriptions of sumak kawsay as living well, that is to say, of living in harmony with nature, fellow beings and other cultures, and enjoying a wholesome earth, water, and air, leaves me preoccupied with the role ascribed to women in the community. In the documentary conducted by César Rodriguez Garavito in 2012 on the Sarayouku case about oil extractivism without previous public consultation in Ecuador not one single woman is heard (*Sumak Kawsay*).[17] No wonder indigenous women have been coming forefront to fight for equity. A powerful movement is Mujeres Creando, in Bolivia, whose significant slogan points to the inevitable interconnectedness of feminist

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[16] For a first approach to queer theory, see Lauretis.

[17] http://vimeo.com/53761269 (accessed 13 March 2013).

struggles: *no se puede descolonizar sin despatriarcalizar* [you can't decolonize without depatriarchalizing] (*Mujeres creando*). The Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meetings as well call for feminist struggles not in isolation, rather commensurate with the infinite variety of experiences of oppression in the world. Particularly noteworthy is the Declaration of the Indigenous Women, presented at the 11th Meeting (Mexico, 2009), firmly contesting hegemonic Eurocentric feminism and eloquently voicing the singularity and specificity of their being women under multiple forms of opression, including male oppression. The Combahee River Collective comes to mind. In the 1970s, in the United States, African American and lesbian women began confronting dominant feminist theories with notions of diversity and varieties of oppression, including class, race, and (hetero)sexual oppression. The classical document is the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977).

Is it possible to decouple difference from hierarchy? Is it possible to think difference positively, particularly as concerns sexual difference? Rosi Braidotti has devoted all her work to thinking difference in a positive way, that is to say, beyond the negative connotations that the concept came to carry in the western culture, and free as well of the constraining, hierarchical binarisms that go on structuring our society (man/woman, master/servant, culture/nature, mind/body, human/animal). The article entitled "Becoming-Woman: Rethinking the Positivity of Difference" best synthesizes her ideas on the subject. Braidotti's thinking has many affinities with Nietzsche-inspired poststructuralist philosophers (continental philosophers, in American parlance) who do indeed put in question the Cartesian subject, without, however, rethinking positively the problem of difference and, in particular, the problem of sexual difference.[18] With the exception of Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze (with or without Felix Guattari) has been a major inspiration for Braidotti. Deleuze's critique of Freudian and Lacanian phalogocentrism, together with his notions of molecular fluidity of being and constant becoming-self, contributed to overcoming the lack of symmetry Braidotti sensed between the hegemonic philo-

[18] Cf. *Who Comes after the Subject* and Braidotti's *Patterns of Dissonance*, both published in 1991.

sophical discourse (the *master's discourse*, is Braidotti's formulation) about an integral subject and absolute and universal knowledge, on the one hand, and, on the other, feminism as a philosophy that conceives of the subject as multiple, nomadic inter-subjectivities, and of knowledge as an infinite variety of knowledges, open to infinite interchange and mutual translation. Sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos's postcolonial notion of ecologies of knowledges cannot help but come to mind again (Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking"; "A Postcolonial Conception of Citizenship").

Drawing on Deleuze, Braidotti questions the hegemonic conception of the subject — as *sedentary*, *major*, *and molar* — and conceives of it as *nomadic*, *minor*, *and molecular*, a feminist epistemological project that again is very similar to Santos's conceptions of knowledge-as-emancipation (from "colonialism" to "solidarity") as opposed to knowledge-as-regulation (from "chaos" to "order") (Santos, *A crítica da razão indolente* 53-110). If Santos truly valorizes indigenous minority knowledges by calling for intercultural translation, Braidotti rejects poststructuralist philosophy's use of the image of woman-as-minority as a metaphor of its questioning of hegemonic philosophy but not as a thinking subject of philosophy. Braidotti's essays on the becoming-woman of philosophy never fail to insist on the positive reconceptualization of difference. A gesture to overturn the culture's age-old idea of being woman/being inferior, so eloquently analyzed by Denise Riley in "*Am I That Name?*", Braidotti's becoming-woman may actually be understood as a Deleuzian revision of Simone de Beauvoir's "on le devient" (Riley; Beauvoir). Where Braidotti parts from Deleuze is on the ultimate value ascribed to the concept of difference itself. Whereas Deleuze's fluid becoming-self points to an ideal society in which all difference, including sexual difference, has been eliminated, Braidotti follows Luce Irigaray's "ethics of sexual difference" by insisting that the dissolution of sexed identities is "both theoretically and historically dangerous for women" (Braidotti, "Becoming Woman" 395; Irigaray). In Deleuze, becoming-woman is part of becoming-minority, becoming-molecular, becoming-nomadic, thus a radical rejection of logocentrism (Deleuze). Braidotti follows Deleuze/Guattari this far, but the total erasure of differences, including sexual difference, entails the disappearance of concrete, socially and historically situated human beings and their legitimate struggles and aspirations, in the case in point, the disappearance of

concrete women in a society far from free of the crassest forms of misogyny and sexual oppression. Acknowledging sexual difference means, therefore, according to Braidotti, recognizing women as free, independent and autonomous human subjects, on a par with men, hence ready to fight for and claim their rights, no matter how hostile the environment. She thus rejects the concept (or, in her own words, *non concept*) of gender, favored and canonized by the American historian Joan Scott for very specific reasons related to the academic situation in the United States at the time.[19]

Braidotti's feminist theory is grounded on a non-sexist theory of the subject. In *Nomadic Subjects*, she actually defines sexual difference as a nomadic political project, that is to say, "a new figuration of subjectivity [understood] in a multidifferentiated nonhierarchical way".[20] In this book, Braidotti engages in a reconfiguration of difference explicitly away from the terrible use that was made of the term in European fascism, when difference meant inferiority to be eliminated in the camps, and offers the Deleuzian concept of nomadism as a new form of nonhierarchical subjectivity. Difference is thus viewed by Braidotti as positivity in its complexity and multiplicity of being-in-relation, and sexual difference, as equitable, nonhierarchical commerce between the sexes. More recently, Braidotti has argued for a sustainable world, in which the distinction beween life as a social form (*bios*) and life as a natural force (*zoe*) no longer makes sense, and rather calls for endurance, "in the double sense," as she puts it, "of learning to last in time, but also to put up and live with pain and suffering". I appreciate Braidotti's concern with the philosopher's imperative to pursue social change, in-depth transformation, and an ethics of endurance and sustainability, no less because "critical and creative thinkers and activists

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[19] As Scott explains in a somewhat disregarded passage of her much quoted essay, the term "gender", as a theoretical and analytical category, served to legitimize the discipline of Women's Studies in the academy. At the end of the twentieth century in the United States, Feminist Studies sounded too political and Women's Studies not scholarly enough. Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in *The American Historical Review*, 91.5 (Dec 1986) 1053-1075. Cf. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 150; see also Braidotti, "The Uses and Abuses of the Sex/Gender Distinction in European Feminist Practices", 285-307.

[20] Esp. chapter VIII, "Sexual Difference as a Nomadic Political Project".

who pursue change have often experienced the limits or the boundaries like open wounds or scars" (*Transpositions* 268). But I am more concerned with women who, because they have been always hierarchically associated with *zoe*, hence reduced to "a mere biological function and deprived of political and ethical relevance" (270), continue to be treated like secondrate people in the culture. Traffic of women across geographies has always been rampant, and little girls, often still mere babies, have always been molested by members of their own family both in "less advanced" and in "more advanced" societies. Could it be a good sign that patriarchy is now beginning to pay attention to the monstrosity? I wonder if J's Hava/Eve was really entitled to boast of her creation of a human *man*, supposedly more sophisticated than Yahweh's original "earthling" shaped "from clay".

Origin is not the issue; the learning process and consciouness raising are. For being knows difference, but not hierarchy.

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Abstract

Difference and Hierarchy Revisited by Feminism

Drawing heavily on the work of classicist Page duBois, which eloquently explains the emergence, in ancient Greece, of hierarchy and of what is still understood today as the great chain of being (scala naturae: male, female, slave, barbarian, animal), this paper analyzes the age-old negative conotations of the concept of difference in western culture, considers the reinvention of difference as "positive" by Rosi Braidotti (after Deleuze & Guattari), and reassesses the efforts of several other feminist philosophers (e.g. Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Gayatry Spivak, Drucilla Cornell) to counter Lacan on the impossibility of "speaking women" beyond the dominant (male) philosophical discourse. Or, to paraphrase Marie Cardinal, their efforts to find "les mots pour le dire".

Keywords

Women; Difference; Hierarchy; Sexism; Feminism

Resumo

Diferença e hierarquia revisitadas pelo feminismo

Com base na obra da classicista Page duBois, que eloquentemente explica o aparecimento, na Grécia antiga, da hierarquia e daquilo que ainda hoje é entendido como a grande cadeia do ser (*scala naturae*: homem, mulher, escravo, bárbaro, animal), este ensaio debruça-se sobre as velhas conotações negativas do conceito de diferença na cultura ocidental, pondera a reinvenção da diferença como "positiva" por Rosi Braidotti (na peugada de Deleuze & Guattari) e reconsidera os esforços de várias filósofas feministas (e.g. Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, Drucilla Cornell) para negar a impossibilidade lacaniana de "falar mulheres" independentemente do discurso filosófico dominante (masculino). Ou, parafraseando Marie Cardinal, os esforços destas feministas contemporâneas para encontrar "les mots pour le dire".

Palavras Chave

Mulheres; Diferença; Hierarquia; Sexismo; Feminismo

Making a Difference with Difference

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Making a Difference with Difference

> "…differences are never just 'differences.' … The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully".
>
> Chandra Talpade Mohanty

Meet DEREL

In my feminist theology courses, I introduce students to third-wave feminism through an imaginary character, DEREL, whose name is an acronym for components I stress in contemporary feminism. DEREL's third-wave feminism, I explain, seeks the flourishing of all people and the planet, particularly through dismantling oppressions related to gender norms. DEREL's "R" is where I place the heart of contemporary feminism: in Relationality, in a relational framework that elucidates how we as persons are relationally comprised. Quite different from an earlier emphasis on women as more fully focused on relationships, third-wave relationality emphasizes instead that we *are* relationships — whether we are women, or men, or intersex, or trans. DEREL's "EL" stands for Embodiment and Lived experience, two related emphases which are directly inherited from the vigor of feminism's second wave: "The personal is political", and we will share the wisdom of our bodies, ourselves.[1]

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[1] I am referencing here the popular slogan of 1970s feminism, and the 1970 health book by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, now in an updated 2011 edition. By teaching my students about lived experience, I mean to

Continuing with my lesson, I explain that third-wave DEREL's other "E" is for Empowerment, which I argue has more richness for widespread flourishing than feminism's earlier E — an even-handed Equality. Equality may simply not be *different* enough to serve the needs of all women, let alone all people. We may want equal rights, and there remains much to be said for a basic legal framework to protect such a goal, but in actuality we are so far from equal — *and this is not all a bad thing*. While we should not construct and enforce inequality through mechanisms of oppression, we might nonetheless see in our lack of equality *the resource of our difference*. We have unequal abilities, needs, and bodies; we have unequal desires, and unequal power. *And* we can affirm the flourishing of each one as essential to our own "individual" flourishing. So while "Equality" might be a good way to start a feminist conversation, and might give us a basic plum line for measuring social oppressions, in contrast, the struggle for "Empowerment" does not assume any unifying principles of what we each of us, "in ourselves", should have. Empowerment can stem instead from diversifying principles that measure flourishing based on space for complexity and contrast, on an aesthetics of difference that *expects* some discord and divergence, like the push of the pulse, moving us forward, animating our efforts, vivifying our humanity. Thus we third-wave feminists fight for difference, not equality. This kind of difference needs to contain the basic ingredients of what we have called equal rights, but expressly for the wider purpose of enabling divergence and flourishing amidst and through ongoing differentiation.

It has been a task of the third-wave to construe how such difference would not be the undoing of feminism. For the second wave receded as it crashed into the rocky topography of difference, and feminism seemed to splinter, to be unable to hold together as any kind of unified movement: Is porn abhorrent to feminism, or is it sometimes expressive of women's

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invoke the particular situatedness of those experiences, and not a constructed category of "women's experience". "Lived experience" here emphasizes that feminism has followed a phenomenological epistemology, that feminist theory is grounded in particular lives and bodies. For an overview of the problems with appealing specifically to the category of women's experience as foundational to feminist methodology, see Kamitsuka 4-10. Also see Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*.

agency? Can lesbian feminists embrace s/m play, or is the juxtaposition of sadism and masochism antithetical to the mutuality of feminist or same-gender love? Can a wealthy white woman see the racism upon which her own "equality" relies? And can a feminist be a man? Or could a feminist love one? So the "sex wars" raged, and the second-wave splashed and fragmented around perceived obstacles of human difference.[2]

The wreckage of this conflict of difference the third wave now claims not as mess to clean up but as (nonetheless messy) construction material. It is the stuff of our composition, the building blocks of who we are together. In working with my students, "Difference" is DEREL's "D", for difference is essential to any relational framework. Not a problem, or at least, not *only* a problem, difference is breath, is space between, is possibility, fecundity, spark to the *eros* which draws us forward in pursuit of our own flourishing and that of others.

Doing Difference Constructively

As a teacher of both gender studies and theology, I am drawn to the parallels between Christian responses to difference and the feminist responses to difference. To some degree, the mainstream forms of both Christianity and feminism have perceived difference, at least initially, as a threat. This perception of threat is of course seen most vividly in ancient imperial and medieval crusader Christianities, when labeling the "threat" as such was far from politically incorrect. Feminists have had their less bloody moments: we have not followed medieval Christians in burning each other (thank goodness!), but we have burned each other's books.[3]

Much more subtly, in the modern Western context in which I now encounter feminism and Christianity, difference is often still negotiated as a problem, an "issue", a thing to be addressed. But we can, as some are showing us, explore it instead as a fundamental state of being, a platform

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[2] The chronology comprising the first chapter of Duggan and Hunter's *Sex Wars* offers a compelling entry into these debates.

[3] Duggan and Hunter report on the 1983 burning of lesbian s/m outside a women's bookstore in London (23).

for our relationality and connectedness: the fiber of our constitution rather than a subsequent and potentially troublesome aspect of communal living.

Both Christianity and feminism have their fundamentalisms, and these are stereotypically proud of their defense of uniformity. But the more progressive forms of each have striven for a generation now to approach difference more positively — celebrating it, or hosting dialogue across it, or seeking to facilitate organizations or gatherings that are more inclusive of it. I have participated in many such attempts at academic conference and at church events — too often facilitated as though we could really get down to work if we could just say a thing that finally had everyone's perspective, that finally took into account all various cultural perspectives and all the ways we are oppressed and actively oppressing. But who would we be when we finally said that thing? How would we any longer be *different*?

For many of us, Christian or feminist, difference — religious difference, sexual difference, differences of sexuality, racial difference, global difference — has in fact become a key issue to challenge us both as theorists and as activists.[4] Perhaps we are becoming more accessible; perhaps we are getting somewhere. Or, as Susan Stanford Friedman suggests, perhaps our focus on difference is impeding creative work in the relational spaces between difference (73).

I am mindful, too, of Chandra Talpade Mohanty's warnings about the ways in which Western academic feminists can, in the name of sensitivity to difference, replay colonizing postures toward the very different "others" for whom they are at heart concerned. Trying to be mindful of our differences across class, race, global, and other lines does not automatically make those differences functionally productive toward a positive end. Quite to the contrary, as Mohanty has shown, this mindfulness is too often functionally productive of further imperialism (19).[5] Thus a mindfulness of difference

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[4] On the prevalence of difference discourse in feminism, see Friedman 69-71.

[5] See also the related critique of Western epistemological imperialism in the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and the applications of Spivak in Rivera 104-124 and Kamitsuka 94-97. Spivak, as Kamitsuka explains, introduces the concept of "strategic essentialism" but is later frustrated by later invocations of the concept by those who ultimately essentialize others.

collapses on itself and produces further protection for unified intellectual and economic power: a hegemonic and colonizing feminism.

Thus my question remains: how might we — as feminists, working together through this journal issue — or how might we — Christians, with whom I work in my primary field — make a difference with difference? We already *are* difference; how might we *do* it with more grace, more fecundity? This need not mean blindsiding ourselves into a localized relativism, but rather a "specifying" of difference, that as Mohanty has argued, "allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully" (226).

"We Believe in One God…"

My own primary field, Christian theology, has largely shown great determination in its message of unity and final inclusion. Often, a unified inclusion cleansed of divergence has indeed been the point. The first line of the fourth century Nicene Creed, the beginning of which I quote above, is recited in many contemporary churches in many languages every Sunday, and yet it is also a relic of an imperial strategy to unify Christians of the Roman Empire under one standardized form of belief and practice.[6]

Unity remains a utopic fascination for many contemporary Christians, long after the fall of many (but certainly not all) imperial ecclesiologies. I sheepishly admit that even I am often swayed by a contemporary hymn which includes the summative verse, "Sing! Sing a New Song! Sing of that great day when all will be one! God will reign, and we'll walk with each other, as sisters and brothers, united in love!"[7] As hymns go for a feminist theologian, this one is not as prickly as most. But I sing with hesitation, knowing that in Christian history, unity has too often been an imperial goal. Theologies of unity have served political consolidation, bringing diverse persons under control. The push to overcome difference can still function as an imperial aim in the new colonialisms of our day.

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[6] For a more positive angle on the use of creeds today, see Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy* 535.

[7] This is a selection from "We Are Called", by David Hass (GIA Publications, 1988).

Contrary to the erroneous idea that the New Testament replaces an Old Testament exclusivity with a Christian inclusivity, the Hebrew Bible gives evidence of a people's understanding of their own uniqueness amidst cultural plurality. The Israelites and then ancient Jews do move into a more assertive monotheism from an initial henotheistic, and possibly polytheistic, background. But the ancient people of this monotheism (at their best) imagine for themselves a beneficial place among wider humanity without trying to morph that humanity into their own peoplehood (at their worst the stories tell of annihilation of the other).[8] In the book of Isaiah, for example, there is a sense of the universal significance for the "people of God", as Israel stands as a salvific presence for others, but not an expectation that other people need to be converted into Israel to receive this benefit. It is good for everybody that Israel is around, but everyone need not be Israel in order to experience goodness.[9] This is just one of many examples disproving the anti-Jewish Christian claim that the Hebrew Bible is a clannish narrative to be replaced by a second testament more inclusive of difference.

It takes the form of Judaism that becomes Christianity a long time to become zealous in its own colonial aims. As Christianity began to form in its early centuries, "Christians" were only messily distinguished, when at all, from Jews. Christianity's history with a destructive doing of difference begins in the abrasive cleaning up of that ambiguity under imperial pressure, as Christians and Jews pit themselves in opposition against each other, essentially constructing difference.[10]

Once some forms of Christianity strategize their way out from beneath the foot of empire and become a licensed religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the creeds are formulated, often as the

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[8] Thus this same Hebrew Bible also has its colonizing narratives, most famously in the slaughter of Canaanites as the Israelites claim their promised land, but also in stories like the mass slaughter after the rape of Dinah.

[9] For an example of a widespread benefit, beyond the "people of God", see the *Book of Isaiah*, chapter 25.

[10] For a thorough exploration of this Jewish and Christian "difference making", lasting through half of the first millennium, Common Era, see Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines*.

documents of imperial councils. Though they are abstracted from such a history in their use in worship today, they remain standardizing texts: here is the theology of the empire, the correct way of believing and conforming. And these imperial words are those still recited so long after those early standardizing councils at many Christian baptisms, as new persons are swept into the "oneness" of the churches.

So what can difference mean for Christianity, wherein unity is so often deified and sought? As John's Jesus — in the midst of the myriad Jewish differences of his day — prays to the one he addresses as father, "Let them be one, as we are one".[11] Much churchly attention to difference arises out of a belief that Christians *should* be one, meaning for many that we are supposed to all pay attention to each other, or at the very least, stop subjugating each other. To sound another contemporary hymn: "One bread, one body, one Lord of all, one cup of blessing that we bless, and we, though many, throughout the earth, we are one body in this one Lord!"[12] The irony is that hymns like this are sung at the Eucharistic meal, the ritual sharing of bread and wine as the body of Christ which is *a broken body*, which is ritually broken again and again every time said meal is enacted. And motivations to include everybody (in our church? in our culture? in God?) are inspired in devotion to such a split Christ. Yet certainly there is a trajectory there, in this enduring Christian ritual, for doing difference *differently*. Perhaps Christians can stop trying to glue the loaf back together. Christians can be broken — conscientiously, that is, for we've been broken all along, as the less mainstream have always been acutely aware — and see where that gets us.[13]

This would mean, perhaps, that Christians can stop seeking to unify the churches (where they were ever seeking such a thing). This would mean

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[11] See John 17:22. This passage also begs the question of how, precisely, Jesus and the one addressed are one: is this unity or difference?

[12] This is the refrain of "One Bread, One Body" by John Foley (New Dawn Music, 1978).

[13] For theologies embracing such a brokenness, see Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, and as it relates to sexual ethics, see the final chapter of Mark Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex*.

that Christians so minded to do so can stop worrying about the "problem" of religious difference, or the questions about how religious people might ultimately fit as one, while also not clearing the room and enthroning Christianity as the one way. Perhaps Christians (some Christians, since Christians themselves will remain *different*) can use their Christian "identity", their difference from other ways of life, religious or otherwise, constructively, abandoning in the process the attempt to push for sameness, for Christian hegemony, for orthodoxy. Perhaps they can learn to break, as Virginia Burrus has termed it, "the heresiological habit".

Indeed, many contemporary theologians are at work in this effort.[14] For example, Laurel Schneider thoroughly critiques the trope of oneness in Christian theology and offers instead the constructive proposal of divine multiplicity. She articulates the dangers of a totalizing, deified oneness: "the logic of the One cannot abide the difference that bodies make, and so abstracts bodies into classifications, types, and identities. This means that specific, always-differing-and-becoming bodies disappear over and over again in Christian theology and philosophy" (Schneider 167).

To make a long and complex story very short, Christianity has not done difference well.[15] It has tried to make a difference by overcoming difference. And yet, as Schneider emphasizes, "Oneness falters in bodies, and that is the brilliant critique incarnation makes of dominant Christian theology!" Incarnation — our own, not just a particular historical one — "is a material event of distinction". Bodies make difference. These bodies, and the occurrence of divine multiplicity within and among them, cannot be regrouped into another whole — such as "pantheism". Divine multiplicity, writes Schneider, "cannot be constrained by such a narrow limit as everything" (167). For "everything" is its own oneness, its own consolidation of difference into a homogenized totality. "All" lacks particularity and distinction; divine multiplicity, however, thrives in difference. As do we.

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[14] See particularly Boesel and Ariarajah, *Divine Multiplicity*.

[15] Two interesting entryways into a study of Christianity's often tragic and colonizing doing of difference are Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality*.

Feminist Heterodoxy

First wave feminism, which preceded the term "feminism" itself, spoke of itself in the singular. It was time for the Woman, mobilized in the U.S., for example, in the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association. Great strength was garnered in the idea of a unified identity, as women came together to protest the patriarchies that would silence them in their work for emancipation.

In the second wave, "Woman" gave way to Women, and many, many gains were achieved for the flourishing of "women". But the category itself would not hold. "Sisterhood" may sound nice, but remains a dangerous and too often false notion, whitewashing difference in the name of unity.[16] Too often, appeals to one shared ground are veiled invitations to yield to the ground-rules of the one making the appeal. Drawing the defining lines around "Women" inevitably consigns someone's womanness to the heretical.[17]

The third wave has taken shape in troubling the "heresiological habit" forming in the second wave. Now, any feminist orthodoxy seems both impossible and dangerous. Heterodox, can we still make difference?

While I tell my students that third wave feminists seek the flourishing of all people and the planet, feminist heterodoxy means that the thriving of each is no blanket policy. No large meta-story, neither is thriving of all abandoned for each to (impossibly) figure out on one's own. Flourishing is a thing worked out *not individually* but between us, in the contexts of relationships, which is to say, in life, in lived experience, on the ground. In the small stories between us, we share the truth of the troth (Keller 37).

In referencing the linguistic connections between "truth" and "troth" (think "betrothal"), Catherine Keller pushes truth firmly back to the ground, seating it in the context of relationship. Rather than high-flung universals — never truly shared by each and every one because attached only to those shaping such universals — truth is born among and

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[16] On critiques of "sisterhood", see Mohanty 106-123.

[17] Anne Fausto-Sterling's *Sexing the Body* examines how intersex bodies are seen as "heretical bodies" in a two sex system.

between us. Truth we realize together: it adheres to us and the contexts of our coalition. In being relevant, connected to us, truth is also more than us, because the relational is more than me or you. As such, truth realized amid the differences of relationship is not consigned to the relative — for relativism often denotes you and me unbound, with no claims on each other (Keller 38).

This sort of truthfulness, born of our multiple troths in coalitions, allows us truth claims while not qualifying our descent into difference. Rather the deeper the difference, as we coalesce, the more poignant the truths. Difference is then not a threat to transcendent claims, nor something that needs to be balanced against the universal.[18] Writing of the caress of transcendence in relational situatedness, Mayra Rivera writes of transcendence as a "product of relations between irreducibly different beings" (77).

This grounded, local relational space is the fertile medium in which the dynamism that will rise up and overturn larger-than-local oppressions can take hold and expand. As Audre Lorde prophesied, our futures may depend on our ability to develop "new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference" (123). Our difference remains the ground of our relating and the space from which we can emerge as feminist activists and theorists. Differences are, in Mohanty's wording, our "common differences" (225). Differences are not things we have in common, but in difference we share the commonality of being bordered, being particular. The plentitude of our differences prevents a merger between us and forms the medium for our relationship, the guard against intimate empires that mask difference in the name of love or justice.

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[18] Here my argument differs from that of Serene Jones, who values the constructionist side of theologizing in which I place myself (and, importantly, does not articulate difference as a threat), but who balances the particularities of our social constraints against carefully articulated "normative universalist" claims that arise from her concept of "eschatological essentialism" (54). This path "between belief in a universal truth and recognition that we are radically constructed" helpfully leaves our current understandings of truth always open to being transformed as we reach a more just future. My sense is rather that truthfulness arises out of and within the coalesce of our multiple differences. Jones' model conjures an image of the beyond pulling us forward; I am seeking to portray a "between" that rises up.

Mohanty's work retains a larger-than-local, more-than-relative goal. Indeed, she must avoid relativism as she presses her concern about the colonizing forces of global capitalism, for her analysis of global colonization would be short-sighted if it resided only in local differences. "How we think of the local in/of the global and vice versa without falling into colonizing or cultural relativist platitudes about difference is crucial", she maintains, for today's feminism. Mohanty carefully describes the flip side of the relativist mistake: the colonizing tendency of even feminist theories in their constructions of universals or appeals to all women's experience.

As Keller has maintained, both relativism and a colonizing absolutism fail in that they ignore relationality (4). Where the absolutist masks the difference of the other, the relativist makes no claim on the other: here difference is not fundamentally important in any way. Thus a way forward for feminists doing difference constructively cannot be some middle ground between the absolutism of oneness or the relativism of sheer diversity. Rather, in order to make a difference with difference, feminists need to step away from this polarity altogether, refocusing attention on the local caress of difference in the situatedness of lived coalitions. It is here, Rivera shows us, that we encounter "the touch of transcendence".

Lorde called for a deeper "recognition of difference" (122). Striving to make a difference with difference, such recognition is not simply about acknowledging the fact of diversity, but instead recognizing the function of it, the power and dynamism of connected differences. Recognition of difference is like a spiritual practice, a concerted resistance to merging or eliding into a paternalizing sameness. We trust in our difference to ensure flourishing; we step back into difference, into particularity, in order to give space for others' developments, to release any oppressive tendency, to breathe in our own uniqueness, to attend to multiple paths of connection.

Thus in contemporary feminism we still need to put difference on our agendas, but never in the name of any final inclusion. Instead multiple outcomes are possible as we feel the friction of our difference. Like the ever expanding universe in which we somehow live, the space between us need not be minimized in order for life to flourish. The intentional maintenance of the space of difference, like Luce Irigaray's "relation of indirection" (109), can be productive, but not if the goal is finally to erase difference in order to come together. Rather it is the difference that allows an "us" to

come together. And together, different, we can work for flourishing, for justice: for more difference.[19]

The difference allowed by feminist heterodoxy will allow us a more vast togetherness than any orthodoxy ever could. We turn our attention not to infinite splitting but to infinite connections. Accordingly, Friedman advocates a feminism that "assumes difference without reifying or fetishizing it" (4).[20] Friedman arrives at this proposal out of concern for "what gets lost, forgotten, or suppressed in the exclusivity of the project of difference" (71). Thus she turns her theoretical analysis to the spaces of "connection in between difference" in order to explore what María Lugones describes as "the place of our possibilities as companions in play" (35).[21] Friedman concludes that "the contact zone where differences meet is as real and as significant a part of cultural formations, including the formations of identity, as the spaces of difference" (104).

Because these spaces are ever shifting and "migratory", we cannot theorize them once and for all (Friedman 102). But we can argue, as Friedman does, for the spaces between us as vital sites for feminist focus — rather than the focus on differences themselves, too often essentialized on the other side of the between. Without the between, without the relation, we always consigned to a crude essentializing, rather than realizing relational essence. Without the between we make objects of others and ourselves, even in the name of difference, as we congeal into stasis rather than risking renewed and shifted subjectivity. Thus to fight for difference is also to resist the power of our scripts of difference.[22]

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[19] Iris Marion Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* articulates the importance of working for justice while maintaining difference.

[20] Friedman advocates a return to a "feminism in the singular" based on a "locational epistemology" (4).

[21] For Friedman's analysis of Lugones' notion of "play" see 76.

[22] Analyzing circulating scripts of difference involves scrutiny not just of the "what" of difference but of the "how" of difference. How has difference between us been produced? What has made us, for example, "immigrant" and "citizen"? See the related discussion in Rivera 103-115, where she is in conversation with Spivak's notion of the "wholly Other".

Friedman celebrates the "migratory movement in the spaces between difference" (68) and this fluid image is like unto that of Margaret Kamitsuka, who calls for a deeper engagement with difference within feminist theology particularly. Kamitsuka suggests improvisational dance as a way of imagining contact across difference. Into this dance we inevitably carry all our bodily memories and scripts, while also opening ourselves to the formulation of a new script in the particularity of this new encounter, learning new rhythms (154).

"Reading Up" Together

Articulating a postcolonial, anti-capitalist feminist theory, Mohanty advocates the analysis of particular anti-capitalist practices from localized communities of the Two-Thirds world. She does not focus on such local specificity, however, at the expense of universal claims; she resists a relativist use of difference. Rather she "reads up" from this specificity, finding that "beginning from the lives and interests of marginalized communities of women", she can then "make the workings of power visible" (Mohanty 233). Her strategy of "reading up" offers a way to make a difference with difference. "It is more necessary to read upward" — that is, "to read up the ladder of privilege" — for "colonized peoples must know themselves and the colonizer" (Mohanty 231).

Such a strategy of "reading up", wherein lines of power become exceedingly visible, is also noted by Kamitsuka in feminist theology. She observes that "the appeal to women's experience by feminist theologians of color", in contrast to white feminists who have used such an appeal for imposing unification, "usually serves as an agenda of bringing into focus and affirming the differences among women's experiences, often emphasizing minority women's struggles related to race-based or neocolonialist injustices and the deep mistrust of and lack of connection to the images, metaphors, and ideals of white feminist theology" (Kamitsuka 7). Analyzing experience from a hegemonic perspective occludes power difference and indeed all experiential differences beyond hegemony. The hegemonic gaze seeks to unify rather than differentiate.

This does not mean that those tangled in powerful affiliations with hegemonic norms should abandon their own "reading" positions and usurp

that of some essentialized "victim" of hegemony. Any one person is different from sheer hegemony. I posit that the point of "reading up" to make a difference with difference would precisely be to stay cognizant of our position, *our* position: to read up *from the space of our coalition* across difference. We "read up" from the relational overlaps that form any feminist coalition — indeed any feminist "self" — thus always beginning our reading from a place where power lines are made overt.

The feminist is not *me* or *you* so much as the feminist is the relation between us and is the name of our coalition. The feminist is a relational creature, a relationship. So for a woman somewhere in a situation where she is feeling quite isolated to declare "I am a feminist!" means for her to declare her essence to be far-flung, for her to posit the wide possibilities of who she is, and to connect herself to a wider network in an assertion that resists her current constraints. "I am a feminist!" refuses the isolation and objectification of oppressive structures; it is a relational claim that exceeds and corrodes those structures.

Thus "I am feminist" only insofar as *we* are, so far as "I" am finding empowerment being drawn out and between and with. I cannot properly say "I am a feminist" because feminist coalition, relational selfhood, has blurred the boundaries of my "I" even as it has given it more luminosity and brilliance. Difference means I cannot be a feminist by myself; I need difference to be myself.

As we read up from the feminist who is between us, our unique and shifting perspective reveals the power lines around and between us, lines that shape but do not capture our difference. Starting from the sometimes difficult place of our common differences, we birth the feminist, we birth the work for our common thriving. This is not relativism — we need each other here! — but neither is it a homogenous universalism — again because we need each other here.

We make a difference with difference by being different and realizing it to the extent that we are able to do something with it — like making love or changing laws or cleaning up the earth. Feminists are born of difference.

The Right of Difference

Our need for difference, like the bodily need for air and water, demands a permeable sense of self. Accountability to a permeable self, however, may sound like a threat to the feminist tradition of self-assertion. There is irony in that we assert our subjectivity as we express how such an assertion is always an unfinished sentence, an open-ended prompt, with the door of difference already letting in the drafts of new material, letting out what was. To shut the door for more than a moment is to block the oxygen of the self.

What can it mean for women, who have long been violated and permeated against our wills, for whom such continuing trespass is tragically commonplace on a global scale, to affirm as necessary our permeability? It is to be accountable to ourselves, to refuse the hegemonic norms of patriarchal and colonizing notions of human subjectivity, to refuse to suffocate ourselves in the name of self-protection. It is to need difference, not because we are weak and "needy", but because we have found the key to our strength, and have refused to hold our breath and hold in our bellies to please a patriarchal, colonizing, and racist norm any longer.

As feminists, we need difference. We are difference. Not difference *from* any unified other (men, or straight people), but internal, compositional difference, difference so internal it finally deconstructs the "internal", exposing us rather as eternally in and out, dismantling the polarity of *ex* and *in* until we have started to see ourselves as concentrated, localized coalitions of communities, coalitions poignantly unique but also unable to finally be cut off from a more global or far-flung connectedness without ceasing to be.

The need for difference need not mean that we feminists must stop using the word "equality" entirely, but that we should be clear about what we mean by it. Rather than striving to "be" equal (or, from particular power positions, to "help" others to be equal to us), feminists more usefully fight to enable equalized opportunities, or equal access to that which is needed for flourishing. Yet even in this use of "equal" your needs may not be equal to mine; perhaps one of us needs more glucose, or more sunlight, perhaps another needs more tutoring, more technology.[23] Nonetheless, to fight for

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[23] For feminist discussion of the limits of "equality", and alternative framework for it, see Martha C. Nussbaum's capabilities approach, in *Women and Human Development.*

equally available resources (rather than equality amongst us) is another way to fight to enable *difference* to function more fully, to empower more persons — that is, more localized coalitions of communities — to flourish, to shine more brightly, to make their mark in a uniquely complex and newly beautiful way.

We might make a difference with difference when accountable to ourselves as a relationality that goes all the way down, all the way to the organism of my "own" bodily ecosystem, or to sub-atomic spaciousness between "me", between "us". Our interrelational boundlessness makes difference always again, proving the fundamental irreducibility of each other. I cannot imagine you "a black woman" or "a lesbian" or one of "the British" or one of "the poor". Nor can you reduce me to "white", "straight" or "American" (for even I cannot comfortably reduce myself to these terms). We are unique convergences of relationships and communities, not identities mass produced and conforming. Labels will not stick to the sweat of real skin.

Within theology, two compelling conversations that demonstrate how labels conceal differences in power and purpose are those around the terms "womanist" and "mujerista".[24] In her article, "Must I Be Womanist?", Monica Coleman demonstrates the ways in which "womanist", while helpfully connoting her commitments to Christian church communities, downplays her political activism and occludes her commitments to deconstructing heterosexism and to traditions other than Christianity. She writes,

> To put it in anecdotal terms, when I tell my black male friends that I'm a womanist, they think of me as a black church-woman, which I sometimes am. When I tell them that I am a black feminist, they get a little uneasy, because they start to wonder if I'm aligned with lesbians, if I'm going to question their power, and if I'm going to call God "She" — all of which I also do. I find the word *feminist*, whether modified by *black* or not, to have the disruptive effect that I want (Coleman, "Must I" 92).

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[24] Other concealing and often distancing labels include the word "different" itself and the category "other". On these, see Rivera 103-155, Spelman 137-140 and Minh-ha 100-102.

Identities relate to communal contexts and to strategies, both which are shifting. No one label is going to fit Coleman's work perfectly, or Coleman perfectly, especially because, as she writes elsewhere "…relationships are internal…we do not *have* relationships…Rather, we *are* relationships" (*Making* 55). Thus we (and she) are continually reforming our essence, and the labels slip off, crack away, expire.

Further, as Traci West writes in her response to Coleman, it is only from a hegemonic white racist perspective that the drive to limit and define Coleman would appear: "There is something absurd and sad about the necessity to fight for the space in scholarly discourse and the academic job and publishing markets for a black woman scholar to be permitted to have more than one analytical label for her work".[25] West asks, "Can you imagine a discussion about the appropriateness of assigning one analytical category to identify the work of all white religious scholars?" ("Response" 128). West's question points to the way in which those perpetrating hegemonic power refuse one label for themselves, claiming as obvious their own right to difference, while seeking to deny the compositional difference of others.

While dynamic, compositional difference continually moves us beyond anyone's grasp (even our own), a homogenous, essentialized category of difference seeks to objectify, define, and control.[26] "The search and the claim for an essential female/ethnic identity-difference today", writes Trinh Minh-ha, "can never be anything more than a move within the male-is-norm-divide and conquer trap" (101).[27] Thus West's question,

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[25] West's is one of several responses to Coleman in a special edition of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* on the topic of the label "womanist". In her book *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, West insists that particularities guide our analysis of moral claims beyond the particular (and here I notice her resonance with Mohanty's "reading up"). For example, West shows that looking at the category of "U.S. citizenship" while cognizant of particular women's experiences of abuse by U.S. Customs officials demonstrates how "the moral significance of the universal category is disclosed through particularities of the context where it is in force" (*Disruptive* 49). One can both deconstruct and reconstruct large ethical categories from the perspective of particular webs of relation.

[26] On the contrasting concept of "strategic essentialism", see note 5 above.

[27] Minh-ha offers a cutting critique of *failing* to make a difference with difference:

"How does one resist the imposition of all types of narrow and constraining categories for blacks?" ("Response" 134), confirms for me the importance of the struggle for difference — differences deep, wide, and beyond us — precisely as a means toward the flourishing feminists have desired under the misnomer of "equality".

In keeping with this, the term "mujerista" does not apply to all United States Latina theologians, as Aquino, Machado and Rodríguez briefly explain (Aquino, Machado and Rodríguez xx). Ada María Isasi-Díaz, who brought the term "mujerista theology" into academic discourse, herself writes that for Hispanic women to "attempt to set up unifying categories would result in doing to each other what the dominant culture has done to us" (199). She references Elizabeth Spelman in claiming that "one of the leads we need to follow here is the understanding that in rejecting differences as substantive categories and attributes, what we are doing is welcoming our diversity as relational" (Isasi-Díaz 200).[28]

If we imagine equality in placing a mujerista theologian, a womanist theologian, and an (unspecified) white feminist theologian together on a panel, what we achieve is a small, least-common-denominator equality, consisting in us each having a chair on the panel (though the educational opportunities that have gotten us there are no small thing). Meanwhile the powers that constructed our labels of difference (and lack thereof) go unanalyzed, leaving us unequal in ways that limit flourishing.[29] And all the

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"As long as words of difference serve to legitimate a discourse instead of delaying its authority to infinity, they are, to borrow an image from Audre Lorde, 'noteworthy only as *decorations*'" (101). Minh-ha is quoting Lorde's open letter to Mary Daly.

[28] See Spelman 137-140. Spelman emphasizes that "investigations into ways in which women are similar and ways we are different must always be looked at in light of the following questions: Who is doing the investigating? Whose views are heard and accepted? Why? What criteria are used for similarity and difference? Finally, and most important, what is said to follow from the supposed existence of similarity and difference?" (139). These questions highlight lines of power as we read up from the interstices of our feminist coalition.

[29] Thus West writes, while analyzing not an academic panel but church worship, "Especially in predominantly white settings, celebrations of multiple cultural identities can be a means for avoiding and thus denying the presence of racism. A racially integrated

while the richness of our embodied difference pulses between us and through us, beckoning our attention, too fluid and vivid to be quantified at all, least of all as equal.

Like those who might consider themselves womanist, or might not, and like those who might identify as mujerista, or might not, any feminist coalition needs to maintain a deep sense of difference, of internal, compositional difference in that which is "feminist": an internal difference which contests a firm boundary on the internal, and thus on feminism itself. To struggle for any homogenizing cohesion would result in doing to each other what a non-relational culture does to us. Rather we must struggle for the right of difference.

You and I, we cannot be token representatives, because while we represent in our bodies the overlapping communities that have birthed these moments of ourselves, we do so in ways that no other can or does. I am irreducibly different, non-compartmentalizable, fundamentally *other*. And yet simultaneously this means I am never truly "the other". I cannot be "the other" both because I cannot be pre-packaged thusly and because in this moment of exchange, dialogue, or meeting I overlap with you in all your particularity. I am related to you right now, and "reading up" we analyze the power dynamics of this meeting (even right now, write now, as I am the one with the ink), but we need not agonize over finding a sameness as some sort of balance to our difference. Our sameness is in our irreducible difference; we are similar in our endlessly unique lack of similitude. Our unique sameness lies in this irreducibility to difference and in the shared gravities that have brought us to this moment simultaneously. Other than this basic and yet compelling commonality, we transcend one another, infinitely, as Rivera has written (81). So let us fight for our "infinition"![30] We bring glorious difference to our coalition. We bring different matter to the table — different resources, unequal powers, unequal potential to

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congregation or a liturgy with culturally diverse expressions of faith is not necessarily an indication that racism is being addressed" (*Disruptive* 136).

[30] Rivera writes, "Taking infinity as our main metaphor of transcendence…we attempt to offer a model that emphasizes the in-finite openness and singularity of the other person, within the particularity and complexity of her/his context" (82).

wound, different pains and scars — and our meeting across difference is never a utopic safe space.

But because there is no other sort of meeting to be had, if we desire time together, and shared work, if we hold similar aims, then let us continue to pull ourselves together. Those comings together — those concrescences of individuality, those irreducible and irreproducible relational overlaps — will be the feminists of tomorrow, not we ourselves *a priori*.

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Abstract

This article responds to feminism's history with the charged topics of "equality" and "difference". Working both in feminist theory and in feminist theology, the article argues that difference is fundamental to the coalition which is feminist activism, and also to the coalition which is the human self. Likewise, though it has been a central tenet of feminist activism, equality may simply not be *different* enough to serve the needs of all women, let alone all people. Ultimately this means that feminists today need to fight for difference, not equality. Not a problem, or at least, not *only* a problem, difference is breath: space between, an opening to fecundity, spark to the eros which draws us forward in pursuit of our own flourishing and that of others. For third-wave feminism, the recognition of difference can move beyond the basic acknowledgement of the fact of diversity to an exploration of the function of it. In order to make a difference with difference, feminists need not formulate a meta-theory of difference, but rather refocus their attention on the local caress of difference in the situatedness of lived relations, letting their analysis and activism, and tomorrow's feminism, proceed from there.

Keywords

Feminism; Difference; Equality; Theology; Christianity

Resumo

Este artigo dialoga com a história do feminismo através de os tópicos problemáticos da "igualdade" e da "diferença". Com base tanto na teoria feminista como na teologia feminista, este artigo defende que a diferença é fundamental para a coalescência que é o ativismo feminista e para a coalescência que é a pessoa humana. Por outro lado, embora tenha sido um dos princípios do ativismo feminista, a igualdade pode simplesmente não ser *diferente* o suficiente para servir as necessidades de todas as mulheres, quanto mais de todas as pessoas. Em última instância, isto quer dizer que as feministas hoje precisam de lutar pela diferença, não pela igualdade. Sem ser um problema, ou pelo menos *apenas* um problema, a diferença

é fôlego: espaço entre uma abertura à fecundidade, faísca para o eros que nos leva a avançar em busca do nosso próprio florescimento e do dos outros. Para as feministas de terceira geração, reconhecer a diferença pode ir além de assumir a diversidade e pode tornar-se uma exploração da sua funcionalidade. De modo a fazer uma diferença com a diferença, as feministas não precisam de formular uma meta-teoria da diferença, antes focar de novo a sua atenção na carícia local da diferença em situações de relacionamentos vividos, deixando a sua análise e o seu ativismo, e o feminismo do futuro, proceder desse ponto.

Palavras Chave

Feminismo; Diferença; Igualdade; Teologia; Cristianismo

Equivocation, Translation, and Performative Interseccionality: Notes on Decolonial Feminist Practices and Ethics in Latin America

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Olympia. Édouard Manet (1832-1883). 1863. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris

1. Introduction: Olympia, 1863

Olympia, a translation of Titian's "Venus of Urbino" (which was, in turn, a translation of Giorgione's "Venus of Dresden"), is an oil portrait on canvas signed by Édouard Manet in 1863. The painting was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1867 and was received with a mixture of shock and embarrassment by the public at this prestigious art space.

Contrary to what many say, the cause of so much scandal was not the nakedness of Olympia, but the gaze that her nudity embodies. Olympia's

defying stare confronts ruthlessly those who look at her; she returns the (male) gaze with a fixed, disturbing look that makes the awareness of seeing and being seen to coexist uneasily. As noted by the the painting's critical reception, Olympia's look gives her the power to rise above her gender and class. Besides, her hand draws attention to her sex at the same time that covers it. This dichotomy (to reveal and to cover) leads the viewer to feel the need to stare at her sex, but not without blame, as she hides it from public view. She refuses to be addressed as the peaceful courtesan of French modernity, and Manet, after having created Olympia, subverted forever the nude painting genre.[1]

Why am I using Olympia's image to begin my reflections on feminist theories' decolonial turn in Latin America? I see the painting — which I appropriate here — as a metaphor for the debates on the coloniality of power. On the one hand, if we observe Ticiano's "Venus of Urbino", we can see that Manet's translation of it brings to the forefront several elements constitutive of modernity/coloniality. On the other, from a feminist perspective, although Olympia refuses to be positioned as the object of the voyeuristic male gaze, to recall Mulvey, in constituting herself as the subject of the gaze, she subalternizes the other woman in the picture (the black servant) by not even acknowledging her presence. Olympia disdainfully ignores both the white flowers that are delivered to her by the maid and the maid herself. The whiteness of Olympia's skin contrasts with the blackness of the maid in the faded pink dress, who, in turn, shares the space of the painting with the cat, also black, sitting lazily at Olympia's feet. In quite a provocative way, bodies marked by gender, class, race, fabrics, flowers and animals, carefully arranged in a colonial narrative, intersect in the constitution of the dualism between the human (white woman) and the non-human (the maid and the black cat). I decided to use Manet's painting as a trope to explore the challenges of contemporary feminisms face vis-à-vis the postcolonial and decolonial debates.

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[1] There is already an extensive discussion about Manet's Olympia and its visual rhetoric. My intention here is not to engage with this criticism, but to use the painting for other purposes.

2. Feminism and Cultural Translation

Postcolonial theories have exercised a significant influence on the reconfiguration of cultural criticism. By replacing dichotomous approaches of social-political conflicts for complex analysis of the in-between spaces of the social landscape — and, therefore, by emphasizing relationalities between hegemonic forces and subaltern contestations along with the proliferation of temporalities and histories — these theories constitute today an ubiquitous and profuse transdisciplinary terrain. In the pages that follow, I analyze the relationship between postcolonial criticism and Latin American feminist theories of difference from the perspective of cultural translation.

Latin American feminist theories, articulated by subaltern/racialized subjects, operate within an epistemological referent that is distinct from the analytic model that has historically structured the relations between center and periphery, tradition and modernity. An effect of transculturation and diasporic movements that create space and time disjunctures, the chronotrope of these feminisms is the interstice, and its practice is anchored in cultural translation in the constitution of other forms of knowledge (*saberes própios*) and humanity.

How do feminist theories in the Latin American context translate and decolonize the postcolonial critique? What kinds of mediation are needed in Latin American feminist translations of the postcolonial? These are some of the conundrums about contemporary theoretical trends within feminism that I will explore below in trying to map out, in a necessarily abbreviated and perhaps inconclusive manner, possible routes for gender and feminist studies in the south of the Americas.

I should begin by clarifying that my use of the term translation is borrowed from Niranjana's deployment of the concept, that is, it does not refer exclusively to discussions about the strategies for semiotic processes in the area of translations studies, but to debates on cultural translation. The notion of cultural translation (drawing on debates on ethnographic theory and practice) is premised upon the view that any process of description, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas and worldviews is always already caught up in relations of power and asymmetries between languages, regions, and peoples.

In contemporary globalized formations, in light of the reconfiguration of knowledges and the remapping of all kinds of borders (geographic, political, economic, cultural, and libidinal, among others), the traditional categories of analyses can no longer provide an account of the profound geopolitical transformations we are witnessing. As Appadurai has argued, the technological, financial, ideological and media flows, followed by a variety of diasporic displacements that characterize current life, have established complex interconnections and fractures between the local and the global that cannot be grasped by our conventional disciplinary protocols of analysis. Postcolonial theories emerge as an attempt to fill the analytical void caused by the proliferation of new disjunctive temporalities, asymmetries of power and instabilities of capitalism. They also attempt to make visible the mechanisms that constitute our global reality and, in their larger project of social transformation, seek to move beyond the options offered by modernity and Occidentalism. According to Venn, echoing Young,

> postcolonial critique therefore cannot but connect with a history of emancipatory struggles, encompassing anti-colonial struggles as well as the struggles that contest economic, religious, ethnic, and gender forms of oppression […], on the principle that it is possible and imperative to create more equal, convivial and just societies. It follows that the construction of an analytical apparatus that enables the necessary interdisciplinary work to be done is a central part of the task. (35)

In light of the remapping of all types of borders and in a context of the transnational transit of theories and concepts, the issue of translation has become a pressing concern, constituting, on one side, a single space for the analysis of the intersection (or transculturation) between the local and the global in the production of "vernacular cosmopolitanisms" (Hall, "Thinking the Diaspora" 11), and, on the other, a privileged perspective for the examination of representation, power, and the asymmetries between languages in the formation of social imaginaries. In postcolonial critique, the logic of cultural translation refers to the process of shifting the notion of difference from its common understanding (as in "difference from") to the Derridean concept of *différance* that, according to Hall ("Quando

foi o pós-colonial?"), points to "a process that is never complete, but remains in its undecidability" (74). Viewed as *différance*, translation is always deployed whenever the self encounters the radical, unassimilable difference of the other. In the words of Venn, now resonating the ideas of Bhabha,

> translations across heterolingual and culturally heterogeneous and polyglot borders allow for the feints, the camouflages, the displacements, ambivalences, mimicries, the appropriations, that is to say, the complex stratagems of disidentification that leave the subaltern and the subjugated with the space for resistance. (115)

From the recognition of the incompleteness and incommensurability of any analytical or experiential perspective, Santos proposes, in relation to postcolonial critique, a theory of translation as dialogic negotiation, articulating a mutual — and non hierarchical — intelligibility of the world. The translational turn, so to speak, shows that the translation process exceeds the linguistic transfer of meaning from one language to another and seeks to encompass the very act of enunciation — when we speak we are always already engaged in translation, both for ourselves as for the other. If speaking already implies translating, and if the translation is an activity of openness to the other (a displacement from one's location), then in such a transaction identity and alterity are inevitably intertwined, making the act of translating a process of continuous dislocation. In translation, there is a moral and political obligation to uproot oneself, to become temporarily homeless so that the other may dwell, albeit provisionally, in one's home. To translate means to be always in transit ("*world*"-traveling, for Lugones ["World-Traveling"]), to live in the *entrelugar* (Santiago), in the contact zone (Pratt) or in the border (Anzaldúa). In other words, it means to reside in exile. Deploying both the trope of translation and the notion of equivocation — the latter borrowed from Amerindian perspectivism (which I will elaborate below) — I would like to reflect on the feminist decolonial turn in Latin America taking, as a starting point, the debates on the coloniality of power and gender carried out by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano and by the Argentinian emigré philosopher Maria Lugones.

3. Power, Gender, and Its Colonialities

The coloniality of power, according to Quijano,

> is a concept that accounts for one of the founding elements of the current pattern of power, that is, the basic and universal social classification of the planet's population around the idea of "race". This idea, together with the (racist) social classification on which it was based, originated 500 years ago along with America, Europe and capitalism. They are the deepest and most enduring expression of colonial domination and were imposed on the entire population of the planet in the course of the expansion of European colonialism. Since then, in the current pattern of global power, these two elements pervade each and every one of the areas of social existence and constitute the most profound and effective form of social, material, and intersubjective domination, therefore constituting the universal basis of political domination within the current model of power. (4)

In America, Quijano continues, the ideia of race

> was a way of legitimating the relations of domination imposed by conquest. The subsequent establishment of Europe as a new identity after America and the global expansion of European colonialism led to the development of an Eurocentric perspective of knowledge … Since then [the idea of race] proved to be the most effective, lasting and universal instrument of social domination, which, in turn, depended upon another one, equally universal but older, the intersexual or gender system of domination. (203)

Two points should be emphasized about the above citations. First, for Quijano, coloniality and colonialism are different, albeit related, phenomena. Colonialism represents the political-economic domination of some people over others and is, analytically speaking, anterior to coloniality, which refers, in turn, to the universal classification system that has prevailed for more than 500 years. Coloniality of power cannot, therefore, exist without the advent of colonialism. Second, and more significant for the purpose of my argument in this essay, the coloniality of gender is seen by

Quijano as subordinated to the coloniality of power when, in the 16th century, the principle of racial classification became a form of social domination. For Quijano, gender domination is subordinated to the superior-inferior hierarchy of racial classification.

The productivity of the concept of coloniality of power rests in its articulation of the notion of race as the *sine qua non* element of colonialism and its neocolonial manifestations. When we bring the gender category to the center of the colonial project, then we can trace a genealogy of its formation and use as a key mechanism by which colonial global capitalism structured asymmetries of power in the contemporary world. To see gender as a colonial category also allows us to historicize patriarchy, emphasizing the ways in which heteronormativity, capitalism and racial classifications are always already intertwined. According to Lugones ("Heterosexualisms"),

> Intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other. The move to intersect the categories has been motivated by the difficulties in making visible those who are dominated and victimized in terms of both categories. Though everyone in capitalist Eurocentered modernity is both raced and gendered, not everyone is dominated or victimized in terms of their race or gender. Kimberlé Crenshaw and other women of color feminists have argued that the categories have been understood as homogenous and as picking out the dominant in the group as the norm; thus women picks out white bourgeois women, men picks out white bourgeois men, black picks out black heterosexual men, and so on. It becomes logically clear then that the logic of categorical separation distorts what exists at the intersection, such as violence against women of color. Given the construction of the categories, the intersection misconstrues women of color. So, once intersectionality shows us what is missing, we have ahead of us the task of reconceptualizing the logic of the intersection so as to avoid separability. It is only when we perceive gender and race as intermeshed or fused that we actually see women of color. (192-3)

For Lugones the concept of coloniality of power still rests on a biological (and binary) notion of sex, as well as on a heterosexual/ patriarchal view of

power, to explain the way gender figures in power disputes for the "control of sex, its resources, and products" ("Heterosexualisms" 190). In colonialism and in Eurocentric global capitalism, "the naturalizing of sexual differences is another product of the modern use of science that Quijano points out in the case of 'race'". (195). Hence, to limit gender to the control of sex, its resources, and products entails, in itself, the very coloniality of gender. In other words — and this is a fundamental criticism of Quijano's understanding of gender — the imposition of a binary gender system was as integral to the coloniality of power as the latter was constitutive of the modern gender system. Thus, both race and gender are powerful and interdependent fictions.

Furthermore, anchored in the writings of both the Nigerian feminist Oyuronke Oyewumi, and the indigenous feminist Paula Gunn Allen, Lugones argues that gender, along with race, were colonial constructs racializing and genderizing subaltern societies. These feminists argue that gender has never been an organizing principle or hierarchical category in tribal communities before the "contact". The sexual division of labor did not exist, and economic relations were based on reciprocity and complementarity.

Constesting Lugones, Segato ("Género, política"), studying the Yoruba people, finds evidence of gender nomenclature in that culture, thereby arguing that these Afro-American and tribal societies reveal the existance of a clear patriarchal order which is, however, distinct from Western patriarchy. Segato calls it a lower intensity patriarchy or, in the words of the Aymara lesbian communitarian feminist Paredes, an *entroncamiento de patriarcados* (imbrication of patriarchal systems).

I would like to intervene in the discussion about the existence or not of gender classification systems in pre-contact societies by bringing to the debate the category of equivocation. To this end, I introduce two authors whose works are inspiring for a decolonial feminism: De La Cadena's discussion of indigenous cosmopolitics, and Puar's criticism of the notion of intersectionality. After exploring the arguments of both authors, I will return to the question of coloniality of gender and the translational turn in feminist theories. By foregrounding the coloniality of gender as a recalcitrant factor in theorizing about the coloniality of power, an important space for the articulation of feminism and post-colonialism

opens up, contributing to the project of decolonization of Eurocentric knowledge and the articulation of a *pensamiento própio latinoamericano*,

> [i]n this sense 'pensamiento propio' is suggestive of a different critical thought, one that seeks to mark a divergence with dominant 'universal' thought (including in its 'critical', progressive, and leftist formations). Such divergence is not meant to simplify indigenous or black thought or to relegate it to the category or status of localized, situated, and culturally specific and concrete thinking; that is to say, as nothing more than 'local knowledge' understood as mere experience. Rather it is to put forward its political and decolonial character, permitting a connection then among various 'pensamientos propios' as part of a broader project of 'other' critical thought and knowledge. (Walsh 231)

Although Walsh does not make in her article any mention of the feminist theories that are emerging in Latin America as an integral part of a double movement for the decolonization of knowledge and the construction of "oppositional politics of knowledge in terms of the gendered bodies who suffer racism, discrimination, rejection and violence" (Prada forthcoming), I appropriate her discussion to include the intervention of a feminist politics of translocal translation in the alternative spaces of enunciation of other cosmologies and epistemologies emerging in Latin America.

4. Equivocation, Translation, and Performative Intersectionality

In her influential essay on cosmopolitics, De La Cadena examines Andean indigenous communities' articulation of the presence of earth beings, such as sacred mountains and animals, in social protest. In doing such a subversive gesture, that is, for the first time bringing other than human creatures into the human domain of politics, the Andean indigenous communities are undermining the ontological distinction between humanity and nature that has been a hallmark of Western modernity. Earth practices, such as considering the political needs and desires of earth creatures, enact the respect and affect necessary for maintaining webs of relationality between the human and its others (the non-human) in such communities. To introduce these earth practices into social protest (that

is, to express what earth creatures, such as sacred mountains, claim in the wake of the social protests), invites us, in the words of Stengers, "to slow down reasoning",[2] since it puts forth a very significant epistemic rupture. The political sphere has always been configured as ontologically distinct from the sphere of nature, and this difference was a key element conspiring to the disappearance of pluriversal worlds, understood as partially connected heterogeneous social worlds, politically negotiating their ontological disagreements (De La Cadena). With the reintroduction of earth creatures into politics, we witness the emergence of what this author will call indigenous cosmopolitanism:[3] we are able, first, to open up spaces for a type of thinking that allows us to unlearn/undo the ontological violence represented by the nature/culture dualism (hence allowing us to "slow down reasoning"), and second, to understand that there are different perspectives from different worlds — not different views of the same world.

It is at this point in the argument that I want to invoke the notion of equivocation, a term derived from Amerindian perspectivism and theoretically articulated by Castro. Equivocation signifies not only deception, misconception, but failure to understand that there are different understandings of different worlds. For example, class, race and ethnicity are categories that belong to the colonial division nature/culture. However, when deployed by indigenous peoples, they do not necessarily correspond to the meanings they have been given throughout (Western) history. They are, in other words, equivocations or equivocal categories: although they appear to be the same (i.e., to have the same meaning), in fact they may

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[2] According to Stengers, "slow down reasoning" refers to the generation (might we say, engendering?) of a new space for reflection by decelerating, thus creating the possibility of a new awareness of the problems and situations that mobilize us.

[3] Earth beings, in the political discourses of Western science, refer to beings or "natural resources" that exist separately from the human sphere. In indigenous cosmology, the term refers to those other beings living in nature and who have always interacted with human beings, for they are a constitutive part of the latter. In De La Cadena's article "Cosmopolitics", earth beings are the sacred mountains that demand respect from both humans and non-human others, including animals, plants and other smaller creatures, such as lakes, forests and mountains.

not be when signified by other communities. For the existence of heterogeneous worlds and equivocal categories, and the possibility of articulating partial connections between them, the work of translation becomes necessary. In other words, equivocation (in the sense of misinterpretation, error) calls for translation: it is from politically motivated and unfaithful translations that the pluralities of worlds are interconnected without becoming commensurate.[4]

Through the notion of equivocation, the engagement with translation, and the practice of "slowing down reasoning", we have the ability, therefore, to undo the perverse dualism between nature and culture, inculcated by Western epistemology and, in itself, the cause of the disappearance of pluriversal worlds. At this point in the argument, I would like to revisit the issue of intersectionality of gender and bring it to the debate on decolonial feminism. How to reconceive intersectionality in light of the discussion about equivocal categories and unfaithful translation?

As we may recall, Lugones ("Heterosexualisms"), in criticizing Quijano's notion of coloniality of power, argues that this concept brings in its wake a misconception regarding the gender category. For Lugones, missing from Quijano's highly inadequate account of gender is a lack of understanding of the intersectionality of the categories that constitutes us as social beings. But how to interpret the intersectionality of gender in view of the fact that gender, race, class, etc., are necessarily equivocal categories? How to think about them from the notion of pluriversal worlds?

In her scathing critique of the intersectional approach, so prevalent in today's feminist methodologies, Puar argues, first, that although intersectional analysis has emerged as an intervention on the part of hegemonic (white) feminists to challenge the all-pervasive rubrics of race, class and gender in Western feminism, it actually recenters the very white feminism that it sought to decentralize. That is to say, the intersectional analysis, in seeking to stress the difference of the other, in the end constitutes this other (woman) and gives her a color (non-white). The non-white women —

[4] For a discussion about feminism and the politics of translation, see Costa and Alvarez et al. ("*Translocalities/Translocalidades*").

a result of intersectionality — is always the white woman's 'other'. As Chow had already pointed out in relation to poststructuralist theories, difference produces new subjects which, in turn, in promoting inclusions end up exacerbating exclusions from the self-referentiality of the center.

Second, for Puar the privileged categories of intersectional analysis, being categories of equivocation, to recall De La Cadena, do not travel easily across geopolitical boundaries without the work of translation. They have a genealogy that binds them to specific geopolitical places: for those located in the West, they are effects of Western modernist agendas and their regimes of epistemic violence. Third, and most significant for my argument, Puar notes that the main problem with intersectionality is its inability to deal with the non-representational referent, the material body. In the words of the author,

> The literature on intersectionality has also been enhanced by the focus on representational politics […]. Rarely have scholars concerned with the impact and development of representational politics come into dialogue with those convinced of the non-representational referent of "matter itself" — Donna Haraway, Elizabeth Grosz, Elizabeth Wilson, Karan Barad, Patricia Clough, Dianne Currier, Vicky Kirby, Miriam Fraser, Luciana Parisi, to name a few. Divested from subject formation but for different reasons, these feminist scholars in science and technology studies, inflected by Deleuzian thought, have been concerned about bodily matter, claiming its liminality cannot be captured by intersectional subject positioning. They prefer instead the notion that bodies are unstable assemblages that cannot be seamlessly disaggregated into identity formations. Elizabeth Grosz, for example, foregrounding its spatial and temporal essentializations, calls intersectionality "a gridlock model that fails to account for the mutual constitution and indeterminacy of embodied configurations of gender, sexuality, race, class, and nation". (n.p.)

Bodies are therefore assemblages and categories such as race, gender, sexuality, etc., should be conceived as events, actions in their constitutive performativity — and not regarded as attributes of individuals. In other

words, we need to get out of the linguistic system of representation (to escape its logocentric prisonhouse)[5] to apprehend the fact that identities are events, assemblages, encounters between bodies in constant processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. At this point, and drawing on the notion of performative intersectionality (Barad), I will return to Lugones' discussion of the coloniality of gender and articulate it with the writings of some material feminists on the indeterminate and always already embodied configurations of gender.

5. Feminisms and the Return of Materiality

In an article entitled "Towards a Colonial Feminism", Lugones states that the hierarchycal dichotomy between human and non-human is a central mark of colonial modernity,

> Beginning with the colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean, a hierarchical, dichotomous distinction between human and non-human was imposed on the colonized in the service of Western man. It was accompanied by other dichotomous hierarchical distinctions, among them that between men and women. This distinction became a mark of the human and a mark of civilization. Only the civilized are men or women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species — as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild. (734)

The civilizing mission of Christianity focused on the transformation of non-colonized human in man and woman. The colonized non-human female was not only racialized, but also reinvented as a woman through Western gender codes. Therefore, Lugones ("Toward Decolonial Feminism") sees gender as imposition of modernity/coloniality: "The suggestion is not to search for a non-colonized construction of gender in indigenous organizations of the social. There is no such thing; 'gender' does not travel away from colonial modernity". (746)

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[5] For a discussion of non-representational paradigms, see Thrift.

However, why not think about gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, etc., as equivocations, that is, as categories with different meanings and interpretations from different pluriversal perspectives? If we decide to go down that track, then we have to engage in the difficult process of cultural translation, avoiding the pitfalls of the coloniality of language and colonial translation. Second, according to Mignolo, resistance to the coloniality of gender, as Lugones also observes, implies linguistic resistance. Furthermore, I would add that it involves opposition to Eurocentric representational paradigms, anchored on a dichotomous logic, through the practice of "slowing down reasoning". I interpret these contestatory practices as the *sine qua non* elements for the project of decolonizing gender, being and feminist theories.

Without throwing the equivocal gender category away with the bath water, but articulating it in ways that challenge the modernity/coloniality binaries, perhaps we will be able to take a more productive path, one that has already been partially trodden by many feminists — Latin American indigenous feminists and Western feminists of science — who are rethinking the boundaries between the human and the non-human, between matter and discourse, bringing other earth beings into the conversation.

In the West, the most recent and fascinating discussion about the necessity of a feminist return to some notion of matter and materiality is in the anthology entitled *Material Feminisms* (Alaimo and Hekman). The essays published in this anthology, signed by renowned authors such as Elizabeth Grozs, Claire Colebrook, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway and Susan Bordo, among others, and situated in widely different disciplinary places, argue strongly for an approach within feminism and studies of science that brings nature back into culture. These authors creatively explore the complex links between the material and the discursive so as to allow feminism to reclaim the materiality of the body and of experience without giving up the fact that bodies/experiences are culturally/discursively constituted, but that they do not exhaust themselves in such discursivity.

For the organizers of the anthology, the emphasis on social constructionist models have directed feminists to focus too much on the discursive pole of reality and prevented it from sufficiently exploiting what Barad calls the "intra-activity" between the material and discursive. For Barad,

despite knowledge of the fact that phenomena do not exist independently of the instruments that observe them — as they are in part produced by these instruments — we must understand how the phenomena (in this case, matter), in turn, interfere with the instruments observation, also materializing them. Instead of seeing nature passively receiving the culture's agency, we need to interpret them in their ontological inseparability (*natureculture,* for Haraway), thus challenging the perverse boundaries between the human and the non-human worlds. In the words of Barad,

> Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretive turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn latetly every "thing" — even materiality — is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. (801)

Going against the grain of these turns, Barad proposes an *onto-epistemology* (study of knowledge practices) that integrates the advances of social constructionism and post-structuralism with a new understanding of materiality, which she calls agential realism. Her study of the production of images of the fetus from the intersection of technological, discursive and material practices serves as an illustration of this approach. The technological capacity of the fetal image makes it possible to see the fetus at a very early stage of its development. From this vision, which is a product of both technology and theory, the fetus — an aspect of nature — acquires agency in several meaningful ways. First, it becomes matter; it did not exist as matter before technology has allowed it to be seen. Second, it becomes politically relevant. The fetus, now able to be visualized, acquires a political meaning that it did not have before gaining its status as matter through tecnology. In other words, the technology that allows us to see the fetus at an early stage has political, ethical, and material consequences that are real and meaningful. Moreover, the arrangement of fetal imaging is made possible, and partly conditioned, by a political discourse that presupposes the autonomy of the fetus. In summary, for Barad the fetus is the result of the complex and situated interactions of material apparatuses and discourses in the production of bodies — the intra-actions of discourse and technology.

There is no doubt that the "material feminists" are reacting strongly to the Butlerian notion that material bodies are effects of discourses. To

Alaimo and Hekman, Butler failed to transcend the dichotomy between nature/culture, remaining within the constraints imposed by the language.[6] Even Foucault, with all the emphasis on the discursive configurations, had already undermined the dichotomy language/reality in his theory of bio-power, highlighting the very real consequences of discourses that construct bodies. For Foucault — and for material feminism — we cannot separate "the discourses on the bodies from the bodies we inhabit" (Hekman 101). The material turn, along with the onto-epistemo-logical approach, points confidently to the fact that there is a world out there, even though our access to it is through language. It is through our concepts — always equivocations — that we know the world. However, the world also acts in the formation of our concepts, molding and limiting them, with material/ real consequences.

I see significant affinities between what material feminists are theorizing and the proposals of decolonial feminism. By introducing earth beings and agential materiality in Western epistemology — and subverting the colonial dichotomy nature/culture — these authors produce a "slowing down [of] thinking" that, in turn, in decolonizing perception, provides an opening to other worlds and other knowledges. In the following pages, I will return to the problem of cultural translation as a key element in the decolonization of feminist knowledges.

6. Feminism and Translation: Toward the Decolonization of Knowledge

As Alvarez ("Construindo uma política") argues, a translocal feminist politics of translation is crucial to the decolonial turn and a key strategy in building "connectant epistemologies" (Láo-Montes 132) in order to confront the equivocations or mistranslations that hinder feminist alliances, even among women who share the same language and culture, such as latinas living in the U.S. and Latin American women. Translation — based not only on a linguistic paradigm, but more importantly, on an ontological

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[6] Butler, in her more recent work, *Undoing Gender*, admits the need to reconceptualize bodily matter.

one — therefore becomes a key element in forging political alliances and feminist epistemologies that are pro-social justice, anti-racist, anti-imperialist and decolonial. If women's movements in Latin America and other parts of the global South share a common context of struggle, as Thayer claims, then "their conflicts with the 'scattered hegemonies' represented by the states, industries development, global capital, religious fundamentalism and market relations create powerful, even if only partially overlapping, interests and identities that make the translation project between them possible and even more pressing" (n.p.). According to Alvarez ("Construindo uma política"), Ruskin, in her "The Bridge Poem" that opens *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, reminds us that we all "translated more/ than the damn UN" (xxi)

Moreover, in the interactions between Latina and Latin American feminisms, the travels of discourses and practices across geopolitical boundaries, disciplinary and others, encounter formidable roadblocks and checkpoints migration. As Klahn argues, to understand the coloniality of power, one needs to grasp the unequal travels and translations of feminist theories, texts and practices, as well as their reception. In a lucid analysis of the place of women's writing at the time of *latinoamericanismo* and globalization, Klahn shows that testimonies (as well as autobiographical fictions, novels, essays and poetry) written by women and linked to political struggles and social mobilization were instrumental in constructing a *sui generis* feminist practice. Klahn argues that through cultural translation,

> Latin American and Latina feminists readapted feminist liberation discourses from the West, resignifying them in relation to self-generated practices and theorizations of gender empowerment that have emerged from their lived experiences, particular histories and contestatory politics. (n.p.)

Taking the example of the testimony, Klahn shows how this literary genre was mobilized by subaltern subjects, such as Menchú and Chungara, aiming, from the intersection between gender, ethnicity and social class, to destabilize a Western feminism still centered on the notion of an essentialized woman. In deconstructing the dominant feminist discourse, Latin American testimonies not only constitute other places of enunciation, but also break with the Hispanic surrealist paradigm (magical realism) in favor of a realist aesthetics that brings the referent back to the center of

symbolic and political struggles, documenting the violence and oppression of representation: life is not fiction. These texts, "translating/translocating theories and practices", imagine forms of decolonization of the coloniality of power. I read Menchú and Chungara — through Klahn — as feminist and Latin American translations of the post-colonial that offer new epistemological proposals from the South.

Discussing the circulation of Anzaldúa's writings in the Bolivian plurinational context, Prada explains that any translation, without adequate mediation, runs the risk of becoming a double betrayal: first, that any translation already implies a betrayal of the original, and, second, a betrayal is also perpetrated to the extent that the translated text is appropriated as part of a sophisticated theoretical apparatus from the North. The work of mediation is necessary so that the translation of these texts — coming from other latitudes in the North — can engage with local texts and practices, thus challenging the ways in which the South is consumed by, and conformed to, the North, thereby placing postcolonial critique not only in North/South conversations, but also South/South.

Prada develops a provocative analysis of how the Bolivian anarchist feminist group, *Mujeres Creando* — who describe themselves as *cholas*, *chotas*, and *birlochas* (racist terms used in reference to indigenous migrant women in cities), and also adopt other designations of abject subjectivities (such as bitch, *rechazada*, *desclasada*, *extranjera*) — converse with Anzaldúa in transporting *Borderlands/La Frontera* to a context of feminist politics beyond the walls of the academy (where this author had originally been read), hence establishing affinities between the two political projects. Thus, the language of Anzaldúa, enunciated in the south of the North, was appropriated by the south of the South, and "in fact incorporated in the transnational feminism which (as *Mujeres Creando* since its beginnings stipulated) has no frontiers but the ones which patriarchy, racism, and homophobia insist on" (n.p.). As the author explains,

> Translating, then, becomes much more complex. It has to do with linguistic translation, yes, but also with making a work available (with all the consequences this might have, all the "betrayals" and "erasures" it might include) to other audiences and letting it travel. It also has to do with opening scenarios of conversation and proposing new horizons for dialogue. It

> also means opening your choices, your tastes, your affinities to others — which in politics (as in *Mujeres Creando*'s) can compromise (or strengthen) your principles. Translation in those terms becomes rigorously "strategic and selective". (n.p.)

However, according to Prada, we know that in the travel of feminist theories throughout the Americas, especially in its counter-hegemonic routes, there are several checkpoints (e.g. publications and academic institutions) and mediators (intellectuals, activists, academics) that regulate their movements across borders, facilitating or hindering access to texts, authors and debates. To exemplify how these controls operate, I would like to refer to an example that the Aymara postcolonial theorist Silvia River Cusicanqui gives us, and which speaks directly to the question of the decolonization of knowledge.

Speaking in favor of a political economy — rather than a geopolitics — of knowledge, Cusicanqui examines the material mechanisms operating behind discourses, arguing that postcolonial discourses in the North do not only entail an economy of ideas, but also of wages, privileges and values. Universities in the global North ally themselves with research centers in the South through networks of intellectual exchanges, and become empires of knowledge appropriated from subaltern subjects, now resignified under the sign of the Theory. This creates a canon,

> The ideas run through, like rivers, from South to North, and become tributaries of major streams of thought. But as in the global market of goods, ideas also leave a country like raw materials, only to return regurgitated and in a jumbled package as finished product. A canon is constituted as a new area of socio-scientific discourse: "postcolonial thought". This canon makes visible certain issues and sources, but leaves others in the shade. (Cusicanqui 68)

Cusicanqui refers above to the vexing problem of internal colonialism, formulated in the 1980s under the influence of the 1960s pioneering work of Fausto Reinaga, which in the 1990s was (re)formulated by Quijano under the rubric of "coloniality of power". Subsequently, it was taken up by Mignolo and deployed as the notion (with new shades) of "colonial difference". Cusicanqui explains,

> my ideas about internal colonialism in terms of knowledge-power had arisen from a personal trajectory, enlightened by other readings — like Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory, Franz Fanon on the internalization of the enemy, and Franco Ferraroti on life stories — and, especially, by the experience of having lived and participated in the reorganization of the Aymara movement and the indigenous insurgency in the seventies and eighties. (67)

With rhetorical force, this Aymara thinker shows that, for the decolonization of knowledge to occur, it is not enough to articulate a decolonial discourse, but we must above all develop translational ethics and practices.

7. Conclusion, or Olympia Again, Translated

How could we read and translate Olympia from a decolonial — and queer, I would add — ethical and political perspective? How, from

Yasumasa Morimura, *Portrait* (*Futago*), 1988. Color photograph. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

the notion of reading as performative translation (i.e., a translation that generates more effects than meanings), could we deconstruct Manet's Olympia and, in doing so, reveal its colonial genealogy? Morimura's performative translation of Olympia above, coupled by Brody's inspiring discussion of several of Olympia's contemporary mimicries, indicate a fruitful path toward these goals.

According to Brody, Morimura, enacting an irreverently queer double reading and performance reminiscent of the photographs of Cindy Sherman (and I quote at length),

> appears as both an idealized nude and a realized fantasy of the West. His female impersonation places him within and against such traditions of Western representation that stereotypically feminizes Asian men and sees Asia itself as feminized. […] As in Herb Hazelton's Marilyn Monroe parody of Olympia, Morimura's Olympia is blond. The roots of the dyed blond (dumb and dead) are black — part of the traffic in nineteenth-century eroticism. The infamous black cat here looks like a hard, shiny black plastic "Hello Kitty" bank, its petite paw coyly clawing the air. Morimura's double image (Futago means twin in Japanese) evokes Lorraine O'Grady's and others'understanding of whiteness and blackness as "two sides of the same coin". […] [T]he artist here is not just a painted, objectified woman; rather, he performs as both subject and object of the painting (and subject and object again in recreating the nude and the maid). In this sense, he resembles contemporary performance artists who stage themselves as a representation. Morimura's multiple crossed-cast image performs as a "queer", canny counter-reading that nevertheless resembles the "original" oil painting's violent reception at the Salon of 1865. (116-117)

Recalling the discourse on interspecies by some material feminists, we may argue that the black cat has a central role in the subversion of Olympia's colonial discourse since, occupying a seemingly marginal, barely visible place, it reveals itself to be the heterotopic (and histrionic) element of Manet's visual rhetoric. For Brody, citing Foucault,

> [u]nlike a utopia, heterotopia is "disturbing, probably because [it] secretly undermines language... destroys the syntax which causes words and things to hang together... dissolve[s] our myths and sterilize[s] the lyricism of our sentences". In this case, the cat kills desire […]. The cat makes a mockery of the situation at hand. (107)

But it is not only through parodies that the heterotopic elements subvert the exclusionary utopia of Eurocentric narrative. Boldly trafficking feminist theories in contact zones (or translation zones), Latin American and Latina feminists residing in the United States, for example, are developing a politics of translation that uses knowledge produced by women of color and post-colonial feminisms in the north of the Americas to cannibalize them, thus shedding new light on theories, practices, politics, and cultures in the south and vice versa.

Other places in the Latin American context occupied by these subaltern/decolonial subjects can be found in the testimonies of indigenous Guatemalan human rights advocate Rigoberta Menchú and the Bolivian miner Domitilla Barrios de Chungara. It can also be found in diaries of the Afro-Brazilian garbage picker Carolina Maria de Jesus, in the writings of Afro-Brazilian feminist activist Lelia Gonzalez, in the autobiographical novels by Afro-Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo, as well as in the poetry, graffiti and street performances of the Bolivian anarcho-feminist group *Mujeres Creando*, to cite just a few examples. A preoccupation with not forgetting, with our "memory alleyways" (Evaristo) and the telling of other stories is undoubtedly one of the most important decolonial practices. Writing about decolonial methodologies among the Maoris, Smith makes this clear when she argues that knowing the past is a crucial part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. According to her,

> To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. (Smith 34)

Echoing Smith's words, on the other side of the world, Paredes warns us,

> to refer to our own memory, to our ontogenetic and phylogenetic memory connects it to our first real rebellion of *wawas*, when we resisted and fought against the sexist and unfair rules of society, connects it to the rebellion of our great-grandmothers, who resisted colonial and pre-colonial patriarchy. (10)

Performative translations, queer readings of colonial texts, dissemination of *onto-epistemo-logies* and *naturecultures*, invasions of the arena of politics by the most unusual earth beings, "slowing down thinking", and rewriting memories and histories in the articulation of other knowledges are, therefore, ethical and political practices that decolonial feminists have already initiated in many locations of our vast and dense Latin American territory. Now it remains to be seen when the academy will awaken from its long torpor to take advantage of the "decolonial gaps" (Segato, "Brechas descoloniales") erupting unrelenting across its walls.

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Abstract

In this paper I offer a brief overview of the academic debates about post-colonial theories and the concept of coloniality, seeking to map out their Latin American translations, especially from the perspective of feminist theories in relation to the coloniality of gender. By emphasizing an intersectional approach to understand the gendered character of coloniality, decolonial feminists are seeking innovative ways of articulating new epistemologies or "saberes propios". However, in these debates little attention has been given to the issue of the travels and translations of decolonial feminisms in Latin America. In focusing on the vexed issue of translation, I want to explore some of the challenges Latin American decolonial feminists are facing today.

Keywords

Coloniality; Decolonial Feminism; Translation; Intersectionality

Resumo

Neste trabalho faço um breve percurso dos debates acadêmicos sobre as teorias pós-coloniais e o conceito de colonialidade, buscando mapear suas traduções latino-americanas, principalmente a partir da perspectiva das teorias feministas no que tange às questões sobre a colonialidade do gênero. Ao enfatizar uma abordagem interseccional sobre o carater gendrado da colonialidade, feministas descoloniais buscam formas inovadoras de articulação de novas epistemologias ou "saberes propios". Contudo, nesses debates pouca tem sido a atenção dada à questão das viagens e traduções das teorias feministas (pós-coloniais e descoloniais) na América Latina. Colocando, portanto, o conceito de tradução cultural no centro desses debates, exploro os desafios que as teorias feministas enfrentam diante da virada descolonial na América Latina.

Palavras Chave

Colonialidade; Feminismo Descolonial; Tradução; Interseccionalidade

Beauty Incarnate: A Claim for Postmodern Feminist Theology

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Beauty Incarnate: A Claim for Postmodern Feminist Theology

> *…beauty is important in healing people. It might be the beauty of sounds, of colors, of words, of faces, of food and drink, or of embraces.... [I] can vouch for "salvation through beauty".*
>
> Ivone Gebara[1]

A claim both bold and poignant — that beauty can and does heal. Do we agree? Do we share Gebara's conviction? Or do we quickly dismiss it, on the grounds either that it is simply too obvious or, conversely, that it is too idealistic and possibly misguided, neglecting deeper needs? In my work on beauty over the past few years, I often have encountered both reactions, sometimes from the same person in the same breath. "Of course beauty matters for our well-being. Basic experience tells us that…Yet ultimately beauty is superfluous. We don't really *need* it the way we need other things". Here in this paper I risk both stating the obvious and advancing a misguided ideal, for I stand with Gebara in her claim that beauty does in fact matter for "healing people". That is, beauty matters for ethics. While the bounds of this paper do not allow me to fully elaborate this claim — which I do elsewhere[2] — I do want to probe what exactly she, and we, might mean by the concept of "beauty" and begin, implicitly

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[1] *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*, trans. David Molineaux (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), vii.

[2] Unpublished manuscript (in process) based on "Making 'Sense' of Justice: Aesthetics & Compassion", American Academy of Religion, October 2010, Chicago, IL.

and explicitly, to gesture toward why this might contribute to the healing of people and of the world at large.

Beauty is in many respects out of fashion in postmodern scholarly discourse, where there is a general distrust of universals. One must be careful when invoking the Good, the True, or the Beautiful. Modern and postmodern aesthetics, moreover, long ago moved away from valuing art for its capacity to please the eye and toward celebrating that which unsettles the conscience. That is, while beauty in classical art is appreciated, today it is far more important that art be provocative. This call to provocation need not preclude pleasure, of course, but beauty itself is rarely the aim, and sentimentality should be avoided at all costs. Similarly within feminist thought, positive constructions of beauty have not been generally attended to, perhaps because superficial and quite narrow conceptions of beauty reign in Western cultures, often to the detriment of women. "Beauty" is likely to bring to mind glossy magazines and bright advertisements that sexualize and objectify women — or worse, just certain key body parts.

In addition to these postmodern challenges, the concept of beauty has rarely fared well as a positive value in classic Christian theology. Historically, a fear of idolatry has funded a resistance to, and often an outright hostility toward, beauty. These flow from a deeper Neo/Platonic denigration of embodiment and materiality. For example, the church father Augustine, in chapter 8 his *Confessions*, explores how worldly beauty testifies to the handiwork of the Creator. Yet he goes on to caution in the strongest of terms that it is precisely such beauty that can distract us from God, who ought to be the true and only object of our worship. In sum, at best beauty is a distraction, at worst a cardinal sin. Yet it is precisely on postmodern, feminist, and theological grounds that I lay claim to beauty as a central theological category alongside, and indeed in certain respects displacing, goodness and truth.[3]

Before I set about that task, I want briefly to explain how I approach the theological project. In the postmodern academic milieu, many may

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[3] I am not alone in this task. See *She Who Imagines: Feminist Theological Aesthetics* (Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O'Connell, eds.), a volume I became aware of too belatedly to incorporate in this essay.

look askance at theology, which is often associated with totalizing truth claims, grand metanarratives, and static universals. Yet for many constructive and feminist theologians like myself, the theological task involves not the defense (or advancement) of such modernist ideals but rather the deconstruction and reconstruction of the Christian imaginary. If the language and symbols of Christianity are going to continue to impact those both within and beyond the Christian tradition, how might we root out the negative implications of such symbols and refashion them so that they are life-giving to all involved? While some feminists find that they need to leave the tradition, others stay precisely as a way of taking on responsibility for a religious legacy they have inherited.[4] For feminist thinkers who continue to stand by choice "within" the tradition, the task is to claim and then reconceptualize troubling language and symbols; that is, to identify problems yet also excavate promise. Often we use decidedly postmodern tools to do so.

The Incarnation — the confession that the Divine assumed human flesh in the historical person Jesus of Nazareth — is one of the central Christian symbols that harbors such problems and promises. While historically the notion of the Incarnation has been used to *prop up* all sorts of notions that are troublesome from a feminist standpoint — e.g. body-soul dualisms, androcentrism, anthropocentrism — many feminist theologians have used this symbol precisely to undermine such assumptions. Traditionally, the Incarnation was understood to be the exception to how the divine encounters the world. This notion still holds true in many contemporary theologies, even those that might be placed in the service of progressive socio-political aims. These are Platonically-inspired theologies that posit an absolute distinction between the Divine and Creation. In this scheme Christ, as the mediator, is, in the conceptualization of theologian Kathryn Tanner, "the key" that reconciles the world (and humanity in particular) to God. Another strong thread of contemporary Christian theology,

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[4] Two of feminist theology's foremothers chose different routes: while Mary Daly advocated and even liturgically enacted an exodus from the Church (specifically from Harvard University Chapel in November 1971), Rosemary Radford Ruether chose to stay and foster reform within, citing her responsibility as an inheritor of the tradition.

however, posits continuity, if also a distinction, between God and world, embracing a panentheist view in which the divine is necessarily but not totally embodied in creation. For these theologians — many of whom would claim the influence of feminist thought — the Incarnation proves to be the *exemplification* of how God encounters the world rather than the exception. When the Incarnation is understood in this way, it becomes a rich theological site precisely for *rejecting* the classic Western dualism that posits an absolute distinction between the material and the spiritual (and perhaps even for troubling the notion that there is a distinction or division at all).

It is from this notion of the Incarnation as the exemplification of the divine-worldly relation that I want to think through the specific issue of beauty as a core value for both theology and feminism. Moreover, I look to the Incarnation as a resource for not only claiming but *re-visioning* the concept of beauty for 21st-century theology. My aim is to trace a renewed vision of beauty that is relational and affective-sensible as well as multi-faceted and integrative. Beauty, I suggest, is not a transcendent ideal but that which arises within intercorporeal encounter, ever attending to what theologian Sharon Betcher calls the "corporeal contours" of our lives — not only the pleasures and joys of our relational, embodied existence but also the pains and sorrows (197). This is in many respects a "postmodern move", as I am seeking to displace, if not replace, theology's traditional emphasis on goodness and truth, as a way ultimately of grounding ethics, not in static notions of moral goodness and timeless truth, but in the messy particularity of intercorporeal encounter.

The Incarnation when understood as exemplification in fact has much in common with postmodern feminist conceptions of the self as relationally and corporeally constituted. I thus turn first to recent ontologies of embodied relation before suggesting how these very ontologies might open up possibilities for a renewed conception of beauty. I then begin to trace the contours of a postmodern notion of beauty with an appeal to process-relational philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Finally, I consider the Incarnation as an illustration of intercorporeal beauty. In closing I gesture toward the possibility of an aesthetically grounded ethics.

1. From Corporeality to Beauty: Ontologies of Embodied Relation

Attention to beauty, I propose here, is a natural outgrowth of the postmodern development of ontologies of embodied relation, a development strongly if not exclusively influenced and shaped by feminist thought. These ontologies, with their emphasis on corporeality, materiality, and affect, are fundamentally *aesthetic*. And although aesthetics and beauty should not be collapsed, I offer that an ontology that is fundamentally aesthetic — rather than, say, moral[5] — opens up possibilities for laying claim to beauty. I want briefly to trace that opening by considering three distinct yet resonant fields of thought that assume and advance ontologies of embodied relation: feminist theory and theology, recent theories of corporeality and affect, and the aesthetic ontology of Alfred North Whitehead, the founder of process philosophy.

Themes of subjective agency and of embodiment were central to the earliest feminist thinkers as they sought to critique, as well as offer alternatives to, the patriarchal dualisms and hierarchies posited by classic Western thought. That is, as part of their critiques of gender essentialism, feminist thinkers long have questioned the hard and fast distinctions classically posed between self and other and between the body and the soul or mind — or more broadly, between the material and the transcendent/spiritual. These two aspects of feminist thought have been particularly influential for feminist theologians working within a tradition whose doctrines further reify such dualisms and hierarchies. Alongside other feminist and postmodern thinkers, feminist theologians have proposed more "horizontal", reciprocal conceptions of self-other relations, as a means of enhancing agential power, and they have laid claim to positive valuations of embodiment and the senses (while in later years taking care not to romanticize or essentialize the body).

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[5] The "infinite qualitative difference" (in the words of Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard) between God and creation that is posited by classic Western-Christian thought grounds, in my view, a fundamentally "moral" ontology insofar as God is equated with the Good, while all that is not-God is, logically, not-Good. Many classic Christian ontologies are also aesthetic, yet even these tend to be placed in the service of the "higher" values of the True and the Good. Augustine himself is a key example.

This feminist troubling of dualisms has contributed significantly to postmodern re-imaginings of the self, and more specifically of the subject. In postmodern thought, Enlightenment notions of a discrete, fully individuated, rational "self" have given way to a conception of the self as relationally emergent and even performative. That is, there is increasing acceptance of the notion that the self in each moment and in each relation is being dynamically constituted. The self is always *becoming*, always emerging, in and through a process outside of which no identifiable "self" stands. Moreover, this happens relationally such that the distinction between self and other, while not completely dissolved, begins to break down: that is, the postmodern "self" is less hermetic and more porous than the modern individuated "self". Increasingly postmodern thinkers are likewise highlighting the specifically corporeal nature of inter-relational subjectivity. Still emerging is a multivalent cluster of discourses often collected under the names of "affect theory" and "new materialisms". While there is great diversity within and across these fields, they hold in common, if loosely so, a conviction that relation, communication, and even "thought" can and do occur at a precognitive level. The bottom line is that the "self's" existence is inescapably relational and inescapably corporeal.

One voice in this chorus, philosopher Rosalyn Diprose, has probed the inevitable ambiguities of corporeal encounter. Identity performance (the performance of the self), she offers, is best described as *inter*corporeal because it always involves an (embodied) other. Moreover, this other both opens *and* limits us. That is, our constitution in, through, and by the other, who like us is very particular, inevitably shapes the parameters of our possibilities. Diprose argues that instead of denying or rejecting this double reality of the self-in-relation, we ought to embrace such an understanding and especially what it implies about our radical vulnerability to the other. If, she says, we conceive of the self as something that needs to be protected in our encounter with the other, we make two erroneous assumptions: that there is a greater division between self and other than is really the case and that the relation between self and other is fundamentally hostile. This is problematic for Diprose because it forecloses rather than fosters the opening to new possibilities. She proposes instead that we imagine our self-in-relation as one of "corporeal generosity" in which we acknowledge and even cultivate our vulnerability to the other. Diprose's proposal is interesting

from a feminist standpoint, for it would seem to run counter to feminist efforts to boost women's autonomy and agential subjectivity. Indeed, she seems upon first glance to ignore that for women and others in marginalized positions the self-other relation often *is* oppositional and hostile. However, I do not hear Diprose advocating a return to self-sacrificial vulnerability. Rather, she is imagining the possibilities that might open should all parties recognize the ambiguities of incorporeal encounters. These are the encounters that always already both constitute us *and* dispossess us. Diprose seems to be saying that it is in fact the efforts to deny the inevitable vulnerability and dispossession at the heart of encounter — the efforts toward self-protection — that foreclose possibilities (at best) and do active harm (at worst, specifically when exploiting the vulnerability of the other). The ambiguities of intercorporeal encounter are, Diprose says, necessary for the creation of possibilities, but they are likewise risky, for they offer no guarantees. Intercorporeal generosity, in sum, makes us simultaneously responsive-responsible for and vulnerable to the other(s).

The inherent ambiguities of intercorporeal generosity, as Diprose imagines it, are both promising and unsettling. Yet I am persuaded by her suggestion that a disposition of generosity, despite its risks, bears the greatest promise for moving toward more just relationships. Patriarchal fear of and disdain for vulnerability, which often is equated with weakness, has wreaked havoc in countless ways, upon individuals and upon entire civilizations and every level in between. Just as feminist thinkers have sought to reclaim central elements of human existence that patriarchy has undervalued — e.g., bodies, emotional intelligence, the other-than-human world — without promoting simplistic or essentialist reversals, there seems to be a feminist-informed (if not exclusively feminist) effort in postmodern thought to consider the positive value of vulnerability. Ontologies of embodied relation acknowledge that we are constituted by our relationships, both limited and freed by them. Far from superficial, our relationships strike to the heart of who we are. To deny this, to deny our vulnerability to others, is to close ourselves off, not only to those others but to ourselves and to our future.

Beauty, I offer, shares many of the qualities of intercorporeal encounter, including its risks and ambiguities. Whitehead developed an ontology of embodied relation in the early 20th century that strongly

resonates with postmodern thought on the sensible and affectivity.[6] Although Whitehead's thought centrally includes a divine principle that many contemporary secular theories would dismiss, their ontologies of intercorporeality echo his vision, in which reality is composed of a multitude of entities ever in the process of becoming precisely through the affective "perception" of and encounter with other entities. Moreover, he proposes a conception of beauty growing out of his sensible-relational ontology that, I suggest, can help those whose thought is grounded in corporeality and affect to think through the concept of beauty. My own re-vision of beauty, as that which is fundamentally intercorporeal and sensible, draws substantially from Whitehead's thought. Here I highlight three aspects of this renewed sense of beauty. In contrast to classic conceptions of beauty, this vision, by emphasizing the corporeal and the sensible, values embodied particularity over abstract universals, inter-subjective encounter over objective quality, and complexity, multiplicity, and openness over a closed and sanitized perfection.

For Whitehead beauty only manifests in the real material of the universe (*Adventures*, 255). "Genuine" beauty is not transcendent, that is, not a Platonic ideal form, but rather a concrete manifestation precisely in the midst of life. While he grants that certain things hold the potential for beauty, beauty in its major, primary form is best understood as an encounter or an event. It is something that *happens*. Intriguingly, an event or encounter of beauty is simply a more intensively felt occasion of what we always already experience as the becoming of life itself. The difference is that an event of beauty stands out due to its aesthetic richness. In this respect it has a spontaneous and awakening quality. That is, even if one's experience of beauty is quiet or subtle, at some level the beauty *registers*. This is in part because the "observer" or "recipient" of beauty is in fact a co-creator of it. It is after all an encounter and indeed an intercorporeal one.

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[6] Indeed, I continue to remain perplexed by the lack of attention given to Whitehead by theorists of corporeality and affectivity, though Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth do note in the introduction to the *Affect Theory Reader* that one thread of affect theory does appeal to a Whiteheadian lineage (8).

Beauty, of course, is not the only form of aesthetic intensity, which might also describe pain. Interestingly, Whitehead not only acknowledges this but traces the connection between pain and beauty. Both, he explains, arise from disruption. In some respects all becoming arises from disruption: change implies the introduction of novelty, which constitutes a disruption. In sum, change *is* disruption. Yet when that disruption causes an extended discord or clash, a (usually negative) intensity of feeling arises. Moreover, if that discord remains unresolved, the result is pain or dis/ease; indeed if the discord is intense enough, Whitehead says, we might even call it evil (256-57). On the other hand, if that discord is reconciled — or in Whitehead's word, "harmonized" — beauty arises. That is, beauty is the positive, creative resolution of the clash of discord. Whitehead invokes the musical metaphor of harmony to explain how a clash might not only be resolved but become beautiful (263). Like a musical harmony, the reconciliation of the discordant elements creates something more than the sum of those parts yet without losing the particular distinctiveness of those parts. That is, there is a certain unification that does not sacrifice multiplicity. What Whitehead's notion of beauty bears, therefore, is a risk similar to the that of intercorporeal encounter as outlined by Diprose: the possibility for maximal openness and aesthetic richness carries within itself, by necessity, the risk of an opposite outcome.

My brief overview of Whitehead's conception of beauty does not do it justice, but my necessarily modest goal is simply to trace its resonances with postmodern ontologies of embodied relation: namely, its emphasis on intercorporeal encounter and the affective and eventive qualities that mark such encounter; its implicit resistance to some of the same dualisms that feminist thinkers have found problematic; and its risky yet necessary ambiguities. As I turn to the central Christian symbol of the Incarnation as a way of illustrating this Whiteheadian-inflected vision of beauty, I will further clarify that vision and why I find it compelling. Moreover, I seek to illustrate further that such a vision can be seen as a natural extension of the ontologies of embodied relation that many postmodern feminist thinkers currently affirm and thus is ripe for claiming by postmodern feminist theologians.

2. Incarnating Beauty

"The Word became flesh and dwelled among us"
(John 1:14)

As I shift toward the theological, it is crucial to acknowledge the work of twentieth-century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose name is synonymous with contemporary theological aesthetics. Von Balthasar is troubled by notions of the beautiful that are by turns either abstract and pure or material yet superficial. His solution is to recast beauty from a Christian theological standpoint by proposing Christ crucified as the norm for beauty. Not only does this bring beauty into the material realm, but it places divine love at the very heart of the definition of beauty. It also accounts for pain and suffering in ways that both superficial conceptions of beauty and abstractions of perfection fail to do. In turning to the crucifixion, von Balthasar places himself within the theological tradition of Christian paradox, begun by the Apostle Paul himself, who preaches that true strength is found in weakness (as evinced by the crucified Christ) and that seeming foolishness (namely, belief in the power of that crucifixion) constitutes true wisdom. By the same logic of paradox, von Balthasar holds up the cross to demonstrate that what the world perceives as ugly is in fact the pinnacle of the Beautiful: through the Crucifixion, its torture, blood, and anguish, what shines is God's unparalleled self-sacrificial love for humankind.

There are some elements to be commended in von Balthasar's inversion of what constitutes the beautiful: his insistence on particularity, his attention to the material, and his focus on love. Moreover, he does not present beauty as a sanitized perfection. Quite the opposite: God's perfect love can only shine through the *suffering* Christ. Yet I cannot accept his vision in full. While the tradition of Christian paradox can be emotionally compelling, it does not suffice as a guarantor of theological "truth" as many of its proponents often suggest. More specifically, casting the crucifixion as the heart of the Christian message — and in this case declaring it the norm for all other forms of beauty — raises myriad problems from a feminist standpoint. In fact, the crucifixion and the theories of atonement

surrounding it have been one of feminist theology's central critical concerns from the beginning. From Joanna Carlson Brown who reads classic atonement theories as narratives of divine child abuse to Delores Williams who critiques interpretations of the cross as divine scapegoating, feminist and womanist theologians have challenged the ways that Jesus's suffering has been used to commend self-sacrificial suffering as the pinnacle of love and in turn to keep women (alongside other marginalized groups) in their "proper", i.e. patriarchally determined, places.

I want therefore to shift our symbolic focus as we seek resources within the Christian tradition to help us lay claim to beauty as a postmodern feminist theological value. The Incarnation has classically been interpreted as God's loving gesture toward a human race in need of healing. In fact, for early theologians, it was crucial that Jesus Christ was indeed *fully human*, for in the words of church father Gregory of Nazianzus, "What has not been assumed has not been healed" (*Epistle* 101). It was absolutely vital for these earliest thinkers that the divine had fully assumed human flesh. The claims of certain contemporary feminist theologians have thus been radical in the truest sense of that word. In privileging a panentheistic ontology — the notion that God permeates all of material reality while not being limited to that reality — they have returned to the roots of the incarnational confession, that the divine is fully and truly present and alive in the midst of us. What, then, would it mean to hold up the Incarnation as a central theological symbol of beauty? Will we discover alongside Gebara that beauty can and does heal?

1. The Beauty of Particularity

It is John's gospel, strongly inflected with Platonic notions of the *Logos*, that declares, "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us" (1:14). This and its surrounding verses scripturally ground the philosophical basis for Christianity's incarnational confession that the God of the cosmos took on human form. But it is in Luke's and Matthew's gospels, which narrate Jesus's birth and infancy, where we are given images of actual enfleshment and its relational entanglements. Here we encounter the fears of Jesus's parents prior to his birth, their faithfulness in keeping him safe, and their hopes for his future. Here we learn the difficult circumstances of Mary's

labor and see the newborn Jesus swaddled and placed in a trough normally used to feed cattle. There is no abstract speculation in these narratives. Instead, there are vivid details of how the divine has become flesh in a very *particular* way — in a particular time and place, within a particular family, in a particular little baby.

What an audacious claim orthodox Christianity makes: that the God of the universe, of all that is, took on the flesh of a single human person — a carpenter's son in Palestine a couple of millennia ago. This is what twentieth-century theologian Lesslie Newbigin calls "the scandal of particularity". Because, Newbigin argues, humans are relational, social beings, God can only come to us through "our neighbor" rather than through pure, unmediated revelation. Jesus, God-become-human-flesh, is that neighbor. It is thus that Newbigin answers those who greet the Christian confession of the Incarnation with incredulity. There *is* something scandalous about this claim, of course. Theologically it risks circumscribing the divine, who is said to be infinite. And sociologically, it would seem to combine the worst aspects of universalism and tribalism. Perhaps it is not the Incarnation itself that is the problem, however, but rather how it has been interpreted and deployed. It is a tragic element of Christian history that this scandal of particularity has served more often than not to divide humanity — from itself and from other earthly creatures. Because God was said to be incarnate in a *special* way in this ancient Middle Eastern man, it also was (and by many Christians still is) assumed that the divine was incarnate in him in an *exclusive* way. Yet might the more scandalous claim be that the Incarnation is evidence that the divine comes to us, to each and all of us — human and more-than-human — *only* in particularity? What if, as I posited earlier, the Incarnation is the exemplification of, rather than the exception to, the divine-human, divine-worldly encounter?

Already I have suggested what this would also mean for how we conceive beauty. That we encounter the beautiful in particular things — a crocus in spring, a painting, a loved one's laugh — is common sense. Yet common sense has not been enough to stem the tide of Western philosophical assumptions about "the Beautiful", which in unity with "the Good" and "the True" are said to ultimately reside elsewhere. As noted above, von Balthasar proposes a compelling linkage between God's highly particular manifestation in Jesus on the cross and how beauty ought to be

understood; that is, he offers a theological aesthetics of the scandal of particularity. Unfortunately, von Balthasar repeats the traditional mistake of exclusivity by confusing particularity with an exclusively superior singularity. From Whitehead's process-relational perspective, by contrast, the celebration of particularity must be paired with a celebration of multiplicity. To say that the divine and the beautiful can be seen only through particularity is not to say that one particular particularity is the *only* particularity that really matters. Quite to the contrary, implied in the notion of particularity is an acknowledgment of the infinite differences that arise from intercorporeal encounter. For this current vision, as for Whitehead, beauty is neither a transcendent ideal nor an objective quality that certain things possess but an *event* that arises within the enfleshed, relational particularities of life.

We need not take Jesus' infancy narratives literally to appreciate the power of the message about particularity that they convey: the divine has chosen enfleshment in a particular time and place, with all its possibilities… and limitations. I further offer that the Incarnation is a more capacious symbol than the Crucifixion for thinking through the presence of God within material, relational particularities because the Incarnation is multivalent insofar as it references not simply Jesus' birth but his entire life, which would include the event of the crucifixion while also far, far exceeding it. This means the Incarnation is always *becoming* — temporally, relationally, sensibly. That is, the Incarnation serves as a fruitful image of intercorporeal encounter and possibly of beauty.

2. The Beauty of Encounter

All four of the canonical gospels in the Christian scriptures tell the story of "the anointing woman". While certain details differ, all the accounts convey the story of a repentant woman who comes to Jesus while he is dining in a private home and begins to anoint him — in some cases his feet, in others his head — with some very costly perfumed ointment. The scene is one of deep tenderness. In one version, she anoints his feet not only with the nard but her hair and her tears. With no regard for social propriety, she blesses him. The story grows yet more interesting when Jesus's disciples object to this show of reverence and affection toward their

teacher. "How expensive that perfume was!" they cry. "The money used to buy it could have been given to the poor instead". Although the Christian tradition has tended to teach its followers that the disciples are frequently misguided in their reactions to situations, many progressive Christians today may be inclined to side with the disciples.[7] Yet Jesus rebukes the disciples, saying, "She has honored me in my time of need, and she will be remembered for it". This story illustrates the very tension within Christianity between its promise of sacramental abundance and its command to care for "the least of these". Ideally the promise and the command go hand-in-hand: the promise is made to all people, and therefore Christians are commanded to (re)distribute that abundance based on divine standards rather than human ones.[8] Yet oftentimes in Christian history, the two have been at odds. The story of the anointing woman and the disciples brings this tension into stark relief. While sharing the disciples' concern, I want to read this scene differently — a bit less literally and a bit more symbolically — by looking at what it says about the beauty of intercorporeal encounter.

According to the current vision, based in an ontology of embodied relation, beauty is first and foremost an encounter, a particular and thoroughly corporeal one. While the story of the anointing woman may narrate an event of extravagant waste, it also vividly recounts the tender, compassionate anointing of a body that is about to undergo severe trial — physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual — unto death. In one gospel version of the story, it is Jesus' feet that the woman anoints (Luke 7:36-50) in a foreshadowing of his own kneeling to wash his disciples' feet on the night of his betrayal (John 13:1-20). What we discover, when we encounter this woman through a composite portrait based on the four

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[7] Certain contemporary interpreters have noted that beneath the disciples' objections also runs a disdain for this woman who is, in some versions of the tale, of ill repute. How could a woman of her social standing have afforded the nard? More scandalously, how dare such an impure woman touch their beloved teacher? We might ask whether their reaction is genuinely prophetic or simply misogynist.

[8] For a thorough working out of this argument in contemporary terms, see Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace*.

canonical gospels, is that the best way she can honor Jesus is to cleanse and anoint *his body*. It is not with words but with tactile gestures, with her own tears and hair, and indeed with costly aromatic nard that she honors him. She touches and is thereby touched. She anoints and is thereby anointed. Hers is an encounter with the Incarnation himself, just prior to the events of his radical vulnerability and suffering. Might we read the tale as one of tenderness and even abundance at the point of greatest need? And could we thus hold in creative tension the legitimate objection of the disciples and the desire of the woman to encounter and nurture the very body of a soon to be vulnerable God?

Read symbolically, this story does not give license to spend on beauty at any cost, but instead bespeaks the sensible, relational nature of beauty as encounter. If early in his life Jesus is anointed as God's beloved son at his baptism, then here Jesus is anointed as human, an act which only another, decidedly enfleshed human can do. If Jesus is both truly Christ — the "anointed one" — and fully divine-fully human, perhaps *both* anointments are crucial to his identity. This scene suggests that Jesus, as the divine incarnate, bears two qualities not normally attributed to God: vulnerability and relational reciprocity. There are a number of theological reversals here that might therefore fall into the tradition of Christian paradox that von Balthasar embraces. Alternatively, however, we might read these *seeming* reversals as simply indicative of the divine nature. That is, rather than a site of paradox, Jesus is the prism through which we might discern a God who, as incarnationally and particularly present in all things, engages in reciprocal encounter and therefore continually risks vulnerability. This is a God of such wide possibility, of such infinity that vulnerability and pain do not fall beyond the divine bounds (in contrast to the impassible God of much Christian tradition). To return to the question of beauty, then, we might say that what renders an intercorporeal encounter beautiful is not only the intensity of positive feeling to which it gives rise, but also the opening toward maximal possibilities that it creates. The Incarnation here suggests not only that beauty arises through a particular, embodied becoming in the present but also that it nurtures greater possibilities for future becomings, though always with the attendant risks of vulnerability and the possibility of being harmed.

3. The Beauty of Wholeness

The stories of Jesus as the incarnate God grow perhaps most interesting after his death and resurrection. In order to illustrate that Jesus is not merely a ghost, the gospel writers make sure to emphasize that he is still enfleshed. While he does miraculously disappear from the supper table in one space and suddenly reappear in the iconic upper room, he also says and does several things that establish his embodiment. He walks for hours upon a dusty road. He is hungry and asks for a piece of fish. He also invites his disciple Thomas to put a hand in his side to confirm that he is indeed the one who was crucified on the cross just days earlier. It is this scene that I want to think through. Often this story is invoked to probe the relation between faith and doubt: Thomas, the original "doubting Thomas", is held up as the one who lacked faith, even though the resurrected Jesus stood before his very eyes. He had to touch Jesus in order to *believe*. My focus here though is Jesus's woundedness. It is striking that the resurrected Christ continues to bear the wounds of the cross. He is resurrected, but his healing, his restoration does not undo the physical — and one assumes the psychic — effects of the crucifixion. This is not a new insight: theologians have always emphasized that the resurrected Christ does not cease to be the crucified Christ, or for that matter the incarnate Christ. All of these qualities go together. My purpose is to think through what this symbolism of incarnate-crucified-resurrected means for this vision of corporeal beauty.

Earlier I expressed appreciation for von Balthasar's impulse to offer a norm for beauty that is attentive to suffering and pain. Yet I also expressed my feminist theological discomfort with interpretations of the crucifixion that romanticize or idealize self-sacrificial suffering and/or ignore the historical reality of crucifixion as capital punishment. That is, both symbolically and historically, I cannot affirm the cross as an unqualified image of beauty and particularly not its normative form. But what about the wounded resurrected Christ on the far side of the Incarnation? Is this a more satisfying, or more importantly, a less problematic symbol for a beauty that attends to suffering? Put succinctly, can the wounded resurrected Christ function as a symbol of beauty that takes account of pain and suffering *without glorifying those*?

For me, it is not the wounds of the resurrected Christ but rather

the fact that the resurrected Christ still bears those wounds that is meaningful. The wounds in and of themselves ought not to be celebrated, which would only reinforce the message that suffering at the hands of others is redemptive. Yet to deny or ignore the wounds is to deny that human existence is marked precisely by pain, violence, and suffering. Indeed, we become who we are through them, if not *only* through them. Theologian Sharon Betcher rightly insists that "we need a discourse that holds corporeal contours — finitude, limits, transience, and mortality, as well as the suffering and pain associated with [them] — in cultural consciousness" (197). Accordingly, genuine beauty, as exemplified by the wounded resurrected Christ, does not gloss over the traumas of existence — traumas that are as individual and particular as each person who experiences them. Rather, genuine beauty speaks the truth about woundedness and pain without either gilding them or ignoring them. This accounting for our wounds is what I mean by the "wholeness" of beauty, quite the opposite of what is often intended by the word "whole". That is, I am not referring to a perfected, unblemished, unscarred whole but an *integrated* one, in which all elements of one's corporeal existence are brought together — and even, in Whitehead's word, harmonized. In fact, Whitehead understands the divine nature to work this way, stating that all of our sufferings, sorrows, and failures as well as our triumphs and joys are taken into God's own existence, which ever operates with "the tender care that nothing be lost" (*Process & Reality*, 346).

We once again find ourselves in a space of ambiguity, for there is a fine line between honoring woundedness, our own and others', and glorifying it. Even in the spirit of Christian paradox, I am unable to embrace the supposed beauty of violence. Yet to ignore that vulnerability, woundedness, and pain are an inevitable part of incorporeal existence is to distort the very nature of that existence; it is, in Betcher's words, to "evacuate corporeality" (199). And to evacuate corporeality by denying any of its dimensions is to commit a different type of violence. Conceptions of beauty must be whole and integrative, honoring wounds and scars. By neither glorifying nor ignoring them and by recognizing the vulnerability of each and every one of us, we heighten possibilities for relations that are marked by mutual care rather than competition, hostility, or violence. The Incarnation in wounded-resurrected form illustrates this integrated beauty.

3. Claiming Beauty

Much of the feminist project involves claiming values that patriarchal thought has rejected, while being cautious about proposing any simplistic reversals or falling into essentialism. Embodiment, reciprocal notions of power, and emotional intelligence are just a few of those values. Not simply in addition to but as an extension of these values, I have sought here to argue for a postmodern feminist claim to beauty. Postmodern thought, with its attention to corporeality and affect, seems to be shifting toward a more aesthetic conception of reality, and a claim to beauty makes sense in light of this shift. This vision of beauty also incorporates a growing acceptance that openness, ambiguity, vulnerability, and risk are inevitable markers of life in the world, not necessarily to be guarded against but to be acknowledged, accepted, and worked with. The beauty here proposed is therefore not a vision of unblemished perfection; instead it accounts for and honors vulnerability, suffering, and woundedness, though without problematically gilding those.

Laying claim to beauty from a specifically theological standpoint runs counter to much of the Christian heritage, despite discursive threads of theological aesthetics and the myriad aesthetically rich liturgies that have comprised worship practices. Charges of idolatry and/or superfluity usually have accompanied the tradition's ambiguity about beauty. In laying claim to beauty, I suggest by contrast that beauty might in fact connect us more fully to both the divine and one another; and it is precisely thus that beauty may heal. Diprose suggests that embracing a relational disposition of "intercorporeal generosity" opens us to the possibilities of difference, even "generates" difference rather than foreclosing it (127). Distinctly yet resonantly, philosopher Karmen MacKendrick proposes that cultivating a steady attention to beauty likewise opens us to "the infinity of the world's possibility" (100). Both of these suggestions echo Whitehead's notion that beauty, always some form of corporeal encounter, fosters maximal positive possibilities, arising specifically out of the discord that marks creaturely becoming. If healing, opening to positive possibility, and ethics are mutually implicated — which I provisionally suggest they are — then we may further affirm that beauty matters for both healing and ethics.

For postmodern feminist theologians, we have a symbol ready at

hand, the Incarnation, to explore the beauty of intercorporeal encounter, indeed of Diprose's intercorporeal *generosity*. This Beauty Incarnate illustrates that such generosity simultaneously gives and receives, healing in ways that integrate rather than dismiss or glorify woundedness and pain. Beauty — incarnate, relational, and open, ambiguous and vulnerable, multiple and integrating — may, in fact, as Gebara attests, bear the very power of salvation.

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Abstract

This paper makes a claim for "beauty" as a central category for postmodern feminist theology. Fear of idolatry has funded a resistance to, if not outright hostility toward, beauty in classic Christian theologies. Yet the decidedly aesthetic postmodern shift toward ontologies of embodied relation opens possibilities for re-envisioning beauty. In this paper I employ a feminist theological vision of the Incarnation — the Christian confession of faith that the divine assumed human flesh — to reflect upon a renewed conception of beauty. When understood as an *exemplification* of how the divine encounters the world rather than the exception (as classically interpreted), the Incarnation becomes a rich theological site for troubling the traditional Western dualism that posits an absolute distinction between the material and the spiritual. Instead, it offers grounds for embracing embodiment and materiality in all their complexity. This paper explores a conception of beauty that is relational and affective-sensible as well as multifaceted and integrative. It suggests a notion of beauty as that which arises within inter-corporeal encounter and that attends to what theologian Sharon Betcher calls the "corporeal contours" of our lives — not only the pleasures and joys of our relational, embodied existence but also the pains and sorrows.

Keywords

Beauty; Feminist Theology; Corporeality; Incarnation

Resumo

Este artigo reclama a "beleza" como uma categoria central da teologia feminista pós-moderna. Nas teologias cristãs clássicas, o medo da idolatria esteve na origem de uma resistência, se não de uma hostilidade aberta, à beleza. Contudo, a decisiva deslocação da estética pós-moderna para ontologias relacionais enraizadas na corporalidade abre a possibilidade de se re-ver a beleza. Neste artigo, considero a encarnação sob uma perspetiva da teologia feminista — a confissão da fé cristã de que o divino assumiu um corpo humano — para refletir sobre uma renovada

conceção de beleza. Quando tomada como uma *exemplificação* do modo como o divino encontra o mundo e não como uma exceção (tal como sucedia nas interpretações clássicas), a encarnação torna-se um espaço teológico produtivo para problematizar o tradicional dualismo ocidental que estabelece uma distinção absoluta entre o material e o espiritual. Assim, esta perspetiva propõe bases para abraçarmos a encarnação e a materialidade em toda a sua complexidade. Este artigo explora uma conceção de beleza relacional e sensível aos afetos, e ainda multifacetada e integradora. Sugere que a beleza é algo que aflora do encontro inter-corporal e participa naquilo que a teóloga Sharon Betcher denomina de "os contornos corpóreos" das nossas vidas — não apenas os prazeres e as alegrias da nossa existência corporalizada e relacional, mas também as suas dores e as suas tristezas.

Palavras Chave

Beleza; Teologia Feminista; Corporalidade; Encarnação

Feminism meets the Big Exhibition: Museum Survey Shows since 2005

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Feminism meets the Big Exhibition: Museum Survey Shows since 2005

In the years 2005-2011 something remarkable happened. Feminist art and/or art by women was made the focus of many exhibitions in major museums. If we include the venues that hosted touring versions of the exhibitions, some twenty or more institutions in different parts of the world put significant time and financial resources into surveys of feminist art and/or art by women. This phenomenon occurred mostly in European countries, but also in the USA, Iceland, Russia, Japan and elsewhere.[1]

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[1] These include (in order of the year they opened; touring venues not included): 2005: *MOT Annual 2005: Life Actually, The Works of Contemporary Japanese Women*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan. *La Costilla Maldita*, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Gran Canaria. *Konstfeminism: Strategier och effekter i Sverige från 1970-talet till idag*, Dunkers Kuturhus, Helsingborg, Sweden. 2007: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Museum of Contemporary Art; Los Angeles, USA. *Global Feminisms*, The Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA. This was the opening exhibition for the new Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, alongside the new permanent exhibition of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party. Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 Years of Art and Feminism*, Museo de Bellas Artes Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain. *A Batalla dos Xéneros/ Gender Battles*, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain. 2009: *elles@centrepompidou* The Pompidou Centre, Paris, France. *REBELLE. Art and Feminism 1969-2009*, Museum Voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem, The Netherlands. *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, Museum Moderner Kunst Siftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, Austria. 2010: February 19-March 16: *Donna: Avanguardia Femminista Negli Anni '70 dalla Sammlung Verbund di Vienna*, Galleria Nazionale D'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy. *Med Viljann ad Vopni – Endurlit 1970-1980* (*The Will as a Weapon – Review* 1970-1980), Listasafn Reykjavikur, Reykjavik, Iceland. *Žen d'Art: The Gender History of Art in the Post-Soviet Space: 1989-2009*, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Russia. 2011: September 16-January 22, 2012: *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey*, The Istanbul Modern, Turkey.

In addition to these survey exhibitions, feminism intersected with other major spaces and places in the global field of contemporary art. The *Venice Biennale*, with its national pavilions, is the longest-standing international art exhibition; its 51st edition (Venice, Italy, 2005) was spoken of as "the so-called 'feminist Biennale'" (O'Donnell; see also Nochlin, Jones). In the 12th manifestation of the massive 5-yearly survey of contemporary art, *Documenta* (Kassel, Germany, 2007), women formed 46% of the artists — an unusually high percentage — and "feminism and feminist art were on the agenda" (Esner 239). In various countries other mainstream museums put on thematic exhibitions of feminist work with smaller numbers of artists, such as *It's Time For Action (There's No Option): About Feminism* (Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich, Switzerland, 2006); *The International Incheon Women Artists' Biennale* was established in Incheon, Korea (2007, 2009, 2011); and in 2010 the *Modern Woman* project at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was made manifest through a series of exhibitions, a publication, film screenings, gallery talks, and a symposium.

These exhibitions have occurred 35-40 years after the women's liberation movement, the art world, and art history first intersected in a way that was highly productive; and they have occurred in venues that are in sharp contrast to the often alternative, non-traditional, venues that hosted the first exhibitions informed by the women's liberation movement. That so many major museums felt that it was timely to re-assess this movement and its intersection with the art world provokes the questions: What feminist politics informed these exhibitions, and what feminist politics did they produce? As a result of the choices made by the curators, how would viewers of these exhibitions understand the intersection of feminism with the art world? What was the curators' reading of the history of this work? What histories of feminism have these exhibitions produced? This essay will examine four of the survey exhibitions in an attempt to answer some of these questions.

Context

Some of the survey exhibitions were national. For example, the *MOT Annual 2005: Life Actually, The Works of Contemporary Japanese*

Women in Japan, *The Will as a Weapon: Review*, in Iceland, and *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey* explored the movement within national contexts and cultural specificities. Some were regional or cultural. *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, which was shown in both Austria and Poland, explored art made in 24 countries over a period of 50 years both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall; *La Costilla Maldita*, in Gran Canaria focussed on Spanish-speaking artists from Europe and from Latin America, with the aim of showing similarities and differences. Other exhibitions were more fully international in intent. *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, (USA), *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 Years of Art and Feminism* (Spain) and *REBELLE. Art and Feminism 1969-2009*, all aimed at an international representation of the movement, although with different results. Some were limited to particular decades or timeframes (*WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* focused on the late '60's and the '70's, while *Global Feminisms* (USA) took the period 1990-2007); and *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* encompassed the construction and representation of sexual identity by both male and female artists, as did *A Batalla dos Xéneros/Gender Battles* (Spain).

But despite these significant differences, what the exhibitions share is crucial in four respects. First, they all purport to be surveys, as distinct from the many themed feminist exhibitions or exhibitions of women's art that also occurred during these years, like *It's Time For Action (There's No Option): About Feminism*. Second, they all intersect with feminist thought, in either the stated curatorial impulse for the exhibition, and/or in much of the art selected, and/or in the ancillary products of the exhibition such as the catalogues. Third, they have occurred at the time when the lived experience of the women's movement is turning into the subject of History, and its impulses are being disciplined, defined, written, and, in the art world, canonized. Fourth, they all occupied major national or regional museums and galleries.

Thus, what we see happening during this time is that institutions that are structurally central to the art world (national or regional museums, the kind of institutions that are arguably most able to determine the definition and reach of categories in Art History, and the artists and art

works of most significance to them[2]) were presenting their own definitions of what they consider a feminist art movement to be, or what they consider contemporary art by women to be capable of saying. In this manner, these institutions are determining an Art Historical category of 'Feminist Art' or 'Art by Women'.[3] As they do this, they offer the exhibition visitor an apparently seamless proposition: the visitor sees what is there, and doesn't see what is not there, and it can be hard to argue with the proposition as a result. If the exhibition is elegantly structured in relation to the exhibiting space, and the works are beautifully positioned in relation to the gallery and each other, the visitor can be lulled into an unquestioning acceptance. There can be great pleasure in seeing works that had previously only been known through reproductions in books, and also in encountering previously unknown works in that context. Unless s/he has a deep knowledge of an exhibition's subject of enquiry, the visitor will be unlikely to see the gaps and the choices; s/he will certainly not see the stories behind certain works not being there because of, say, the artist's or the owner's unwillingness to loan them, and even less will s/he see the active choices of exclusion made by the curator. S/he will have the experience of walking around the exhibition, from room to room, and will glean important understandings of the intent of the curator from the way the works are grouped together and placed in relation to each other; s/he will be able to read any labels and wall-mounted texts, pick up leaflets and other material. Eventually, the major trace of the exhibition will be in the catalogue, if there is one, available either for purchase or for loan through library systems. Increasingly, catalogues contain commissioned essays by people who have had no part in making the exhibition, but who write in broad support, complementarity, or augmentation, rather than close critique, of the curator's argument.

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[2] Bettina Messians Carbonell has quoted Geoffrey Lewis to say that "the term 'museum' now 'conveys concepts not only of preserving the material evidence of the human and natural world but also of a major force in interpreting these things'" (Carbonell 4).

[3] I am using capital letters for 'Art History' here to indicate an institutionally recognized academic discipline, with its own traditions, etiquette, and practices — as opposed to a more generic, wide-ranging, and inclusive set of histories of arts; and for 'Feminist Art' to indicate a sub-field institutionally defined within Art History.

But catalogues also usually contain an essay by the curator or curators, outlining the intent of the exhibition — the story that they are trying to tell, its background, and what has informed the way they have structured this narrative. The catalogue is often a lavish publication (the $60 or £45 catalogue is not a rarity), intended to have integrity as a publication independently from the exhibition, and to be coherent and of interest to people who were unable to see the exhibition. At the same time it is also often the main source of information about the thinking that went into structuring and presenting the exhibition. It can thus provide a point of contrast for the visitor to the exhibition between the curatorial intent and its realization in the museum; and to the non-visitor, it exists as an opaque stand-in for the first-hand experience of exhibition.

What is clear from the catalogues for the exhibitions listed above, and from personal visits that I was able to make to some of them, is that each of the exhibitions had a further distinction, over and above the overt distinctions giving bounds to the exhibition — distinctions of location or chronology — that I indicated. Possibly the most significant distinction between the exhibitions — and, by extension, their curators — is their definition of, and relationship to, feminism. While the words 'feminism' or 'feminist' were in many of the exhibition titles, there is by no means curatorial agreement on what this might mean, how significant it is, whether it is located in the realm of politics, or culture, or social exchange. Still less is there agreement on what might constitute feminist practices in art. I will explore some of these exhibitions, particularly through their catalogues, in order to draw out this point.

WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution

The title of *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2007) indicated that the art exhibited would not necessarily be feminist art; rather, the exhibition explored the relationships between art and what is termed (in the first sentence in the catalogue) the "social movement" of feminism (Strick 7). This was re-enforced at its originating venue, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (LA MoCA), when visitors entered the exhibition to see a 13ft diameter fabric hanging piece, a magnificent work by Magdalena

Abakanowicz: *Abakan Red* (1969). Abakanowicz is an artist not known for identification with the women's movement or feminist thought. This piece, however, has some formal resonances with what in the early 1970s Judy Chicago was to call 'central core' or 'cunt' imagery, and Barbara Rose was to call 'vaginal iconology,' and it was presumably selected to open the exhibition for this reason.[4]

WACK! was a large, rambling exhibition. The viewer walked from one (unlabelled) section to another, around the screens and partitions in the hangar-like museum, without necessarily recognising the categories that were laid out in the catalogue; rather, there was a flow, with works in different areas relating to each other through their media and their content. It was an extraordinary opportunity for the visitor to see work in actuality that had often only circulated in black and white photographs in significant publications from the 1970s. This was one of the great pleasures for the viewer in visiting *WACK!*: seeing works that might be recognised from having seen them in reproduction — works that could be named, but had rarely been exhibited before. In total there were 119 artists and artist groups arranged in 18 different curatorial sections. It is worth naming these sections: Goddess; Gender Performance; Pattern and Assemblage; Body Trauma; Taped and Measured; Autophotography; Making Art History; Speaking in Public; Silence and Noise; Female Sensibility; Abstraction; Gendered Space; Collective Impulse; Social Sculpture; Knowledge as Power; Body as Medium; Labor; Family Stories. These are categories of style, media, imagery, content, and intent. As a group they are surprisingly apolitical for a field that included so many activist individuals, groups, interventions, and artworks.

In the first few lines of her catalogue essay, curator Cornelia Butler states her definition of feminism. It is one that she quotes from Peggy Phelan who, Butler says, "has offered what seems to be the most serviceable definition of feminism: 'the conviction that gender has been, and continues to be, a fundamental category for the organization of culture. Moreover,

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[4] Artists in the exhibition who did not or do not align themselves with feminism included amongst others Marina Abramovi , Louise Bourgeois, Lygia Clark, Rita Donagh, Eva Hesse, Annette Messager.

the pattern of that organization usually favours men over women'" (15). Stated like this, the definition emphasises the apolitical, non-activist curatorial categories used in placing the works in the exhibition space. It also removes it from a chronology that Phelan laid out in her original text, written in 2001 (two decades after the time period for *WACK!* came to an end) and in the context of a survey essay in a volume on feminism and art that covers nearly four decades, up to the time of her writing. In that book, Phelan offers her "bold, if broad, definition" in recognition that "the ideological stakes in the question 'what is feminism?' have often led to increasingly sophisticated but, it must be admitted also, increasingly evasive responses" (18). Butler goes on to situate her own first "interest in 1970s feminist art" in her witness of two catalysts for the formation of the Women's Action Coalition in New York in 1991 and 1992 (17). First was the way in which attention to Matthew Barney's breakthrough exhibition "virtually eclipsed several other simultaneous exhibitions featuring women artists" and dominated the discussion in a panel with the title "What Role Will the Language of Feminism Play in the Art World of the '90s?" Second was the intention of the Guggenheim Museum to open its new branch in New York's Soho with an exhibition of only white men (Butler 18-20).

So here Butler is indicating her interest in feminist art as the product of internal art world events, rather than as a commitment to feminist thought and action as a broader political position that is then brought to bear upon the art world amongst other things. In the article from which Butler quotes, Peggy Phelan called our attention to this distinction when working from and within a highly localised art world framework: "writing about art has traditionally been concerned with that which is interior to the frame, whereas feminism has focused primarily on what lies outside the frame of patriarchal logic, representation, history and justice — which is to say the lives of most women" (17). Identifying this difference is not to deny that the awareness of the need for feminist thought and action can come from any catalyst; but there is a move towards vigilance and activism in Phelan's observation, which is not embraced by Butler. Instead, what we find in Butler's essay is the conceptualisation and articulation of two things: first, of a feminism that is interior to the frame of US (or New York) Art History; and, second, of an exhibition that embodies the struggle to move beyond that frame. It is fundamentally an incorporative approach

— one that attempts to assimilate feminism as a practice of art into the particularity of that art history.

This is made evident in the catalogue essay written by Connie Butler as the curator of *WACK!* Exclusions from exhibitions are always interesting, as they form the framework that determines the argument presented by the curator: not part of the picture, they constitute its borders, and therefore, its definition, its 'edge'. The exclusions that are brought to the attention of the exhibition-viewer and the catalogue-reader become precisely those porous and slippery moments where intention is made explicit. Apart from discussing her reasons for excluding men artists as a category from the exhibition, Butler tells us why she excluded one artist whom she names:

> Another test of feminism's relevance and resiliency occurs with artists who did not participate in, and whose work did not circulate through, the mainstream (read: white) art world. Emily Kame Kngwarreye, for example, was an Australian aboriginal artist who, during the 1970s, made textiles as part of the Utopia Women's Batik Group […] Though Kngwarreye later gained recognition for her abstract paintings, which were shown in galleries during the 1980s, she is not represented in *WACK!* because the economy in which the Utopia Group's early production circulated did not favor institutional collections and archives. (17)

From a feminist perspective, this is a surprising statement for two reasons. First is the identification of "the mainstream (read: white) art world" without equal recognition of the mainstream being additionally male and euro-centric: feminist thinking in the art world has not only happened within the traditional studio, but to a very large extent as an institutional critique of the structures of the art world it was trying to occupy and change. The position of what the mainstream art world of the 1970s might define as ethnically-specific craft-work made by a woman (in this case, the textiles made by Kngwarreye as a member of the Utopia Women's Batik Group) would be one that was compromised on numerous fronts, and western feminists at the time and in subsequent decades were struggling (often with each other) over the re-contextualisation of works such as those by Kngwarreye. This included direct challenges to, and circumvention of, the

curatorial categories that produced such exclusions. The second surprising aspect to Butler's statement is that as feminist artists and writers of the 1970s were analysing the exclusion by the mainstream of artists who were women, who were black, and who were non-western European, they were also identifying a number of different strategies that artists and curators could take. One was what might be called "an equal-rights feminism" — an attempt to enter institutional structures on a par with men. A second strategy was to re-structure the art world to make it less exclusionary — "that rotten pie", as Lucy Lippard called it in 1974 (26). A third strategy was to set up alternative, feminist, or woman-centred, structures, as happened through Europe, the USA, and elsewhere in the 1970s, in the process reconfiguring the relationship between artists and curators. The realities with which Emily Kane Kngwarreye was dealing as an Aboriginal woman in Australia in the 1970s were very different from those of the vast majority of women living in the USA or Europe at that time; but the fact remains that many of the works in *WACK!* were made deliberately for circulation in environments that by-passed the mainstream of the art world.[5] This was not peculiar to feminist artists: for example, in the 1960s and 1970s happenings and performance artist Allan Kaprow recognised that much art produced as "anti-art" was eventually incorporated into art world institutions and market without disturbance, and he consequently focused on producing "non-art" (Kaprow passim). But the analysis — and eschewing — of patriarchal mainstream structures was a notable part of feminist practices in the 1970s. Indeed, a number of artists in *WACK!* produced works in this way, even if they did later gain entrance to the authorizing place of the museum exhibition.[6] So we can see through Butler's positioning of Kngwareye that *WACK!* is a fundamentally

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[5] This would include work as diverse as the *Cunt Coloring Book* drawings by Tee Corinne, performances by VALIE EXPORT, collaborative works by Suzanne Lacy, the early conceptual works by Adrian Piper, and the magazine interventions by Cosey Fanni Tutti.

[6] Martha Rosler, for example, has worked in this way, releasing non-editioned video works at low cost to make them almost as financially accessible as mainstream cinema releases.

revisionist version of the history that is less impelled by feminist thinking than it is by contemporary curatorial and art historical practices, realised on an archival scale.

Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 Years of Art and Feminism

There is a great contrast between Connie Butler's curatorial catalogue essay, and that provided by Xabier Arakistain in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 Years of Art and Feminism* (Bilbao, 2007). This exhibition, five years in the making, opened three months after *WACK!*, and comprised "69 works and 36 artists and three feminist groups from various countries which initiated and/or have continued to give substance to what has come to be known as 'feminist art'", according to the museum website. In comparison with the 129 artists of the USA exhibition this is much smaller, but there is also this clear indication that all the work is feminist. In his curator's essay, like Butler in hers, Arakistain outlines the thinking that informed the curating of the exhibition; he gives the curatorial categories developed for the exhibition; and he comments on a small amount of his auto-biographical experience with feminist thinking in the art world prior to the exhibition.

Despite covering 45 years of work, in distinction from the focus on approximately 12 years of work included in *WACK!*, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* had five curatorial categories rather than *WACK!*'s eighteen.[7] Arakistain describes them thus:

1 *The fight for the civil and political rights of women* and the political and artistic implications of the maxim "the personal is political", revealing the political nature of the private sphere, without excluding categories of class and race.
2. *The cultural construction of sex, gender and sexuality* and denunciation of sexist stereotypes.
3. Struggles relation to *the liberalisation of women's bodies*.

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[7] *WACK!*'s focus was on the years 1968-1979, with a handful of works made before and after those dates.

4. Condemnation of *violence against women*.
5. *Feminist practice to make women visible and include them in the history of humankind*, to write a true history that does not leave more than fifty per cent of the population out of the story. (242)

In contrast to *WACK!*'s more museological and art-world categories, all of the categories in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* are directly related to political and activist themes central to feminist thought and the women's movement. The approach to the selection and installation of work is, therefore, thoroughly informed by knowledge of feminist activism, its foci, and the theory it produced. More than that, it is informed by Arakistain's earlier work as the co-ordinator of the *Arts and Feminisms ARCO Forum* 2002-2005, which led to the ARCO 2005 Manifesto (Arakistain 244). The Manifesto gives a brief but forceful account of the exclusion of women in the Spanish State-run Museums and other State-sponsored exhibitions, such as participation in international biennials. It then calls for the establishment of an expert group to analyse the situation; for in-house policies of equity in museums; and for the application of feminist policies, including the establishment of quotas. The manifesto then informed the drawing up of Article 26 of a 2007 Act of Parliament concerning the equality of the sexes. This article requires that all Spanish Government structures responsible for the production and management of Spanish culture must ensure gender equity among exhibiting artists, advisory groups, and decision-makers, and that they must be pro-active in supporting women artists fulfil their potential. This is possibly the most radical legislation in support of women artists anywhere (Ley Orgánica).

Throughout his essay, Arakistain is careful to avoid essentialising the category of 'Feminist Art', instead indicating how the category has been constructed. His argument is that the feminist movement as we know it now can be traced back to the 18th century Enlightenment, and that the calls for political and civil rights for women that materialised in the 1960s began to manifest themselves in art for the first time at that moment. Thus, his focus is upon particular works of art that demonstrate this, specifically, works that are "placing the problematic of representation right in the foreground. This means asking oneself who represents whom, from what point of view and how, keeping constant tabs on the different systems of

representation that continue to construct and transmit stereotypes of sex, gender, 'race' and sexuality" (Arakistain 241). He argues that the concepts of 'excellence' and 'the canon' within the art world are constructions of power, and notes with surprise and concern that many key works he selected for the exhibition still belonged to the artists themselves, and had not been purchased whether by private collectors or by public institutions. The market had not valued such work, despite their appearance in books and catalogues, and their 'aura' for those who have valued feminism. This discussion of his curatorial process and thinking is in contrast with Butler's positioning of Kngwarreye's work, demonstrating the political and activist definitions of feminism that informed his choices. It is precisely what Phelan calls a focus "on what lies outside the frame of patriarchal logic, representation, history and justice" (17).

REBELLE. Art and Feminism 1969-2009

In 2009, approximately two years after *WACK!* and *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* had opened, *elles@centrepompidou* opened in Paris and (three days later and about an hour's flight away) *REBELLE: Art and Feminism 1969-2009* opened in Arnhem. *elles@centrepompidou* came about in part after it proved too expensive to host *WACK!* for another stop on its tour: ironically, as a result, the Pompidou mounted one of the more politically complex and certainly the largest of the survey exhibitions. *REBELLE*, conversely, was a long time in the making; while it "concretely started taking shape in 2004" it was eventually timed for 2009, a significant feminist anniversary in the Netherlands as it was both thirty years after the important Dutch exhibition *Feministische kunste internationaal* (*International Feminist Art*) (1979) and forty years after the founding of the Dutch feminist group Dolle Mina in 1969 (Westen 13).

REBELLE, held in the Museum voor Moderne Kunst Anrnhem (MMKA) in the Netherlands, was an interestingly diverse exhibition. Of the 87 artists, 20 were either Dutch in origin, or trans-national and at the time living in the Netherlands. Many of the Dutch artists were represented by recent work focused in the latter galleries of the exhibition, giving local currency to the presentation. While there were just a handful of artists from the former Eastern bloc, Asia, or Americas beyond the USA, 18 of the artists

were from the Middle East and Africa; the work of all of these artists was integrated in the different thematic areas of the exhibition as appropriate[8] Seven of the artists were represented by work dating from the 1960s, demonstrating that art was being made from a feminist position in a number of countries while the women's movement was growing, and before the designation 'feminist art' had been coined. However, the message that one got from this exhibition was not of nostalgia for a time gone that cannot be recuperated, that can only be celebrated, mourned, and archived. Rather, although the exhibition was not arranged chronologically, it was a demonstration of a movement that is growing, vibrant, and with a lot of work still to do: 33 of the artists were represented solely through work made in or since 2000. The presence of artists from African and Arabic countries, alongside artists from Israel, Turkey, and Iran, and some from China, India and elsewhere in Asia, demonstrated a set of feminist issues and languages that, although they may be newly visible in Europe or the USA, should not be confused with or equated with the then-emerging Western European and North American feminist art of the 60s and 70s. Thus *REBELLE* was an exhibition that demonstrated feminisms not solely situated in a Western European/USA past, but in a broader state of becoming, and without a geographical centre — or centers — determining the feminist present and future. The exhibition as a whole, with one focus on Dutch work, and another focus on African and Middle Eastern work, set up a dialogue between a deep, local, site, and a broader, developing, context.

By the time *REBELLE* opened, MKKA already had a reputation for being supportive of work by women and of feminist work, and had been nicknamed "the women's museum" in the 1980s. The director from 1982-2000, Liesbeth Brandt Corstius, "developed exhibition and collection policies through which the work of female artists became widely represented". She had organised exhibitions of the work of Magdalena Abakanovicz, Miriam Cahn, Dorothy Iannone, Nancy Spero and others,

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[8] This can be contrasted with *Global Feminisms* which had the same number of artists, 13 of whom were from the Middle East or Africa, 19 from Asia, and 11 from the former Eastern bloc. It featured only artists born since 1960.

as well as *Het Persoonlijke = Politiek* (*The Personal = Political*) in 1984 (Westen 10, 12). She was also a contributor to the catalogue for *Feministische kunste internationaal* in 1979 (Corstius). The curator of *Rebelle*, Mirjam Westen, was also the MKKA's curator of contemporary art. She had been actively involved in the women's movement and with feminist arts groups in the 1980s, including Stichting Vrouwen in Beeldende Kunst (Women in the Visual Arts, known as SVBK) and had published in a number of feminist journals. She had also co-organized the historical exhibition *Elck zijn waerom: Vrouwelijke kunstenaars in Noord — en Zuid Nederland 1550-1950* (*Everyone Has Their Reasons: Female Artists in the North and South of the Netherlands 1550-1950*), in 1990-2000 (Westen 12). Under their leadership, the museum had adopted a policy that 50% of the work purchased by the museum should be work by women. (Butcher) Such depth of experience and commitment to feminism provided a rare environment — an institutional commitment to feminist thinking and processes — and this in turn is reflected in the structure of the catalogue. Taken as a whole it follows a different track than either the catalogue for *WACK!* or that for *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*. Rather than bringing together contemporary art historians and theorists from different countries to comment on different aspects of this historicizing moment, the five main essays in the catalogue are written by Dutch authors. Intended as "a retrospective look at the Dutch women's art movement", Westen's aim in editing the catalogue in this way was to "include less well-known voices, perspectives and stories, to particularize the history which has been written about in general terms elsewhere" (18). While the catalogue does indeed do that, it does more. It provides an account of an international movement from the point of view of a small European country no longer regarded as a major global force politically or economically, working in a minority language, which at the same time has been pioneering in the feminist thinking, feminist structures, and feminist art it produces. The catalogue does not constantly look over its shoulder to countries like the USA, the UK, and Germany, but rather it acknowledges and incorporates the importance of what happened in a more dominant art and feminist world, while retaining a fully motivated, locally driven and developed, set of strategies and politics. Adding further to its particularity, the catalogue was published after the opening of the exhibition,

and was therefore able to include documentation of related events and performances.

The curator's essay provided by Westen does echo those of Butler and Arakistain in providing overview, a personal history and process, and an indication of the themes of the exhibition. The extensive overview is written from the point of view of Westen's process of researching and curating the exhibition. It follows the growing feminist interrogation of the art world and how feminist thinking was used to develop new structures, exhibitions, and practices such as teaching, and then moves on to an exploration of different themes that she identifies within the work of feminist artists. She is careful not to put this in generational terms, not to use the concept of 'waves' of feminism, "in order to avoid the pitfalls of oppositional and linear historical thinking" (13). Westen describes the thematic structure of the exhibition as five loose groups: 1) criticism of the representation of the feminine; 2) the social constructedness of masculinity and femininity; 3) lesbian and black identities: 4) the creation of new images; and 5) the crossing of boundaries, such as between the public and the private, the personal and the political and between the local and the global (18). At least four of these themes can be described as politically-informed categories (if not as overtly activist as the themes identified in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*) rather than categories determined by medium, quasi-art-historical categories, or categories of the museum archive. The invitation extended to this visitor walking around the exhibition was to contrast how different artists had approached these different representational issues. It was a curatorial approach that constructed feminist processes as a set of local strategies and histories with comprehension of a growing global network.

elles@centrepompidou

By far the largest of all the survey exhibitions was *elles@centrepompidou*. This exhibition aimed to be a story of contemporary art told only by women artists, and all the works are ones that were in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne (MNAM — also known as the Pompidou Centre). The catalogue lists all of the women artists in the collection, naming in bold the impressive figure of 343 artists who were in the

exhibition. *elles@centrepompidou* was also the longest exhibition: originally intended to be something over a year, it was extended to be a year and nine months, due to the extraordinary public response. During this time, there were two partial re-hangs swapping about 1/4th of the works on each occasion. The fact that all of the works came from the MNAM's own collection should not be remarkable, but it is.[9] As the catalogue for *elles@centrepompidou* lists the date of purchase of works it is possible to see that while MNAM bought a good amount of work by women in the time immediately leading up to the exhibition, it has also systematically bought work by women over many years. So while we can see that in the 2000's the museum was buying earlier works (for example, Niki de Saint Phalle's *Tir* of 1961, purchased in 2004, and a Nancy Spero drawing of 1967, also purchased in 2004), it is also possible to see that the museum has more often bought works within a decade of their creation. Even so, the curator Camille Morineau notes defensively that women artists "only comprise 18% of our collections and 25% of the contemporary collections" — although she later notes with surprise that "two great neighbouring museums, the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay, exhibit works exclusively — or almost exclusively — by men" (15-16).

The opening sentence of the catalogue (similarly to that of *WACK!*, as noted above) is written by the head of the institution (Alain Seban) and situates "the transformation of the condition of women [as] a major economic, social and cultural fact" (Morineau 9), rather than a result of political engagement and struggle. The curatorial themes, at seven, are more manageable than the 18 of *WACK!* but like that exhibition, they

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[9] Contrast this with the Museum of Modern Art in New York: the season of much smaller exhibitions that came together under the title of *Modern Woman* included just one exhibition that mirrored the aim and method of *elles@centrepompidou* — presenting the story of modern and contemporary art told by women artists. That exhibition was *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography* (May 2010-March 2011). At the symposium *Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now* (May 21st, 2010) a panel that was formed of MoMA's women curators agreed that MoMA's photography department was the only one capable of achieving this, as it was the only one that had systematically included women artists in its collection and the other departments simply did not have enough work by women.

combine the Art Historical, the material, and the social, but ironically also add the activist: Pioneers; Free Fire; The Activist Body; Eccentric Abstraction; A Room of One's Own; Words at Work; Immaterielles (Morineau 18).[10] Morineau's curatorial approach as outlined in her essay differs from those of Butler, Arakistian, and Westen in significant ways. Her aim is not to define feminism, or the exhibition's relationship to feminism, or her own relationship to feminism. Rather, at the core of the essay is an attempt to explain what she terms "the French paradox" (Morineau 16): how can a political and cultural system that is based upon the concept of 'égalité' — equality — acknowledge difference? How can women "take the floor" from which they have been excluded when they cannot do so structurally in the name of women? How can women argue for universalism by addressing difference? Morineau paraphrases historian Joan Scott's work on the 'French paradox' when she writes of the MNAM: "Whatever the specifics of its exhibitions (and these have varied depending upon the period, because it is a museum of the present day), a museum concerned about equality within its collections has to argue against exclusion and for universalism by addressing women's difference — the very difference which led to their exclusion in the first half of the century" (17). This in turn can prompt in the non-French reader the reflection that there is another layer of paradox for readers outside France: that to an extent not experienced in relation to other nationalities, 'French feminism' has become a theoretical and cultural category (despite the often vitriolic differences between writers such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva), and that contemporary French philosophers in particular have developed the category of 'difference' as an intellectual and political tool that has been of great use in developing feminist thinking.

While Morineau states that the selection of work from the collection "is as anthropological, sociological, and political as it is art historical", she is also at pains to deny that this is a feminist project: "the goal is neither to

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[10] I have kept the original French version of 'Immaterielles', which playfully and untranslateably ends with a plural feminine, in dialogue with an exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in 1985 with the masculine title of 'Les Immateriaux'.

show that female art exists nor to produce a feminist event, but to present the public with a hanging that appears to offer a good history of twentieth-century art. The goal is to show that representation of women versus men is, ultimately, no longer important. Proving it is another matter" (16-17). And here is another paradox: much of the work in the exhibition focuses on being female — inhabiting a female body, a feminine cultural position, and/or a feminist political position. Even with works where a woman is in the image but the work is not overtly political (for example, in 'Voices of Reason/Voices of Madness' (1984) by the Canadian, Geneviève Cadieux; or 'Electric Dress' (1956, reconstituted 1999) by the Japanese Atsuko Tanaka; or 'Lying with the Wolf' (2001) by the American Kiki Smith), the marked cultural construction of women's bodies (versus the 'neutral' or 'universal' or 'human' cultural construction of the bodies of men) overladen with the gendered associations of particular representational tropes (in turn, hysteria; the traditional wedding dress; the sexually predatory attributes of the wolf in myths and tales) means that each of these works are available for deeply political readings. Further, certain curatorial decisions left the viewer with fruitfully frustrating and ambiguous readings of the various works. For example, in the section on design that focused on kitchens and dining, the curator had included a 1970s TV showing Martha Rosler's acerbically (and now iconically) feminist video 'Semiotics of the Kitchen' (1975). One, activist, reading of this sly move would be that the anger represented by Rosler is enhanced by the work's enforced position in the kitchen; another, revisionist, reading might be that all Martha needed were these neglected women designers to make her domestic experiences happier. A third, anti-feminist, reading might be that the women designers were not neglected — they were in the collection of the MNAM, and some had had highly successful careers — and Rosler's piece was emotional and misplaced. In the case of all of these artworks, the specificity of the subject demonstrates that, contrary to her stated aim, Morineau had constructed an exhibition where representation of women versus men was, ultimately, central. Where the frustration lay for a feminist viewer of *elles@centrepompidou* was in the gap between on the one hand the assumption that simply 'being a woman' would be sufficient to make a coherent exhibition, and on the other hand the rejection of the category 'woman' in favour of the individualism inherent in the feminine plural

'elles' (a grammatical construction that does not exist in — and is not readily translatable into — English). While the exhibition enjoyed an elegant and generous installation, the political thinking that could have filled that gap — the deconstruction of the category 'woman' and the production of new forms of representation — was missing. Instead, 'being a woman' was at times denied or (as in the placing of Rosler's video) was exposed as being an unresolved and unstable category, ready and waiting to undo the museological, archival, approach, but in the context de-historicised and de-politicised: feminism in limbo.

Some concluding thoughts

So why is it important to think closely about how museums curate such exhibitions? There is an increasing tendency for museums to expand collections through donations from donors. Donors, of course, collect to their own loves, and to their own prejudices. The saga of the relationship between Eli Broad and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is an example of this: he is both a trustee of, and has loaned works to, LACMA. Broad's collection is notoriously light on women, but nonetheless is going to form a major part of what the public who go to LACMA will begin to understand as contemporary art — a series of exclusions that is deeply regressive. At the same time as the increase of donor-driven exhibitions, the museums that have put on these survey feminist exhibitions (or exhibitions of women artists) will be able to rest on their laurels. They will have 'been there, done that' and unless there has been a deep, political, change in approaches to the collection and curation of contemporary art in these institutions, it may well be business as usual after those exhibitions. As Griselda Pollock asks:

> What is the effect of separating feminist aesthetic interventions from the larger political and cultural revolution that was feminism and feminist theory, and isolating works and artists within a relatively unaltered curatorial approach and exhibitionary model? *We might gain this work for art, but miss its significance in transforming art*. For feminism was never an art movement. Feminism is a *resource* for artistic practices, inflecting them and allying them with equally radical realignments within the art world at the conjunction with which a feminist effect became possible.

As a repoliticization of gender and the cultural-semiotic enquiry into sexual difference, feminism made things possible within emerging forms and practices of expanded art practice post 1970. The price of not taking seriously this double process of changes in art making and art thought and of changes in social movements and political thought is that we assimilate and domesticate the feminist rupture into a deadened, museal category of "feminist art" while unthinkingly continuing ineffectually to add women artists to existing models of the history of art. (127)

For my students, born as many were around about 1990, the pioneering feminist work of the late 60s and the 70s is like art of the late 30s is for me: it is real art history. If today's young artists are to practice feminist resistance they can learn from the successes and from the failures of earlier moments and movements of resistance. They need not the fixity of museal and archival categories, but unfixity.

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Abstract

In the years 2005-2011 something remarkable happened. Feminist art and/or art by women was made the focus of many museum-scale exhibitions. This phenomenon occurred mostly in European countries (ie Sweden, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland), but also in the USA, Iceland, Russia, Japan and elsewhere.

Some of these exhibitions were national (ie *Life Actually*, Japan; *The Will as Weapon*, Iceland); some were regional or cultural (ie, *Gender Check*, Austria and Poland; *La Costilla Maldita*, Gran Canaria); others were more fully international in intent (ie, *WACK!*, USA, and *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, Spain). Some were limited to particular decades or timeframes (*WACK!*: late '60's and the '70's; *Global Feminisms*: 1990-2007); *Gender Check* included both male and female artists, as did *A Batalla dos Xéneros/Gender Battles*. But despite these differences, what the exhibitions share is crucial in four respects. First, they all purport to be surveys, as distinct from the many themed feminist exhibitions or exhibitions of women's art that also occurred during these years (like *It's Time For Action*, Zurich 2006). Second, they all intersect with feminist thought, in either the stated curatorial impulse for the exhibition, and/or in much of the art selected, and/or in the ancillary products of the exhibition such as the catalogues. Third, they have occurred at the time when the lived experience of the women's movement is turning into the subject of History, and its disciplining impulses are being written and, in the art world, to an extent, canonized. Fourth, they all occupied major national or regional museums or galleries.

Thus, national or regional museums, institutions that are structurally central to the art world, are presenting their own definitions of what they consider a feminist art movement to be, or what they consider contemporary art by women to be capable of saying. In this manner, they are determining an Art Historical category of 'Feminist Art' or 'Art by Women'. As they do this, they offer the exhibition visitor an apparently seamless proposition: the visitor sees what is there, and doesn't see what is not there, and it can be hard to argue with the proposition as a result. Eventually, the major trace of the exhibition will be in the catalogue,

if there is one, available either for purchase or for loan through library systems.

Each of the exhibitions had a further distinction: their definition of, and relationship to, feminism. While the words 'feminism' or 'feminist' were in many of the exhibition titles, there is by no means curatorial agreement on what this might mean, how significant it is, whether it is located in the realm of politics, or culture, or social exchange. Still less is there agreement on what might constitute feminist practices in art. I will explore some of these exhibitions, particularly through their catalogues, in order to draw out this point.

Keywords

Feminism; Art; Curating; Museums; Exhibitions

Resumo

Entre 2005 e 2011 sucedeu algo extraordinário. A arte feminista e/ou a arte feita por mulheres tornou-se o foco de várias exposições à escala de um museu. Este fenómeno ocorreu sobretudo nos países europeus (i.e. na Suécia, em França, em Espanha, na Holanda e na Polónia), mas também nos E.U.A., na Islândia, na Rússia, no Japão e noutros locais.

Algumas destas exposições foram nacionais (i.e. *Life Actually*, Japão; *The Will as Weapon*, Islândia); outras regionais ou culturais (i.e. *Gender Check*, Áustria e Polónia; *La Costilla Maldita*, Gran Canaria); outras pautaram-se por uma intenção mais internacional (i.e. *WACK!*, E.U.A. e *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, Espanha). Algumas foram delimitadas por décadas ou enquadramentos temporais específicos (*WACK!*: final dos anos 60 e anos 70; *Global Feminisms*: 1990-2007); *Gender Check* incluiu tanto artistas masculinos como femininos, tal como *A Batalla dos Xéneros/Gender Battles*. Apesar destas diferenças, estas exposições partilham quatro aspetos cruciais. Primeiro, todas se apresentam como retrospetivas, distintas das muitas exposições de temática feminista ou das exposições de arte de mulheres que também ocorreram durante este período (tal como *It's Time For Action*, Zurique, 2006). Segundo, todas se cruzam com o pensamento feminista, quer seja pelo impulso curatorial explicitado como fundamento da exposição, e/ou por muita da arte selecionada, e/ou pelos produtos subsidiários da exposição, tais como os catálogos. Terceiro, ocorreram num momento em que a experiência vivida do movimento de mulheres se está a tornar um tema da História, e os seus impulsos disciplinadores estão a ser escritos e, no mundo da arte, até um certo ponto, canonizados. Quarto, todas ocuparam importantes museus e galerias nacionais ou regionais.

Assim, os museus nacionais ou regionais, instituições estruturalmente centrais para o mundo da arte, estão a apresentar as suas próprias definições daquilo que

consideram ser um movimento de arte feminista, ou aquilo que consideram que a arte contemporânea de autoria feminina é capaz de dizer. Deste modo, estão a determinar historicamente a categoria da 'Arte Feminista' ou da 'Arte de autoria Feminina'. À medida que fazem isto, oferecem ao visitante da exposição uma proposição sem problemas aparentes: o visitante vê o que lá está e não vê o que não está lá, e pode tornar-se difícil argumentar com a proposição que daí resulta. Eventualmente, a maior marca da exposição serão os catálogos, caso existam, disponíveis para compra ou para empréstimo através das redes de bibliotecas.

Cada uma das exposições tinha ainda um traço distintivo: a sua definição de, e a sua relação com, o feminismo. Embora as palavras "feminismo" ou "feminista" se encontrassem em muitos dos títulos das exposições, não há de todo um consenso curatorial sobre o que isto significa, sobre quão significante é, e sobre o quadrante onde se inscreve, na política, na cultura ou nas relações sociais. Há ainda menos consenso relativamente ao que pode constituir práticas artísticas feministas. Vou analisar algumas destas exposições, em particular através dos seus catálogos, de modo a sublinhar estas problemáticas.

Palavras Chave

Feminismo; Arte; Curadoria; Museus; Exposições

Finding Her Place: "Success", Space, and Subjectivity

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Finding Her Place: "Success", Space, and Subjectivity

Virginia Woolf's questions in *Three Guineas* "... do we wish to join that procession or don't we? On what terms shall we join that procession? Above all where is it leading us, the procession of educated men?" ([1938]1993:184) still reverberate. Indeed one of feminism's dominant narratives, in the past, present and, doubtless, into the future, has been about access to the spaces, institutions, social roles, and forms of employment from which women have been traditionally excluded, and about questioning the consequences of that access for femininity and feminism. In this essay, I want to consider a series of texts from Woolf to the present that are, in diverse ways, preoccupied with this issue. Their forms vary: Woolf's essays and fiction, Margaret Drabble's part-realist novel, part-memoir, *The Peppered Moth* ([2000]2001), David Lodge's academic satires, *Nice Work* ([1988]1989) and *Thinks* (2001), and Zadie Smith's experimental novel, *NW* (2012). Yet all are conscious of the social history of the UK, the changing political and economic discourses that have aided or restricted women's mobility and access, and the role that feminism has played in driving this agenda. And all have at their heart the figure of the woman struggling to find a place that is both personally fulfilling and socially acceptable.

My particular focus is on the inter-connection between space and subjectivity. Woolf's essays are, of course, a *locus classicus* for women's relation to various institutional and professional spaces, but I suggest that Woolf can be interestingly re-read through Drabble's Bessie Bawtry, a girl from a mining community who goes up to Newnham College, Cambridge, at just about the same time as Woolf is giving the lectures at Newnham (20 Oct. 1928) and Girton (26 Oct. 1928) that subsequently informed *A Room of One's Own* ([1929]1993). Drabble makes inter-textual play

between her novel and Woolf's essay. Does a working-class girl negotiate the spaces of Cambridge in quite the same way as does "the educated man's daughter" who is Woolf's concern in many of her essays, particularly *Three Guineas*? Robyn Penrose, Lodge's heroine in *Nice Work*, is trying to get into professional employment. When we first meet her she has been on temporary academic contracts for eight years. By the time of *Thinks*, she is a university professor and both Robyn's sense of self and the university as an institutional space have changed considerably. In 1986, the date of the events of *Nice Work*, we see the impact that business values and the education policies of the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher are having on the university sector and, in *Thinks*, some of the consequences. Robyn has a sense of confident entitlement unknown to Woolf's or Drabble's more hesitant characters though, by the end of *Thinks*, there are doubts about the price paid. It is a radical sense of doubt that is explored in the character of Natalie Blake in Smith's *NW*. As a city barrister, she has access to all the privileged spaces of the urban metropolis; as a human subject, she is unable to reconcile the spaces and identities of her past with those of the present. Nearly a century after Bessie's attempt at social mobility, *NW* illustrates how divisive class continues to be. The period of these texts covers a history of widening opportunities for women, the development of the post-war Welfare State, the rise of an ethic of meritocracy, equal opportunities legislation, the economic transformations of deregulation and neoliberalism, but the consequences for women's success, space, and subjectivity are always ambiguous.

"Through Different Eyes": From Virginia Woolf to Margaret Drabble

In Woolf's writings about the university, women's access is enacted in a geography of prohibited, available and disputed spaces.[1] The abundance of the men's colleges encourages a certain subjectivity, one of ease and largesse, a postprandial confidence in which all are comfortably content: "No need to hurry. No need to sparkle. No need to be anybody but oneself.

[1] For a useful survey of Woolf's varied spaces see Snaith and Whitworth (2007).

We are all going to heaven and Vandyck is of the company...." (*Room*:10). At the women's college, "We are all *probably* going to heaven, and Vandyck is, we *hope*, to meet us round the next corner...." (16-7). The conditional "probably" and the aspirational "hope" indicate the nature of women's subjectivity — uncertain, earnest, at best, ironic. Institutions, particular buildings such as libraries or chapels, processions, patches of grass are all impossible for women. Admonished by the College Beadle for walking on the grass, Woolf's narrator in *A Room of One's Own* thinks "he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path" (5). The very syntax suggests a *pas de deux* as Beadle and woman dodge back and forth, vying for space. College men have no equivalent tentativeness. For example, as Carol Christ has pointed out, Jacob in *Jacob's Room* walks confidently through the College, past chapel, hall and library; he possesses the space (Kukil, 2005:6). There is a synthesis between the dominance of the institution and the dominance of the person. At the sound of his footsteps, "the old stone echoed with magisterial authority" ([1922]1992:59).[2]

If women cannot get access to the male institutions, Woolf recognizes the creative and political potential for women of a separatist space — the room, the Outsiders' Society, the women's college, the "female space" of Bloomsbury, as Juliet Dusinberre (1997) describes it. In the chapter excised from *Jacob's Room* that became the short story, "A Woman's College from Outside", Angela Williams, we are told, "was at Newnham for the purpose of earning her living" ([1926]1991:145).[3] That material imperative is forgotten for one night in the enclosed, desiring space of the women's college. The narration moves the reader from the outside, to the inside, to the room, to the intimacy of Angela's bed as darkness, laughter, mist, and vapour envelop the college. But these utopian, feminine spaces are scarce and short-lived. The story ends with "the world of course, and the morning coming" and Angela's cry "as if in pain" (148).

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[2] Of related interest are Kate Flint's comments on women's relation to space in her Introduction to *Jacob's Room*. See pp. xxiii-xxiv.

[3] "A Woman's College from Outside" appeared first in the *Atalanta's Garland* by the Edinburgh University Women's Union (Nov., 1926). It was anthologised in Dick (1991).

More frequently, Woolf's narrative position is neither firmly inside nor happily outside, but one of careful negotiation. With wariness and caution, she explores the possibilities of those spaces that are both proximate to and separate from institutions of power. Her narrator in *A Room of One's Own* certainly wants to get into the library, but Woolf suggests that a sensuous bodily engagement outside the college also fosters the mind. Hence, it is on the river bank, in the ambience of the college but not within its jurisdiction, close to the feminised willows with "their hair about their shoulders" (4-5) that Woolf's narrator begins to think. Moving on from her dispute with the Beadle, she again finds a productive position. Within the college walls but protected by a "miraculous glass cabinet through which no sound could penetrate" (6), she has a sense of bodily self-sufficiency and intellectual freedom. In *Three Guineas*, she thinks about the bridges of Oxford and Cambridge. The bridge can furnish both access and separation. Women may choose to cross the bridge or remain on the other side. It also offers a vantage point from which men and women "see the same world (but) we see it through different eyes" (133). Though Woolf despises the war, we could understand the bridge as part of a quasi-military plan. It can, if necessary, be defended from incursion; women may block the bridge or raise the drawbridge in a tactical albeit temporary separatism. These examples are all geographical locations but equally fruitful, as Rachel Bowlby has shown, is the textual space, "[d]oodling in the margins" (1997: 33). The subject Woolf constructs is shrewd and strategic, though it is taxing to be endlessly alert to potential affronts, as indicated by the troubling parenthesis, "unless one trespassed on the turf again" (*Room* 6). Thus, those moments of dissolving subjectivity, such as within the women's college, are all the more attractive and sustaining.

The important "difference of view" that Margaret Drabble offers in *The Peppered Moth* is not one of gender but of class.[4] Bessie Bawtry goes up to Newnham College in the 1920s. At school, her progressive English teacher had encouraged her to read the modernists including Woolf and at university she reads *Mrs Dalloway*. Indeed, one can almost imagine that

[4] This phrase features in Woolf's essay on George Eliot. It is central to Mary Jacobus' comments on the difference of women's writing. See Jacobus (1986).

Bessie attended Woolf's lecture at Newnham.[5] Drabble approaches *A Room of One's Own* through the eyes of the respectable, skilled working-class and, in so doing, space and subjectivity are differently configured. Both Bessie and Woolf's narrator notice the College's red brick and fine windows and Bessie certainly enjoys the fact that "[t]he room was all her own" (*Moth* 110). However, there are notable differences between Bessie's experience and the perspective of Woolf's narrator. Bessie was not the product of the girls' public schools or private tutoring but of Breaseborough Secondary School, and she does not have an inheritance of £500 a year, as Woolf's narrator advises. The combination of a State Scholarship and a County Major Scholarship from the West Riding County Council has given her £190 a year; to this she adds a College Exhibition. Drabble's precise tabulation of sources and amounts of funding indicate how crucial they are. For those without family money, a patchwork of scholarships, grants and loans have to be pieced together from universities, schools, local authorities, professional bodies, charities. The process is beyond most students. No wonder Bessie is constantly anxious.[6]

Bessie too has to confront authority figures "like a guardian angel barring the way" (*Room* 7) but, for her, the barrier is not a male Beadle or a male librarian but Miss Wadsworth, a local benefactress, and Miss Strachey, Newnham's Principal, who intimidate her and who "rose before her like angry angels to bar the way" (*Moth* 101). Bessie does not mind the thin soup and the poor food generally, but Woolf's comment — "coal-miners doubtless were sitting down to less" (16) — suggests again the difference of Bessie's position. Bessie was neither a coalminer's daughter, nor "the educated man's daughter." Rather, she was the daughter of an electrical engineer at the local pit, the daughter of skilled labour on the edge of the lower middle class. Bessie's maiden aunts are small shop keepers and dress-makers; the fact that her childhood home did not front straight

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[5] For fascinating accounts by female undergraduates who did, indeed, attend Woolf's lectures, see Phillips (ed.) (1979); and Raine (1975), pp. 21-3 in which she describes Woolf's visit to Girton.

[6] For a fuller sense of the position of UK students and the differences of class and funding, see Dyhouse (2006), Ch. 1 "Going to University in England between the Wars: Access, Funding and Social Class."

onto the pavement was an important distinction. Bessie does get her degree. Cambridge had begun to grant women the title of degree in 1921 though it was not until 1948 that they became full members of the University. Yet, unlike the peppered moth, she is not a triumph of evolutionary biology. Suffering from unspecified illnesses, with "a yearning towards inertia, failure, self-pity, collapse" (103), she is unable to "mutate" and adapt to a new environment and returns reluctantly to Breaseborough to teach at her old school and to live at home.

Despite being clever, Bessie's class position, her limited social capital, and her emotional defensiveness in no way prepare her for Cambridge. Her story is emblematic. In the fiction of the scholarship girl where access to education or the professions involves upward mobility, there is always a perilous opposition between "home" and "away."[7] Woolf characterizes such an opposition in *Three Guineas*. She sees women in a position of double jeopardy. On one side is "the private house with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy;" women, she says, are "like slaves in a harem." On the other side is "the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed;" here women would be endlessly circling "the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property." Their only option is to "plunge off the bridge into the river" (199).[8] On this occasion, the spatial metaphor of the bridge is a launching pad to destruction. In the fiction of upward mobility, though, the opposition of "home" and "away" implies a change of class status. If Bessie is to have a more fulfilled life, she has to move geographically, socially, temperamentally. The encounter with new people and places is wanted, educative, but stressful. Woolf's response to the university and the public world, generally, might be cautious or calculating, but she is negotiating with a known environment. Her father, husband, brothers, nephew, and male friends were all university — largely, Cambridge — men. When Woolf gives her lectures at Newnham and

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[7] For an exploration of this opposition in the figure of the post-war female student, see Eagleton (forthcoming).

[8] See Pawlowski (2007) for a discussion of *Three Guineas* which not only explores the metaphors of veiling, harem etc. but which brings together geographical, textual, and intertextual understandings of space in this essay.

Girton Colleges, she is also in the orbit of women she knows. For example, her cousin, Katherine Stephen, had been the previous Principal at Newnham; the frightening Pernel Strachey, the current Principal, was a long-standing personal and family friend. Woolf considers exclusion and marginalization but, in many ways, her social and cultural capital is already fully integrated and her inherited wealth a salve. For women of Woolf's class, the relation is lateral. Women are disadvantaged, but between "home" and "away" there is always a dialogue of social contacts, cultural links, and economic comfort.[9]

For Bessie and her class, the relation is hierarchical. A return to "home" is a sign of decline, failure, the loss of all opportunity. As Drabble writes, "[i]t was a defeat, though nobody dared to say so" (128). In a rare account from the period, notably entitled "I Didn't Like Newnham," K. A. Rees, a working-class girl from London, describes the awkwardness of her position, her inability to adjust to the quiet respectability, the well-meaning but ignorant comments, her own lack of social etiquette. She left Cambridge with little prospect of getting the kind of job she needed: "I became a shop-girl — a graduate trainee it was called" (Phillips 1979: 178). Even if the university experience is successful, the two spaces can never be comfortably reconciled. The depth of that gulf is revealed in a remarkable passage where Drabble imagines Bessie's mother, Ellen, coming to Newnham to rescue Bessie during one of her collapses. Ellen is a shadowy presence in the corridors alongside the ghosts of women classical scholars and mathematicians. Drabble recognizes the qualities of these women; they are "gallant," and "pioneers," and full of "courage." But Ellen also hears "a faint dying snigger." The passage moves by association from Ellen to "the slut [who] scrubs the steps" to "the damp souls of housemaids" to "the black beetles scuttle" to Bessie who might have heard the comment, "They let the scum of the earth in here now" (120). Drabble posits here a class distinction which is visceral; the dominant emotions are disgust, on the one hand, humiliation, on the other.

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[9] NB Jacobus' position differs from mine. She sees this difference as without benefit for the middle-class woman; she "experiences not only exclusion but an internalized split" (1986: 38).

"Top Girls"? From Robyn Penrose to Natalie Blake

Bessie might have remembered Miss Kilman in *Mrs Dalloway* telling Elizabeth Dalloway that "all professions are open to women of your generation" ([1925]1992:170-1) and, perhaps, Woolf's audience for the lecture that became "Professions for Women" always remembered her description of them as "women practising for the first time in history I know not how many different professions" ([1942]1979:63). In truth, such optimism was largely rhetorical and the social, political, and legal history of the twentieth century testifies to the on-going battle for women to gain access. Lodge's Robyn Penrose is middle class and of the post-war generation. She has enjoyed the benefits of the Welfare State and the culture of meritocracy that enabled her to get a Cambridge doctorate in the late 1970s. Though Christopher Brooke (1993:527) has pointed out the scarcity of female postgraduates at Cambridge (only 14.4% as late as 1969), women's access to university and the professions had increased in the 1970s, and the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 provided a legal structure. Rather wearyingly for Robyn, her father frequently remarks that people thought she had been named after the Robbins Report (1963), a report commissioned by the British Government which ushered in an expansion in Higher Education provision and, specifically, more opportunities for women.

Robyn's upward mobility is clear. From a difficult professional start she has achieved the position of Professor of Communication and Cultural Studies at Walsall University. In *Thinks* we see her giving the H.H. Crosbie Memorial Lecture at the University of Gloucester. Robyn's lecture is on subjectivity. It is both theoretically and politically "correct" but constructed upon a series of equivalences and analogies. Helen Reed, temporary lecturer in creative writing at the University, notes:

> As far as I could follow it the general argument was that the Subject... is a Bad Thing, that there is some kind of equivalence between the privileging of the ego in classical psychoanalysis, the fetishization of formal correctness in traditional grammar, the exploitation and oppression of subject races by colonialism, and the idea of a literary canon: they are all repressive and tyrannical and phallocentric and have to be deconstructed... (225).

Obviously, this is Lodge having a bit of insider fun at the expense of critical theory, but he is also pointing to the political and ethical dimensions of theory, how a casual slipping between different fields and formations is, on the one hand, suspect logic and, on the other, can disguise real differences of value. This is nowhere more clear than when Charles, Robyn's on-off lover, gives up his lectureship in comparative literature to become an investment banker on the grounds that he was "simply changing one semiotic system for another" (*Nice Work* 313). Lodge always satirizes the dangerously neat self-sufficiency of theory, its tendency to resolve too easily the messiness of life. For Robyn, the body is merely an assemblage of sensations and appetites and the mind stays in charge. Thus she keeps at bay the unpredictability, the obligations, and the deepest affects of desire. As a result, desire virtually disappears or is reduced to a kind of management problem. Robyn and Charles are in happy agreement on this issue; they like nothing more than discussing sex theoretically but are not much interested in actually having it. And why should they if desire is seen as more textual than sexual, if desire is merely "a play of signifiers, an infinite deferment and displacement of anticipated pleasure which the brute coupling of the signifieds temporarily interrupted" (*Nice Work* 56-7).

Helen also notices how Robyn's progressive and radical theory is at odds with her professional practice. She observes that Robyn "employed... management jargon with the same smooth competence as she had displayed in literary theory" (*Thinks* 226) and she thinks that Robyn probably controls her staff "like an old-fashioned factory boss" (226). Robyn has become a kind of female, academic version of Vic Wilcox, the factory manager she shadowed in *Nice Work*. In an article written in 1989, Lodge comments that Vic would probably feel quite at home in the contemporary university as a "privatised service industry," and Robyn would be aghast (1989: 4). In fact, by the time Lodge came to write *Thinks*, he had significantly transformed the Robyn character, and he is specific about the historical moment. Robyn gives her lecture on 7 April 1997, just three weeks before Tony Blair's landslide victory heralded the start of New Labour. But the awkward consequences of success and the vulnerability of that confidence is hinted at in Robyn's character. We learn in *Thinks* that she has recently become a single mother and it is uncertain how maternity is to fit into her high-achieving role.

Across the two novels we can trace the movement of the university from an ivory-tower, humanist ideal (duly satirized by Lodge) into one where learning is linked to a neoliberal politics and economics, mediated through new forms of managerialism. In the person of Robyn, we can trace the move from a radical, feminist, oppositional subject to the creation of the female, neoliberal subject. Robyn proves herself to be a successful "peppered moth." As Mark Olssen and Michael Peters have indicated, the university of the millennium is marked by the "commodification of teaching and research and the various ways in which universities meet the new performative criteria, both locally and globally, in the emphasis on measurable outputs" (2005:316).[10] Thus, as Helen discerns in Robyn's language, she will be familiar with monitoring, appraisal, performance targets, line-management chains of accountability, development plans, budgets etc. While one of the jokes of *Nice Work* is the inability of Philip Swallow, Robyn's Head of Department, to understand any managerial processes — he has particular problems with the meaning of "virement" — Robyn in *Thinks* is an adept manager. She will see the encroaching market pressures on what one teaches, how and when, or what is seen as a legitimate and fundable research subject. She may wonder how literature is going to fare in debates about "the knowledge economy," or "knowledge capitalism," or knowledge as an "economic resource." In her role as Professor, the Robyn of 1997 is both feminist and the agent of the new managerialism. She might "talk feminism" in her lecture; it is less sure that she is "living feminism" in her work practices.

Robyn could be viewed as the "big sister" of the new female subject who emerged around the time of the millennium. Anita Harris refers to this figure as the "future girl" and the "can-do girl" (2004), Angela McRobbie as one of the "top girls" (2009). Work by, for example, Lisa Duggan (2003), Hester Eisenstein (2005), and Nancy Fraser (2009) has discussed what Eisenstein calls "a complex interaction" (495) or Fraser a "disturbing convergence" (97) between feminism and new forms of capitalism. They explore at a macro level how feminism's concern with

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[10] For further critiques of the neoliberal university, see Brooks and MacKinnon (eds) (2001) and Collini (2012).

women's rights, employment opportunities, and women's importance in the public sphere has unwittingly facilitated neoliberalism. As Eisenstein comments: "the success of the U.S. women's rights movement has become central to the selling of capitalism to the third world.... The conventional wisdom links democracy, the free market, and the emancipation of women" (509). Similarly, at home, as women come into the labour market, as the two-income family becomes the norm, neoliberalism dismantles welfare provision, and equality politics becomes perfectly manageable within a discourse of "human resources" and "diversity." McRobbie and Harris suggest that the figure of the young woman is central in this process. Highly educated and highly employable, these young women are, McRobbie argues, "subjects of capacity" (72), reshaped to "fit with new or emerging (neoliberalised) social and economic arrangements" (57) just as Harris suggests the "can-do girl" is the ideal late modern subject, one who is "flexible, individualized, resilient, self-driven and self-made" (16).

The idea of the self-made subject is critically explored in Smith's *NW*. At the start of the novel, Leah Hanwell, lying in a hammock in her garden, hears on the radio the line "I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me" (3). Impressed, she looks to note it down but a pencil on shiny magazine paper is not effective and she makes a series of abortive attempts:

> I am the sole
> I am the sole author...

A few lines later:

> I am the
> The sole...

And later again:

> I am the sole. The sole. The sole (3)

As the text moves from attempted note-taking to a different register, the reader starts to think of "the sole" and "the soul", and that this claim to neoliberal self-making might not be supported by the book. Indeed, the line's repetition at various stages of the novel confirms that suspicion. Self-authoring is not the only mantra. *NW* is full of metaphors, slogans, and wise maxims about social mobility and self-improvement. Michel,

Leah's husband, has the immigrant's determination to get on and succeed, "[c]limbing that ladder" (25). Posh-boy, Tom Mercer, plaintively "wants to have the illusion that one is making one's own life, out of one's own resources" (116). Felix Cooper leaves his drug-dealing past and tells himself, in a New-Agey way, "[y]ou must shake yourself free of the negative" (142). At the milk round Natalie Blake attends in her final year at university, the drinks can she holds exhorts her to "Claim Your Future" (187).[11] "Choice" is the ruling precept. Natalie consoles herself with the kind of axiom you could find on a fridge magnet: "You *choose* your friends, you don't choose your family" (187). But then, thinking about her plans to go into the law, she recalls that "friends" "know the difference between solicitors and barristers, and the best place to apply, and the likelihood of being accepted, and the names of the relevant scholarships and bursaries" (187). The evidence of the novel, then, is that what the dominant ideology likes to think of as a commendable neoliberal project of self-making and trickle-down benefits is, in fact, a savagely selective and divisive process which produces social and psychic damage. Astute Natalie is well-aware how her "choices" are actually part of a determined, necessary, and largely conscious amassing of social and cultural capital.

Natalie is the "top girl" *par excellence*. Originally called Keisha (she renamed herself when starting at university), Natalie is Black British, working class, brought up on a council estate, educated at an inner-city comprehensive, and she becomes a commercial barrister, married to a privately wealthy banker, with two children and a large Victorian house on the edge of a London park. The Natalie part of the novel, describing her life from the age of four until she leaves the marital home, is written in 185 short sections, anything between a single line and a couple of pages. Responding to questions from Cressida Leyshon in *The New Yorker*, Smith explains using this form as a way of conveying Natalie's sense of time as progress towards success (Leyshon 2012). Elsewhere, Smith has commented on her attraction to "controlled little gasps of prose" (Smith

[11] "Milk round" is the term used in the UK to describe the process of companies, services etc. visiting universities to recruit students about to graduate.

2001), a kind of writing where every word is precise and carefully selected. As the chapter develops, the abbreviated responses might signify also the increased fracturing of Natalie's psyche as it becomes impossible for her to hold together past and present. Those from the past see her as a sham, superior, self-interested, and self-absorbed. Shar, the addict and scam-artist, who went to school with Natalie and Leah, remembers her as, "Up herself. Coconut. Thought she was all that" (9). Her school-friend, Layla, thinks Natalie is, "Showing off. False. Fake. Signalling to the boys in the audience, or whatever" (245). Her jilted boyfriend, Rodney, writes to her, "... you talk about following your heart, but weird how your heart always seems to know which side your bread is buttered" (188). As Zygmunt Bauman comments, in this period of "liquid times," social relations become "temporary stratagems that need to be suspended or terminated the moment their benefits have been used up" (2007:3).

For Natalie this pursuit of the self as "top girl" leads only to the loss of the self. She feels full of "inconsistencies" (55), that she is "indistinct to herself" (236), that "her own shadow was identical to all the rest" (239), that she had become a "paradox" (264). Natalie believes she has neither inner authenticity nor any honest way of relating to the world. It has all become a drag performance:

> Daughter drag. Sister drag. Mother drag. Wife drag. Court drag. Rich drag. Poor drag. British drag. Jamaican drag. Each required a different wardrobe. But when considering these various attitudes she struggled to think what would be the most authentic, or perhaps the least inauthentic. (245)

If everything is part of the self-making, then everything must be opportunistic or calculation. When her husband-to-be, Frank, tells her that his family will finance her pupillage, Natalie hoped to respond with tears but found that "her face was dry, her mind strangely occupied" (199). Natalie, it seems, is in danger of losing her "soul."

Natalie's identity is both formed and threatened by the spaces in which she finds herself. Juggling phones and websites, she is familiar with Manuel Castells' "space of flows." Her passing interest in "the Kashmiri border dispute, at least as far as it related to importing stereos into India through Dubai on behalf of her giant Japanese electronics manufacturing client" (234) is an example of that globalized movement of capital, labour,

knowledge, and social relations. Similarly, the transnationalism of Smith's characters is an aspect of her London novels, both *NW* and *White Teeth* (2000). Hence, in *NW*, Natalie is of Jamaican origin, Leah's mother, Pauline, is Irish, Michel is French-African, Frank is of Trinidadian and Italian descent, Shah is second generation from the Indian sub-continent and so on. Laura Moss's exploration of how characters in *White Teeth* negotiate the "politics of everyday hybridity" (2003) applies also to *NW*.[12] Hybridity is not without issues but it has become ordinary. It is the "space of places" that is more problematic for Natalie.[13] *NW* has a highly local sense of place, a known environment, and long-established, face-to-face relations. The book title and several chapter titles refer to postal districts, largely in the area of North West London where Smith herself grew up. The words on the book cover are composed of maps. Characters go on journeys through space by tube, bus and on foot. As the chapter titles make clear, the long walk taken by Natalie and Nathan, another school friend and now a pimp and drug-dealer, cuts across a swathe of North East London, from Willesden through Hampstead to Hornsey Road Bridge. It is this bridge, known for its suicides, where Natalie stands and then turns back, that features on the cover of the book.

As in Woolf, the crucial spatial problem is that of proximity and distance but, for Natalie and Leah, the question is not how close they are to the place of patriarchal learning but how close they are to their place of origin. Thus, once again, the meanings of "home" and "away" have to be assessed. Cultural and urban geographers have explored the demarcating of space in the neoliberal metropolis. The middle class will live in the exclusive suburb, or the gated community, or a high-security condominium. Equally characteristic of London, though, are spaces where the gentrified areas are but a street away from the down-market; the "top girl" or the "can-do girl" is round the corner from, as Harris calls her, the "at-risk girl" (2004), or "the midriff", as Rosalind Gill terms the "supersexualized"

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[12] On the transnationalism of *White Teeth*, see also Cuder-Domínguez (2008).

[13] Castells develops these terms throughout his work. For a useful survey, see Castells (2003) and Stalder (2006).

heterosexual woman (2009).[14] Cities can be places of alienation, anomie, strangers. For Natalie and Leah, on the other hand, the city is too intimate, too full of family, old neighbours, and friends. Living in the area where they grew up, they experience uncomfortable daily confrontations with places and people from an earlier time. These confrontations signify the possible resurrection of a subjectivity one thought one had abandoned, the fear of slippage back, or the realisation one has not actually come very far. Moreover, for Natalie and Leah, proximity and distance express in geographical terms the stress in their relationship. Leah had gone to university but has been in a low-grade administrative job for the past six years. At the start of the novel, when she looks out from her "nice" council flat she can see the window of the council flat on the estate where she was born. As Leah comments:

> I was born just there.
> From there to here, a journey longer than it looks. (11-12)

Natalie, Leah points out, lives "just over there, in the posh bit, on the park" (9). Later we learn that "Leah passes the old estate every day on the walk to the corner shop. She can see it from her backyard. Nat lives just far enough to avoid it" (55).

What is notable is the depth and finesse of the distinctions. Seemingly inconsequential terms like "estate," "nice," "on the park," or measurements of distance — what is in sight or not in sight — carry the narrative of social mobility and class distinction. Leah is not a "top girl". Despite her degree, she has barely moved, geographically or socially. Natalie's social move is dramatic but her geographical space is still close to that of home and childhood. Because she is in a gentrified enclave, her return to home does not indicate failure in the way it does for Bessie and the scholarship girls. Nevertheless, crossing borders of space, class, and

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[14] Also relevant here is "the NEET", a government-initiated acronym for young people who are not in education, employment or training, and "the chav" which refers dismissively to both female and male working-class youth, usually white. Natalie's sister, Cheryl, with three children and no husband, could be included in Tyler's "chav mums" (2008). See also James (2011) for a critique of "the chav" as a "demonization of the working class."

affiliation challenges Natalie's subjectivity on a daily basis. Like the scholarship girls of an earlier generation, it is impossible to reconcile legacy and aspiration. Does she belong "here" or "there"? Is she Keisha or Natalie?

Conclusion: Joining the Procession

Feminism has been adapted by Robyn to suit her own interests; for Natalie it seems to have little relevance at all. *NW* raises issues relevant to feminism — about maternity, or sisterhood, or bisexuality, for example — but the single gesture towards a possible feminist politics is in a section called "Role Models." Theodora Lewis-Lane QC, OBE, PhD, of Jamaican origin, offers Natalie advice on being Black, female, and in the legal profession. The advice is to "avoid ghetto work" (209) and to "turn yourself down" (210). If Theodora was responding to the questions from Woolf at the start of this essay, one suspects her answers would be: join the procession; employ any terms that work; it will lead to financial and status security. Though Natalie is unimpressed at the time, she subsequently does what Theodora suggests. McRobbie believes current feminism is "instrumentalised... brought forward and claimed by Western governments, as a signal to the rest of the world that this is a key part of what freedom now means" (1) but, in so doing, it is de-radicalized and becomes a degraded feminism. We can see in the "top girls" how "empowerment," or "choice," or "achievement," or "entitlement" substitutes for a radical critique, and how the continuing demands of feminism are smothered beneath a discourse of "common sense," or absorbed into management diversity programmes. The post-war project of class mobility and meritocracy, with its painful, dedicated remoulding of the self, has stymied, while the neoliberal expectation of a rapid, networked, flexible, project-orientated self-making has, in the post-crash period of austerity, proved illusory. Robyn has become one of the 19.8% of professors in the UK who are female. She can be grateful her subject is not mathematics; in 2013 just 6% of maths professors in the UK are female.[15] At the same time, if Robyn and Natalie hope to become the

[15] See the report of the Equality Challenge Unit (2011) and the report commissioned by the Women in Mathematics Committee of the London Mathematical Society (2013).

ultimate "top girls", they need to have reservoirs of patience. At present only 14.2% of UK University Vice-Chancellors are female and 15.6% of High Court Judges. If Natalie joined the Court of Appeal, she would be the only woman there. As is made clear in the 2013 report of the Counting Women in group, from which these statistics come, "at the current rate of progress, a child born today will be drawing her pension before she has any chance of being equally represented in the Parliament of her country" (2013:5). It is a very winding and slow-moving procession.

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Abstract

This essay is stimulated by Virginia Woolf's questions in *Three Guineas* concerning women joining the procession of successful men. It explores what "success" might mean for women at different moments, from the period of first-wave feminism, to the post-war culture of meritocracy, to the current moment of neoliberal crisis. Considering texts by Woolf, Margaret Drabble, David Lodge, and Zadie Smith, the essay focuses on concepts of space and subjectivity. In pursuing "success," the figure of the woman negotiates disputed spaces, oppositions between "home" and "away," proximity and distance, or, as Manuel Castells says, "the space of flows" and the "space of places" (2003). The subjectivity produced is sometimes desiring, occasionally confident, but, overwhelmingly, anxious and conflicted. Even the "top girls" (McRobbie, 2009) cannot retain an assured sense of self. The struggle to relate success, space and subjectivity is, the essay suggests, one of feminism's dominant and continuing narratives.

Keywords

Women's "Success"; Space; Subjectivity; Meritocracy; Neoliberalism

Resumo

Este ensaio teve como estímulo as três perguntas que Virgina Woolf coloca em *Three Guineas* sobre a possibilidade de as mulheres se juntaram à procissão dos homens de sucesso. Explora o significado que o "sucesso" pode adquirir para as mulheres em diferentes momentos, desde o período da primeira vaga feminista, à cultura da meritocracia do pós-guerra e ao atual momento de crise neoliberal. Considerando textos de Woolf, Margaret Drabble, David Lodge e Zadie Smith, o ensaio centra-se em conceitos de espaço e de subjetividade. Ao perseguir o "sucesso", a figura da mulher negoceia espaços disputados, oposições entre "casa" e "exterior", proximidade e distância, ou, como diz Manuel Castells, entre "o espaço dos fluxos" e "o espaço dos lugares" (2003). A subjetividade produzida

é por vezes desejosa, ocasionalmente confiante, mas, sobretudo, ansiosa e contraditória. Nem sequer as "top girls" (McRobbie, 2009) conseguem reter um sentido de identidade confiante. A luta para relatar o sucesso, o espaço e a subjetividade é, como o ensaio sugere, uma das narrativas feministas predominantes e recorrentes.

Palavras Chave

Sucesso das Mulheres; Espaço; Subjetividade; Meritocracia; Neoliberalismo

The Porn Wars Redux

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The Porn Wars Redux

Even the most casual stroll through the Times Square district of New York City today reveals an utterly transformed landscape from a mere thirty-five years ago. Though still the city's transportation hub — the major bus terminal, train station, and crossroads of every major subway line — the area no longer feels dark and dangerous. Gone are the sex shops, porn theatres, erotic emporia that once lined the near-deserted, dimly lit streets. Today the area's bright with neon and floodlights. Children line up with their parents to see matinees of Disney musicals in theatres where once men came for clandestine encounters. The area is clean, safe, sanitized.

All of which serves as a topographic metaphor for the shifting landscape of pornography in America. On the one hand, it has become so ubiquitous, so mainstream, that it hardly needs a separate geographic space; who needs Times Square when you own such a large percentage of virtual real estate in cyberspace? On the other hand, it may be that the eroticization of misogyny has become so commonplace, such a permanent fixture in the cultural landscape, that pornography has become banal.

But it was here, in Times Square that the feminist "porn wars" were first launched in the mid-1970s, as feminist activists came to see in pornography the eroticization of women's subordination. And today we take the transmogrification of Times Square as a metaphor for the shifting pornographic landscape — both its mainstreaming and its banality. And we ask two questions: first, what impact has this shift had on the feminist conversation about pornography? And second, how have the terms of debate in those "sex wars" of the 1970s themselves shifted as a new generation of feminist researchers and activists has come of age? In short, we are interested in the mutual influencing of the world of pornography

and feminist debates about it. In what ways has feminist debate itself been transformed by these cultural shifts?

We argue that the answer is "not enough". In many respects the feminist conversation about pornography, heating up again in the 2000s after a more than decade long hiatus, rehearses the earlier debates as if the intervening years had never happened at all. The different sides talk past each other, and neither really listens much to the other.

This essay constitutes a dialogue among three sociologists, two younger feminist women and an older profeminist man, about the how the current debate is being framed, and what is lost in the conversation. We will try to bridge various divides among and between feminists on the nature of pornography, its relationship to women's subordination, violence, and its implication in the construction of sexuality. Specifically, we point to three types of new voices — moderate anti-porn feminism, intersectional positions, and an "insider" perspective — that offer the possibility for fruitful conversation, an opportunity to move past the polarized thinking that has dominated debates about pornography historically.

Debates about Pornography: Then and Now

The 1980s were an explosive time for feminism. The issue of pornography divided feminists: some, known as anti-pornography feminists, opposed pornography, while others, "pro-sex" or "anti-censorship" feminists, feared censorship, specifically the repression of sexualities that would result from such a course of action. On the issue of pornography, feminists could not agree. In fact, their disagreement became a feud known as the "sex wars."

The roots of anti-pornography feminism began in the late 1970s with feminist activism against the use of sexualized, sometimes violent, imagery of women in the media. Organizations like Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) opposed the increase of eroticized media images, which they argued contributed to a culture that devalued and even dehumanized women. For some, activism against violence in eroticism in the media turned to a concern about the harmful effects of pornography. Other groups, such as Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM) and eventually Women Against Pornography (WAP),

emerged to take on what they saw as problematic portrayals of women in pornography. Even in their infancy, members of these organizations were divided, as the emphasis on pornography over the concerns about mainstream media troubled some members, particularly of WAVAW and WAVPM (Bronstein 2011).

Eventually, WAP became the leading national organization for the anti-pornography movement with many feminists, academics and activists, lending their support (Bronstein 2011). Their public framing was simple: pornography is violence against women. In some cases, the actual pornography itself records actual violence against women; these cases are documentaries, not fantasies. Porn also causes violence against women, planting in men's fantasies the sorts of images they consume in pornography. (This argument gave rise to Robin Morgan's famous line, "Porn is the theory, rape is the practice".) Finally, the constant consumption of these images would lead men to become inured to the stories of real violence against women, as they would be unable to distinguish between pornographic fantasy and lived torture and domination (see Dworkin 1979[1991] and MacKinnon 1984 for examples of this argument). Importantly, Bronstein (2011) explains that most anti-pornography feminists actually thought that the relationship between pornography and violence was much more complex than this message, reduced for ease and understanding in the media. Yet, this nuance gets lost in the history of anti-porn feminism (Grant 2006; Bronstein 2011).

From the start, many anti-pornography feminists, particularly members of WAP, showed enthusiasm for government regulation of pornography and later put their support towards the civil ordinance in Minneapolis by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon (Dworkin and MacKinnon 1988). In order to push these political aspirations forward, anti-pornography feminists made problematic alliances with religious conservatives. These ordinances, which would allow women to take pornographers to court if they could prove that they were directly harmed by the images portrayed in pornography, eventually failed. The appeal for government regulation and the unlikely alliance with religious conservatives ostracized many, both from within and outside the feminist community, even leading some to conclude that the message of anti-pornography feminism was co-opted by popular politics (McGlynn 2010).

Alongside the anti-pornography movement was a growing opposition. In the late 1970s, the lesbian S/M organization, Samois, took issue with WAVPM, claiming that the anti-pornography critique of S/M further oppressed them as minorities (Rubin 2004). Their work was an influential and early opposition to anti-pornography feminism and their battle with WAVPM was one of the first explosive moments of the sex wars.

Pro-sex feminists had a number of concerns with the claims of anti-pornography feminists. Increasingly, anti-pornography feminists conflated all sexuality with violence, leaving no space for positive representations of women's sexualities. Rather than seeing women solely as victims of pornography, pro-sex feminists believed that pornography could play an important role in women's sexuality (Commella and Queen 2008). Moreover, they feared that censorship could lead to the repression of sexualities, including those of sexual minorities (Duggan and Hunter 1995). These fears would come true after Canada implemented anti-pornography legislation. Rather than restricting violent pornography, many of the erotic materials of sexual minorities were censored (Segal 2004).

Many women in pornography, like Annie Sprinkle (see Sprinkle 1998) and Candida Royalle (see Royalle 2000), expressed optimism from within the industry. Activist organizations, like the Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force, campaigned against censorship of pornography. A particularly explosive moment occurred in 1982 when pro-sex feminist, Carole Vance, and other faculty members at Barnard College organized the Barnard Conference. This conference, and the culminating book, *Pleasure and Danger* (Vance 1989), was intended to allow feminists to have an open conversation about pornography and sexuality, a conversation that took seriously both the pleasures and dangers of sexuality (Comella and Queen 2008; Basiliere 2009). Anti-pornography feminists were purposefully left out of the conference, a decision which increased the gap between the two sides. The Barnard organizers, though, defended their decision to leave the anti-porn feminists out, explaining that the anti-pornography position already dominated the public debate (Wilson 1983; Bronstein 2011).

At the heart of both sides, we see two important and valuable feminist concerns. Feminism is about both protecting women's rights and about empowering women. These two goals were evident in the polarized sex wars, yet the concerns of both sides are often mischaracterized.

Anti-pornography feminists sought to protect women by eliminating problematic portrayals in pornography. As a result, they were characterized as anti-sex. This was simply not true; they wanted sexuality divorced from gender inequality (Bronstein 2011).[1] Pro-sex feminists wanted to embrace women's empowerment through sexuality. Yet, many thought they endorsed an "anything goes" philosophy, even though they were also concerned with the dangers around women's sexuality (Vance 1989).

The debates about pornography fizzled in the late 1980s and early 1990s for two reasons. First, the older combatants grew weary of such strained alliances and inter-feminist enmities, especially as the Reagan and Bush years witnessed a concerted political effort to curtail women's rights. Second, a new generation of feminist women began to emerge, a so-called "Third Wave" of younger feminists, feminist of color, and lesbians inherited a debate that felt stale, old, and remarkably heterosexual and white. And it probably didn't hurt that the veritable boomlet in experimental social psychology to measure the effects of pornography failed to produce any reliable empirical foundation for the claims made by anti-porn activists (see, for example, Donnerstein et al., 1985).

The current resurgence in feminist anti-porn activism has, unfortunately, paid little heed to these shifts; indeed, the terms of debate currently on offer from the anti-porn activists are almost exactly the same as they were nearly half a century ago. As far as they're concerned, it's more pervasive, more violent, and therefore more worrisome. In such an unnecessarily polarized environment, younger feminists often experience pressure to take a side — to position oneself for or against pornography (Purcell 2009). For example, Christine Stark and Rebecca Whisnant (2004) pick up where Dworkin and MacKinnon left off in *Not for Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography*, as does Gail Dines (2010b) who, in a recent presentation, described Stop Porn Culture as an attempt to reinvigorate anti-porn feminism. For Dines, Whisnant, and Robert Jensen (2004, 2009), the main movers behind this organization, the anti-porn

[1] Even Andrea Dworkin made room for sex postpatriarchy, where a wide range of sexual practices would flourish (Grant 2006).

feminists of the 1980s lost, and, as a result, the situation has gotten even more out of control. Yet, their work seeks to reinvigorate a specific form of anti-pornography feminism, as advanced by WAP and theorists like MacKinnon and Dworkin, that may not represent all anti-porn feminists (see Eaton 2007).

Additionally, we see a number of feminist writers whose arguments mirror those of the pro-sex feminists of the 1980s. In addition to some of the same voices from the 1980s, we also see more women from the industry making feminist claims about the production and use of pornography. Where industry women's voices had previously been incorporated merely as evidence for one feminist argument or another, we now see a broader, active engagement by female porn actors and pornographers in the feminist debate. We have even seen a new genre, called feminist pornography, emerge as these women take control in parts of the industry (Milne 2005, Lust 2010). A new group of feminists, Third Wave feminists, have emerged since the 1980's; they take sexuality and the diversity of women's experiences of sexual expression, including pornography, as a central concern (Snyder 2008, Crawford 2010). Though the Third Wave may set themselves in opposition to some Second Wave feminists, their emphasis on women's positive sexual exploration is very much related to the arguments of Second Wave pro-sex feminists (Snyder 2008).

With this proliferation of new feminist works on pornography, we are entering what has previously been dangerous territory. What is different and exciting now is that feminism itself has opened up since the 1980s — queer and multicultural feminisms, critical race feminisms, postcolonial feminisms have all fought for recognition by mainstream (white, middle-class, heterosexual) feminism. Although much of the new debate regurgitates the old discourse, these newly recognized feminist thinkers have much to offer. In our paper, we highlight these emerging voices to see what insights are being marginalized as the mainstream feminist discourse on pornography recreates the old framework. Specifically, we outline three feminist positions — a moderate anti-pornography feminism, an intersectional approach to pornography, and feminist pornographers' views of pornography — that have the potential to escape the current, limited framework and bridge new conversations on a contentious, yet important, issue.

New Ways to Bridge the Divide

A Moderate Anti-Porn Position: Leaving Space for Inegalitarian and Egalitarian Pornography

If there is one thing that we can probably all agree on about pornography, it is that there is a lot of it. Even those who avoid the politics of this shift recognize that new technologies — the internet, digital media sharing, and cell phone apps — have expanded the potential for encountering porn in one's daily life. The numbers tell a clear story (Ropelato, http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics-pg4.html 2010) — porn is huge, and growing.

Some anti-pornography researchers make the "pornification" of American society — the increasingly pornographic spectacle that characterizes mainstream American consumer culture — their starting point. The imagery of porn has infiltrated mainstream media, resulting in sexualized advertising (Rosewarne 2009), products (Gale 2009; Stop Porn Culture), music videos and other types of popular culture (Dines 2010a, 2010b), much of it reaching younger and younger audiences (Reist 2009). Of great concern to these authors is the increased availability and easy accessibility of pornography (Whisnant 2004; Paul 2005; Freeman 2007; Gale 2009; Reist 2009; Dines 2010a, 2010b). Gone are the days of visiting sex shops to watch sexually explicit videos. Now, pornography is sold in convenience stores (Gale 2009), and the Internet allows consumers to access pornography from virtually anywhere. For some of the dominant anti-porn voices, the move from magazines and videos to 68 million pornographic search queries on the Internet every single day, as well as the increasingly violent genres — gonzo, double and triple penetration, bukkake, etc. — have increased the sense of urgency.

Though these anti-porn authors rightly point out that porn is growing and reaching more of us, they paint an extreme and thus distorted picture. Yes, porn is growing, and that means that hardcore, even violent, pornography is growing. But, pornography is not monolithic. Some porn is big-budget, others produced by individual couples at home; some targets mainstream heterosexual audiences, primarily men, and others aims at niche audiences; some is made by men, some by women. To try to theorize

this multi-headed hydra with a single viewpoint is to declare the elephant to be a tree because one can only see its leg.

A.W. Eaton offers a moderate model for evaluating pornographies. Eaton (2007), a self-proclaimed "sensible anti-porn feminist", argues that, rather than homogenizing the world of pornography, feminists should focus their critiques on what she calls inegalitarian pornography — porn that eroticizes extreme power imbalances between the sexes — as one of many possible causes of violence against women. She calls for more complexity when interpreting pornography. Anti-pornography feminists need to recognize the diverse world of pornography, including non-heterosexual porn, and to admit that even seemingly inegalitarian pornographies may include egalitarian representations of intimacy.

What we like about Eaton's model is that it refuses a universal understanding of porn's meaning. She does not assume the meaning of any particular film, or even scene. Instead, she takes seriously the insights of audience reception theory, which tells us that different audiences interpret images differently, and would have us analyze the actual content of a film for its depiction of gender relations and sexuality. She also doesn't assume that meaning inheres in any particular act. For example, women's submission to men might, to some anti-porn feminists, appear as an act of violence; for Eaton, submission is only violence if it happens in an inegalitarian context (676).

Eaton offers us a new starting point for thinking about pornography. She is open, and clearly appreciates typical anti-porn feminist claims about the dangers of sexual representations for real women. However, she is also open to the nuanced position made by some pro-sex feminists about the potential for positive depictions of sexuality. Hers is an empirical approach, one that demands actual engagement with the material in porn, rather than a simple ideological position about pornography. We do not expect that all feminists will (or should) agree with Eaton's definition of inegalitarian pornography but we do expect that all feminists engage with the possibility of "good" porn. New research, empirical and theoretical, on what actually constitutes "good" or "bad" porn (and anything in between) could provide the foundation for a more nuanced conversation about pornography, one that resists the monolithic, simplistic framings of the old debate.

Intersectional Points of View: Refusing to Universalize Women's Experiences

Early mainstream feminist approaches to pornography emerged from a very particular context — specifically, the feminists who engaged in this debate were primarily white, middle-class, heterosexual, Western women (Bronstein 2011). This necessarily limited the terms. Within the past three decades intersectionality has gained traction throughout feminism. Some feminists have incorporated race and class into their analyses of pornography, but in practice, we do not see a true commitment to the spirit of intersectionality, which refuses a unified position on the status of women. For the most part, the story about pornography maintains that women, as a group, are either harmed or helped by porn. As feminists committed to an intersectional approach, we should refuse claims that women constitute a unified group. Taking an intersectional approach, how can we bring this fact — that differences matter — into a conversation about pornography? It isn't just by looking at the content of films. We also need to look at the different positions of the people involved, be they actors, audiences, producers, etc.

One author, Mirelle Miller-Young, brings this point home. By looking at a particular genre of pornography, she can make claims about the history of black women's representation, the repressive consequences, and their struggles for agency. She historicizes the aesthetics that seem to govern these representations and, in doing so, moves us away from an either/or approach to understanding women's, and in particular black women's, relationship to pornography. She presents the opportunity to see women not as either harmed or helped, but as sometimes harmed, sometimes helped, and sometimes both at the same time.

For example, in her analysis of hip-hop pornography, she finds that black women are constrained by racist standards of beauty, but are able to negotiate their positions in empowering ways. As she explains, "Not a simple story of domination or liberation, hard-core hip-hop practitioners and black pornography workers both challenge and are constituted by the racialized, gendered, and sexualized terms of representation in pornography and hip-hop, as they negotiate ways to strategically *re-present* themselves as subjects of fetishistic desire" (emphasis in original, Miller-Young 2007:

266). Detailed and complicated analyses like Miller-Young's offer a corrective to a polarized debate about women's position in the industry.

From this approach, we can see the importance of thinking intersectionally. In a simplistic understanding of porn's relationship to women, *all* women are part of a universal marginalized group, though some may be further oppressed based on their race or class status. Instead, Miller-Young opens up a space for agency and even empowerment in seemingly oppressive situations. Miller-Young reminds us that we cannot make universal claims, that we need to contextualize the experiences of women in order to understand how racial representations might simultaneously repress and empower women of color.

Intersectionality is not just a tool for understanding marginalization, but also dominance. The emphasis on intersectionality leaves space to understand how privileged statuses, like whiteness, wealth, and heterosexuality, impact one's ability to negotiate the pornography industry (on whiteness, see Mahawatte 2004; Penley 2004; Williams 2005; Magnet 2007; Miller-Young 2010). While we need to recognize that women of color can be empowered in the pornography industry, we also need to remember that whiteness, and specifically white supremacy, structures the porn industry, forcing black women to conform to white standards of beauty and limiting their job opportunities to ghettoized genres (Miller-Young 2010). An analysis of whiteness puts the focus on the dominant group and the ways in which it maintains its privilege.

Miller-Young and others elaborate the problems and potentialities of racial representation in pornography. While pornography is obviously about gender and sexuality, it is always already about race, too. The recognition of intersectional axes of oppression can only further a discussion about pornography. As we move forward in our thinking about pornography, we need to take intersectionality seriously, remembering that neither men nor women constitute homogenous groups.

An "Insider" Perspective: Listening to Women's Voices

The previous sections have laid out two very important points: we cannot make universal claims about the content of pornography and we cannot generalize about its effects on the category called "women". The content

of pornography varies from scene to scene and film to film; and "women" vary just as dramatically depending on the other identity categories they inhabit. In this final section, we suggest that the way to embrace this non-universalist approach to pornography is to take women's voices and experiences as our starting point for theorizing.

The starting point for feminism has always been, at least ostensibly, women's experiences. But somewhere along the line, real women — the women who interact with pornography in their daily lives, as actors and consumers — became pawns in an abstracted, academic game. Their stories of victimization or liberation were simplified and caricatured to act as evidence for one side or another. Jenna Jameson is a good example. For those who support pornography as a potential avenue for women's empowerment, Jameson is an example of how to take control in a male-dominated industry (see Calvert and Richards 2006); for those who detest the industry, Jameson is a victim who has been brainwashed to accept continued abuse, and to encourage others to seek out that same abuse (Dines and Jensen 2005). When Jameson tells her own story, it is more complicated than either of these readings, full of contradiction and negotiation, some ups and some downs.

Recently we've also witnessed a burgeoning literature written by women in the industry, women who struggle to make a meaningful space for themselves. Some choose to break away from the mainstream pornographic enterprise to produce women's and feminist pornographies. Others stay within the mainstream and push to make it more inclusive and safer. Certainly not a unified voice, these women make perfectly clear what the previous sections have argued — our experiences are not the same, our differences matter.

Beginning with the voices of these industry insiders can be instructive. It offers a corrective to the stereotype of the drug-addicted, sexually abused young woman forced into a life of sex work where the abuse and coercion continue, a caricature emerging from the anti-porn rhetoric. Many of the authors describe their participation as consensual, sometimes even pleasurable (Milne 2005; Strano 2005; Taormino 2005; Almodovar 2006; Reed 2006; Lust 2010). The authors look practically at the realities on set, arguing that they play an active role in production. They are not simply used and abused, but are informed participants with the ability to

draw their own lines and create their own boundaries (Milne 2005; Strano 2005; Taormino 2005; Lewis 2006; Lust 2010; Tarrant 2010). In Tarrant's (2010) interview with April Flores, a BBW (big beautiful women) adult actress, Flores explains, "Each performer is responsible for their own physical health. A performer always has a choice of not doing something they are not comfortable with. All of my peers are doing work they feel proud of and that enhances and expands their own sexuality" (2). However, they do not discount the possibility that women may enter the industry because they lack economic alternatives. Well aware of the social constraints that govern many women's lives, Almodovar (2006) and Reed (2006) contend that the solution is not to restrict their options further by censoring pornography. Instead, women should be given the opportunity to decide how they use their bodies, as well as to change the sex industry from within. Others suggest that bending the rules isn't always enough. For these authors, starting their own companies and websites gave them better opportunities (see Milne 2005 for examples).

Interestingly, these women articulate another set of constraints women face in an inegalitarian society: constrained gender roles. Pornography can transgress limiting gender roles by presenting women's sexual subjectivity in a positive way (Strano 2005; Taormino 2005; Williams 2005; Andrews 2006; Martin 2007; Lust 2010). According to the women in the industry, this is particularly important in a society in which women's overt sexuality is discouraged, and there is little room for open discourse about the transgression of traditional gendered sexual roles. Erika Lust (2010) suggests that porn can help overcome these issues: "Porn can help us spice up our fantasies and discover tastes we never even knew we had. And porn can be an instrument of education and liberation for women who are still struggling with shame, guilt, and sexual repression. We can see that desires and fantasies we thought were abnormal are actually quite common. As women, we have to give ourselves permission to explore our sexuality" (26; see also Taormino 2005).

Several anti-pornography writers argue that porn is one of the main sources of sex education for boys. They contend that boys' and men's sexuality (their fantasies, desires, and embodied pleasures) is shaped by these images (Dines 2010a). The solution: eradication. But the industry writers suggest a different solution: proliferation. Of course porn shapes

our fantasies. So let us shape pornography in ways that produce more egalitarian desires. According to Lust (2010),

> "[The mainstream producers] are unhip, anti-feminist, anti-intellectual, and unenlightened…There's no racial or socio-cultural diversity among these producers and directors and because they're all alike, they all think alike. They're mostly middle aged straight white guys…It just stands to reason that a homogenous group is going to create a homogenous product" (15).

For Lust and others, more diversity behind the camera means more diversity of images, more potential for imagery that Eaton might call "egalitarian". For example, Taormino (2005) describes her experience making an anal sex education video, where she set out to make the "ultimate feminist gang bang" (94). In the video, she gave detailed instruction to all participants and allowed everyone to set their own comfort levels. She filmed her interactions with other actors so that viewers could read the film critically. She lists several requirements for a feminist pornographic film (see also Lust 2010): no coercion; safety and respect on set; and the choice to determine what positions and sex toys are used. Feminist porn should teach, inspire, validate, arouse, empower. It should also counteract messages from society that sex is shameful. As far as sex education goes, this strikes us as a better option than what most of us ever get; not only does it demonstrate how to engage in safe sex practices, it puts mutuality, shared responsibility, and pleasure at the center of what sex itself can mean.

Still, sex work, like all work, is not free of problems. Many of the writers from the industry found their sexuality and their work stigmatized. Sarah Katherine Lewis (2006) provides us with a nuanced discussion of empowerment in sex work. While she worries about the commodification of intimacy and the patriarchal components of the industry, she also notes the many benefits of her experiences: she has gotten to meet amazing people, travel, and run her own business as a result of sex work. This is a common sentiment of these women — they point out flaws of the business which, like any job, has drawbacks, but ultimately they find financial independence and, at times, sexual empowerment through their work (Milne 2005; Taormino 2005; Lewis 2006; Reed 2006).

Though they might not put it in these terms, the industry writers are deeply committed to a social constructionist view of sexuality and gender. And their voices are beginning to make an impact. But we need more. The solutions offered by these authors are somewhat privileged. The option of working outside the mainstream is restricted to those women with the cultural and economic capital to start their own businesses. It is unclear, for example, if the women in the hip hop pornography described by Miller-Young have the same opportunities to recreate on set conditions or form new companies.

We also need more systematic analyses of the work these women produce. What exactly makes a feminist porn feminist? Taormino and others suggest certain occupational conditions, but much less is said about the content of the images they produce. We would love to see these women participate more publicly in a conversation about "inegalitarian" and "egalitarian" imagery, and how their images might contribute to the feminist project of gender/race/sexual/social equality.

Finally, we need to hear more from women viewers. Women are increasingly consuming pornography, especially mainstream pornography. Yet we have heard very little from them. In order to evaluate pornographies, we must take female viewers' experiences seriously. What kinds of pornography are they watching and why? With whom? How does pornography shape them, and what do they want to see?

The exception here is a set of interviews conducted by Karen Ciclitira. Ciclitira (2004) set out to interview women about their use and experience of pornography, and though she did not bring it up, the women consistently referred to the feminist debate, a debate they felt was alienating. They believed the anti-porn feminists overshadowed any opposition. Though they agreed that pornography can have sexist elements, they felt that the anti-porn/pro-censorship position made women feel guilty about their sexuality, especially if that sexuality includes pornography. Ciclitira's findings remind us that we need to talk to, not at, women. And we need to make a space for them to speak for themselves, without fear of judgment from feminist communities.

Finally, in addition to women's voices, we need to make room for men. Far from the monolithic dominance anti-porn feminists presume, men occupy a range of positions in and outside the industry and thus have

varied experiences with pornography. For example, gay Asian porn star "Brandon Lee" occupies a unique space in an industry shaped by ideals of whiteness and dominated by white men (Hoang, 2004). Lee breaks the mold of the stereotypically passive and effeminate Asian man in pornography. Sometimes, he is a passive bottom, but other times he is shown as an aggressive top. So what are the experiences of male porn actors, most of whom exist as nameless, low-paid bodies? And what of the amorphous "male consumer" about which we speak so frequently but know so little? How might the differences between men shape the experience of pornography, and might these differences point to new directions in the industry?

Conclusion

These questions, like all the questions we've raised, demand empirical investigation. They demand that we consider a wider variety of voices — including, but not limited to the anguished and sincere voices of white, middle aged and middle class heterosexual feminist women who are rightly agonized over the mistreatment of women in pornography. We must also include younger women, women of color, LGBT women, women who engage with the sex industry, whether as producers, actors, or as consumers. We need careful analyses of how images are created, and how they are consumed. We can no longer assume that "we" — some benighted few — can know how others will receive, interpret, and use those images in their own lives. Nor can we assume that just because "we" — some other, self-proclaimed sexually enlightened few — find such images unproblematic, that they simply *are* unproblematic. To say that meanings do not inhere in the images themselves cuts both ways; we need to find out how people receive and use them.

And this includes men. There are few reliable empirical studies of how men use pornography and how it informs their sexuality. The studies that do exist offer contradictory and inconclusive information. Just as all women are not alike, neither, also, are men. Differently situated men will receive and use pornographic images in different ways, only some of which may be "authorized".

More than careful empirical research, though, we believe that the feminist conversation about pornography must encompass a much wider

range of voices. At times, the debate seems a cacophonous shouting match between middle-aged, middle-class white heterosexual women, yelling in unison at a disorganized array of women of different races, classes, occupations, sexualities, and relationships with pornography. Because of their diversity, they often believe they needn't take the anti-porn position seriously. This is as serious a mistake as it is for the anti-porn feminists to assume that by examining images, they can speak about "women" and "men" as undifferentiated monolithic groups — arguing, as anti-porn feminist John Stoltenberg once quipped, "pornography tells lies about women, but it tells the truth about men".

We are not at all certain that pornography lies about women — because we simply don't know how differently situated women respond to it. Nor are we convinced that pornography tells *the* truth about men. It may tell a truth, and it may also tell some lies. Pornography is a vast array of images; women and men are equally diverse categories. Beginning to understand the varieties of the pornographic experience — the production, distribution, and consumption of images — is the necessary step to actually transform a shouting match into a conversation. It is both good social science, and good feminist politics.

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Abstract

Thirty-five years after the first salvos of what became known as the "Porn Wars" or the "Sex Wars" among feminists, we return to the scene of those first skirmishes. In many respects the feminist conversation about pornography, heating up again in the 2000s after a more than decade long hiatus, rehearses the earlier debates as if the intervening years had never happened at all. The different "sides" often talk past each other, and no one really listens to each other. This essay constitutes a dialogue among three sociologists, two younger feminist women and an older profeminist man, about the how the current debate is being framed, and what is lost in the conversation. We'll try to bridge various divides among and between feminists on the nature of pornography, its relationship to women's subordination, violence, and its implication in the construction of sexuality. Specifically, we point to three types of new voices — moderate anti-porn feminism, intersectional positions, and an "insider" perspective — that offer the possibility for fruitful conversation, an opportunity to move past the polarized thinking that has dominated debates about pornography historically.

Keywords

Pornography; Feminism; Social Justice; Intersectionality

Resumo

Trinta e seis anos depois das primeiras salvas daquilo que ficou conhecido entre as feministas como as "Guerras da Pornografia", voltamos à cena dessas primeiras escaramuças. Em muitos aspetos, a conversa feminista sobre pornografia, que aqueceu depois de 2000, após mais de uma década de um longo hiato, ensaia os debates anteriores como se os anos interpostos nunca tivessem ocorrido. As diferentes "fações" muitas vezes falam em surdina, e, na verdade, não se ouvem umas às outras. Este ensaio estabelece um diálogo entre três sociologistas — duas mulheres feministas mais novas e um homem feminista mais velho, sobre o modo como o atual debate vem sendo enquadrado e sobre aquilo que se perde na conversa.

Vamos tentar superar as divisões existentes entre as feministas sobre a natureza da pornografia, a sua relação com a subordinação das mulheres e a violência e as suas implicações na construção da sexualidade. Especificamente, sublinhamos três novos tipos de vozes — o feminismo moderamente anti-porno, as posições interseccionais e a perspetiva dos *insiders* — que oferecem a possibilidade de uma conversa frutífera, a oportunidade de ultrapassarmos o pensamento polarizado que historicamente tem dominado os debates sobre a pornografia.

Palavras Chave

Pornografia; Feminismo; Justiça Social; Interseccionalidade

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

NOTAS SOBRE OS COLABORADORES

Diana V. Almeida obtained a MA (2001) and a PhD (2007) in American Literature and Culture, at FLUL (Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon), where she teaches. She is currently developing a transdisciplinary post-doctoral project in Gender Studies that is founded by FCT (Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology) and connects poetry and photography. Integrated in this research framework, she has been implementing since 2009 a creative writing project at the Museum Collection Berardo. She is a full member of ULICES (University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies), where she has organized several international conferences. She edited *Women and the Arts: Dialogues in Female Creativity* (Peter Lang, 2013). She translated several authors, such as Eudora Welty, Dylan Thomas, and Edith Wharton. She is a practicing photographer (arodaemroda.blogspot.pt)

Claudia J. de Lima Costa teaches Literary Theory, Feminist Theories and Cultural Studies at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), in Florianpólis, Brazil, and is one of the co-editors of *Revista Estudos Feministas*, Brazil's premier feminist studies journal. She was a Visiting Professor at University of California, Santa Cruz and at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where she taught courses on feminist theories. She is the co-editor of *Translocalities/Translocalidades: Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Americas* (Duke University Press, forthcoming). She has published articles on the travels and translations of feminist theories, and is presently doing research on the feminist decolonial turn in Latin America.

Mary Eagleton was, formerly, Professor of Contemporary Women's Writing at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK and is a Fellow of the English Association. She has published extensively on twentieth and twenty-first

century women's writing, including *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction* (Palgrave, 2005) and essays on, among others, Doris Lessing, A.S. Byatt, Carol Shields, Margaret Atwood, Alice Walker, Diana Athill, Hilary Mantel and Emma Tennant. She is interested in feminist theory and feminist literary history. This is evident in, for example, her collection, *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory* (Blackwell, 2003), and chapters in Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (eds) *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Peter Boxall and Bryan Cheyette (eds) *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). The third, extended edition of her classic text, *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Wiley-Blackwell) was published in 2011. Currently, she is working with Emma Parker on the final volume in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1970-Present* (Palgrave). She is the founding Chair of the Contemporary Women's Writing Association (http://www.the-cwwa.org) and the founding co-editor, with Susan Stanford Friedman, of the Oxford University Press journal, *Contemporary Women's Writing* (http://cww.oxfordjournals.org). In 2009, the journal was awarded the prize for the Best New Journal from the Council of Editors of Learned Journals.

Sandra M. Gilbert, Professor Emerita at the University of California, Davis, Berkeley resident. Sandra M. Gilbert has published eight collections of poetry, most recently *Aftermath.* Among her prose books are the memoir *Wrongful Death*, the cultural study *Death's Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve;* and two essay collections, *On Burning Ground*, and *Rereading Women.* With Susan Gubar, she is coauthor of *The Madwoman in the Attic, No Man's Land* (three volumes) and coeditor of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women.* Her latest book, *The Culinary Imagination*, will appear in 2014, and she is currently working on an anthology of food writing. In 2013, Gilbert and Gubar were named winners of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Krista E. Hughes holds a PhD in Theological & Philosophical Studies from Drew University and is Assistant Professor of Theological Studies at Hanover College (Hanover, Indiana, USA). Her research occurs at the

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Amanda Kennedy is a PhD candidate at Stony Brook University (SUNY). Her BA is in women's studies and feminist science and technology studies from the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College of Florida Atlantic University. Her main areas of interest are race, gender, sexuality, and the body, issues she approaches from a critical race/postcolonial feminist perspective. Her dissertation focuses on the "intactivist" movement in the United States — through interviews and content analysis of organizational materials, she is exploring the gender dynamics of a movement aimed at ending male circumcision. She is also actively studying feminist engagements with pornography. She teaches courses on race/gender/sexuality, media and technology. She is a news blogger for Sociology Lens and has been a teaching assistant as well as managing editor for the *Men & Masculinities* journal.

Michael Kimmel is Distinguished University Professor of Sociology at Stony Brook University. He is the author of many books and articles, including *Manhood in America*, *The Gendered Society*, *Guyland*, and *Men Confront Pornography* (1990), the first anthology engaging men in the feminist debate, and empirical research on the impact of pornography on male sexuality. He is the editor of the scholarly journal *Men and Masculinities*, and a co-founder of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS).

Cheryl Llewellyn is a PhD candidate in Sociology at Stony Brook University. She received her BA in Sociology from Stonehill College and

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Anna Mercedes is Assistant Professor of Theology and Gender Studies at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University in central Minnesota, USA. She is the author of *Power For: Feminism and Christ's Self-Giving* (London: T&T Clark, 2011). She completed her doctoral work at Drew University with Catherine Keller. Her current research focuses on doctrines of sin and theories of difference. She has ongoing interest in dismantling the sexism and antisemitism of Christian churches. She enjoys writing and teaching, but also a kitchen warmed by fresh-baked bread, and the chaos and love of her young children.

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Professor Hilary Robinson is Dean of the School of Art and Design at Middlesex University. Having trained as a painter, she gained an MA in Cultural History at the Royal College of Art, and a PhD in feminist art theory at the University of Leeds. As well as writing numerous papers, she

has published *Feminism-Art-Theory 1968-2000: an anthology* (2001); *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: the politics of art by women* (2006); *Visibly Female: women and art today* (1987). She is currently working on a revised and updated edition of the *Feminism Art-Theory* anthology, and also on a history of the feminist art movement. In 2012 she curated 'Feminist And....' for the Mattress Factory Museum in Pittsburgh, PA, USA. While focused upon the intersection of feminist thinking with art, her interests include art criticism, performance art, and the impact of the arts and cultural industries on post-industrial cities. Prior to joining Middlesex, Hilary was Professor of Art Theory & Criticism and Dean of the College of Fine Arts at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University. Before moving to Pittsburgh to take up that position she was Head of School of Art and Design at the University of Ulster, where she was also Professor of the Politics of Art.