



Università degli studi di Napoli
"L'Orientale"

A feminist critique of knowledge production

edited by
Silvana Carotenuto,
Renata Jambrešić Kirin
and Sandra Prlenda

Materia Postcoloniale/Postcolonial Matters





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Editorial Introduction

Silvana Carotenuto, Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Sandra Prlenda

Promoting feminist critical voices from the (semi)periphery of knowledge production, this e-book does not aim at adding one more ‘critical turn’ to feminist thought, but it wants to evaluate the potentiality of feminist epistemology for emancipatory education and positive social change. In a world of radical sociopolitical and economic changes, it is becoming ever more urgent to explore structural relationships of power and knowledge from a feminist and transnational point of view. Women have long been excluded from academic and public life, which is why they are particularly sensitive to questions related to the production of knowledge/power, to strategies of empowerment and exclusion as well as to ways of connecting pedagogy, activism, artistic practices, and non-formal education. Women’s knowledge is an important resource not only for studying the dynamics of transnational processes but also for understanding neoliberal practices of discriminations, seclusions, dislocations, and the overall deterioration of social citizenship rights of vulnerable social groups. The limitations of the neoliberal economy and its cultural and sociopolitical values are affecting feminist principles and practices in a way that urgently needs to be interrogated and questioned. Namely, the dangerous drawback can come from within feminism itself, especially when it gets canonised, established within the academe and disenchanted.

This volume is a result of the close collaboration between Silvana Carotenuto from the University of Naples “L’Orientale” and Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Sandra Prlenda on behalf of the postgraduate course *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective* held regularly at the Dubrovnik Interuniversity Centre since 2007. Contributions included in this volume constitute a selection

of papers presented at the Dubrovnik course in 2012 and 2013. The libertarian tradition of Dubrovnik and the inspiring mixture of women's ideas, energies, dialogues and confrontations have brought to life an ad hoc "community of historically located subjects seeking for inter-connections in a non-ethnocentric and non-phallogocentric manner".¹ During the last few gatherings, the common interest of this one-week 'city of women' was to critically reflect upon the possible contributions of feminist, queer, postcolonial and Black theoretical thought to the current struggle for preserving humanities in its full breadth and critical capacity.

Namely, the neoliberal incentives of social Darwinism, political pragmatism, fragmentation and marketability of goal-oriented science are daily reducing the space for free research, social intervention, experimentation and the independent 'life of the mind'. The intersection of economic and neoconservative rationalities in academic discourses threatens the status of Women's Studies programs. The intellectual backlash has not spared the core or the (semi)periphery of the European continent where, due to the devastating effects of the North/South polarisation and debt economy, the material condition and the status of scholars are even more difficult. Besides, the strong neoconservative movement and the influence of the church in postsocialist societies are putting new demands on feminist scholars and activists. In such ungrateful external and internal circumstances – where (feminist) theorists are making additional efforts to catch up with the core of knowledge-production but also to resist the paternalistic integration into this core obsessed with scoring, measuring and ranking – the Dubrovnik IUC course represents a safe zone for encounters and for exchanges, the questioning and the affirmation of feminist positions.

Feminists from the European margin are moved there by the urge to act and re-think their peripheral position as a productive, flexible and transgressive epistemic zone that can stimulate new humanistic concepts and values, or the 'new pedagogy from below' (G. Ch. Spivak).² Women scholars and students from all over the world have been invited to the course *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective* in order to reflect on basic questions: are the experimental quality of knowledge and emancipatory

¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 69.

² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2012.

knowledge the only two ways of challenging deep-rooted power inequities within and outside the academe? Are the critiques of postcolonial reason and of neoliberal production of centers, (semi) peripheries and margins, still helpful to understand the ways in which the academic world and intellectual authority operate in a 'liquid society'? In an atmosphere of free thinking, vibrant discussion and mutual respect, these women intend to test and develop intellectual politics based on responsibility, justice and proximity to the other, as well as on the production of another knowledge, inscribing feminist po-ethics that affirms life in the face of all impossibilities. Despite many differences in disciplinary locations and research orientations, as well as in national educational traditions (from Finland to Spain, from Germany to Italy and Croatia), the authors included in the volume propose some challenging ways of en/acting the transversal politics of feminist production of knowledge.

The authors included in the first chapter of this volume start from epistemological and methodological questions on how to teach, to develop and to live feminist ethos inside and outside the neoliberal academe (**Part One**). The following three contributions discuss the theoretically and politically relevant conjuncture of feminism, minor transnationalism and literary studies (**Part Two**). The theme of the third chapter is how feminist literary critics confront the merits and disadvantages of historical postmodernism and national literary/art canons (**Part Three**). The last chapter reveals feminist concerns with re-writing gender sensitive histories based on new (non)archival materials, bold interpretations and counter-narratives (**Part Four**).

From UNESCO Humanistic Ideals to Antiracist Politics of Knowledge

Four contributions in the first chapter discuss the potentiality of feminist thought for the re-affirmation of emancipatory knowledge and critical consciousness in contemporary academia pervaded with the devastating consequences of "banking education".³ The options reflected in detail are the feminist agenda in non-formal educational methodology (K. Špiljak), feminist commitment to the decolonization of knowledge crossing academia/alternative education dichotomy (B. Kašić & S. Prlenda), the Black feminist theoretical contribution to another (transfeminist, migrant, politically subversive and sexually transgressive) knowledge (M.

³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York, 2005.

Gržinić) and, finally, an example of gender sensitive critique of UNESCO's program of intangible cultural heritage (N. Ceribašić).

Marina Gržinić discusses the urge for an antiracist politics of knowledge in order to resist "the normalizing processes of whiteness" with its structural racism and the act of erasure of (colonial) history at the heart of the political project of European unification and homogenization. She opposes universal Eurocentric knowledge through transfeminism and Black lesbian and feminist positions, as well psychoanalysis and contemporary activism, referring to the work of bell hooks, G. Kilomba, H. J. Spillers, B. Preciado and many other scholars. Following the critical works by B. Carr and Ph. Essed, Gržinić argues that "the gendered white bourgeois subject" of normalizing sociopolitical and legal discourses is made by processes of negation, exclusion and disfiguration of 'racialized/colonized subjects' whose access to the representational status of 'human subject' is fundamentally halted. She warns that notions of tolerance, multiculturalism and anti-racism, somewhat popular in the 1980s, have almost disappeared from recent political agendas. An elaborate argumentation is offered in order to exemplify how the modern regime of power that goes from Foucault through Deleuze, Derrida and Agamben, etc., is radicalised in current times of crisis in modes of control, austerity and debt, or even more by the distribution of debts, fear and fantasies misused in political discourses. Gržinić connects the process of racialization with a new global division of labour: "Capital got a myriad of names – cognitive, immaterial, and financial – but we can connect all of them with racialization". Namely, what could be named as a 'neocolonial matrix of power' is based on a control of labour that works hand in hand with racial formations and racial knowledge production.

While **Karmen Špiljak** justifies the need for non-formal feminist education and activism with the deep neoliberal structuring of politics, economics, legal institutions, culture and art, **Biljana Kašić** and **Sandra Prlenda** further discuss the anti-feminist and anti-secular climate in the postsocialist educational system concomitant with the consumerist turn in higher education and cognitive capitalism. Evaluating their own experiences of teaching inside and outside the academic system, both authors illustrate a harsh implication of the peculiar juncture of the neoliberal regime of knowledge and the religious old-new 'patronage' upon gender. The Croatian example reveals certain paradoxes – an increased interest by students in Women's Studies education vs. the lack of interest among academic authority to integrate the WS program within the academic curricula, not to mention the integration of alternative

education based on civil, peace, ecological and feminist agenda. The authors remind us how advocates of feminist and gender studies are easily caught and entangled in the web of conflicting interests and power plays within the academia that produce no sensible strategy of feminist and emancipatory education. As Špiljak argues, rather than empowering the oppressed groups, institutional academic knowledge is rather than not used to increase oppression and further marginalise the already disadvantaged.

Naila Ceribašić offers a gender sensitive critique of UNESCO's program on intangible cultural heritage following the few feminist anthropologists (S. M. Okin, V. Moghadam, M. Bagheritari) who have pointed out its 'blindness' for a frequent opposition between the idea of gender equality and the reality of traditional cultures. It has already been observed that the Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage bears ambiguities, as regards its ultimate outcomes and its capacity to accommodate various identity positions and social groupings. Ceribašić's refined analyses suggest that politics of intervention, be it in the name of the most humanistic ideals, such as the case with UNESCO's example, cannot solve tensions between affirmation and antidiscrimination, human and cultural rights, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, intellectual property and common good, speech in the name of pluralizing and work in essentializing of culture. So it seems that the main – humanistic yet realistic – effect of UNESCO's program is in producing the local appropriate for global understanding and supporting the tourist expediency of national heritage production in the context of managed multiculturalism of difference. Focusing on the example of the Bistritsa Babi, a well-known group of elderly women singers from Bistritsa in western Bulgaria, Ceribašić tries to illustrate the still unresolved ambiguity of whether heritage programs are basically empowering for women or if they confine women within traditional, usually basically patriarchal social arrangements. Following these discussions, she describes the gender structure of the Croatian register of intangible heritage and comments on UNESCO's latest emphasis given to the gender aspect of safeguarding as an attempt to overcome tensions between human and cultural rights.

Three Key Words in Transnational Feminism: Ethics, Politics and Critique

The three contributions in this chapter have been presented within a joint panel at the IUC course *Feminist critique of knowledge production* (Dubrovnik, May 27-31, 2013) entitled "Three key words

in transnational feminism: ethics, politics and critique". They are part of a larger research in transnational women's literature that Vita Fortunati, Jasmina Lukić, Sonia Fernández Hoyos and Adelina Sánchez Espinosa have currently undertaken. The three articles, each in its own way, address some of the theoretically and politically relevant issues relating feminism, transnationalism and literary studies. Thus Fortunati speaks of the relevance of ethical and political questions in current feminist thinking; Lukić examines the main claims of minor transnationalism and its applicability in the post-Yugoslav context, while Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa move the debate to the domain of academic knowledge production.

The contribution by **Vita Fortunati** discusses how feminist literary criticism and theory have embraced 'the narrative of responsibility' in a transnational context following Levinas' ethics. The feminist credo on 'situated knowledge' has been complemented by attention to ethics and the sphere of affection. This turn is connected with an urge to escape from ethnocentric logics and to encourage a dialogue among different feminisms and women's trajectories. A new ethics does not mean being focused on our self and imposing our own thoughts to others, but to perform a willingness to listen to the other (woman) in order to understand her positions, constraints, hopes and fears. This ideal is connected with an attempt to create 'the third space' of interaction (described by Azade Seyan) or 'the third ear' (C. Ch. Spivak) and to work on a new set of expectations about language medium, translation, negotiation and the proximity of understanding.

Jasmina Lukić's article deals with the concept of minor transnationalism as it was introduced by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih. One of the main claims of Lionnet and Shih is that the traditional binary model of 'center-periphery' should be replaced by a more complex model of 'minor transnationalism', which introduces multiple spatialities and temporalities. This model allows for a better understanding of creative interventions across national boundaries between 'minoritized cultures'. The perspective allows for a more refined approach to complexities on a local level, where mutual influences, between geographically or historically close regions, can be of much higher importance than influences from some assumed 'centre'. At the same time, it points to the relevance of local topics and local knowledges as opposed to the dominance of imported theories and interpretations.

The contribution by **Fernández Hoyos** and **Sánchez Espinosa** offers a critique of the traditional practices of research and teaching

and new forms of knowledge that can be generated in higher education through transnational postgraduate collaboration. A case in point is the GEMMA program Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's Studies and Gender, taught simultaneously at seven universities within Europe with the collaboration of eight other universities worldwide. The authors focus on some specific examples of how new feminist transdisciplinary and transnational practices are gradually producing new forms of knowledge.

Women's Assault on the Production of (Mainstream) Knowledge

In the third chapter, feminist critique gives itself the form of an 'assault' on the production of knowledge. The texts here gathered and presented, know that feminism is undergoing a confrontation with historical postmodernism, characterised by the insights of the 'weak thought'. They know the fatal effects of the neoliberal economy on feminism. They understand how dangerous it can be for feminism to be canonised. They are aware that producing a feminist critique proves a question of life and death, thus vindicating the right of female difference to existence against all negation and negativity. In such knowledge, the aim of these essays is to implement/supplement feminist thinking. They oppose and resist the contemporary policies of cultural and institutional, that is, economic, equivalences. They question the actual politics of canonization. They develop (a term used in its technical sense, marking a gradual process, a skill or a strategy) a feminist 'po-ethics' that affirms life in the face of all impossibilities.

Implementation, resistance, questioning, and affirmation – the trait of the cultural interest, literary passion, political responsibility and vital engagement of these papers is the production of another knowledge, inscribing its performance within the present conditions of the Humanities, through a different valence of poetry and its metaphors, thanks to *tekhnè* and writing. Theatre, the tale, poetic figurations, and photography are the arts and the genres envisioned and proposed by the feminist critique in action here, each of them tackling and establishing a peculiar link with the scope of this publication. It is the claiming back, from male colonization, of the participatory instance of a female 'tragic and sublime'. It follows the quest – in the form of 'allegories of new feminist reading' – for the 'unknowable' as that which literature produces and dissipates, against any interest, debt, credit or value. It then becomes the desire which, somehow enlarging the already spacious range of the previous essay, interrogates all framing, even when it claims itself as revolutionary or alternative,

of women's 'ironic insubordination' to patriarchy. In conclusion, it is the difference of 'life', one's own life, the life of women, to be exposed to the traces of a violent past and to the difficult instances of the present, always and already able to imagine, envision, and share the chance of the future-to-come.

The relationship between identity and alterity is the privileged focus of attention, marking the question around which these papers construct their specific legacies, the specificity of their scholarships, the knowledge of other feminists who come on the stage of thinking in order to debate, contradict, deviate or support the lens of the critique they expose and propose. The range of references is so vast, and the game of interlacing voices so compelling, that we can only briefly present these engaged *oeuvres* of feminist critique of knowledge production.

Natka Badurina thinks that the 'tragic turn' has been underestimated by contemporary feminism. The return to the 'tragic' and the emergence of the 'sublime' in critical thought have constituted some of the radical efforts enacted by modernity to unsettle the convictions of Enlightenment in the power of Reason, Man, and Totalization, proving its historical demise and the invention of epistemic difference. The philosophy of Nietzsche, Adorno, Horkeimer, Arendt, Foucault, and Lyotard, to mention some of the authors, embody the emergence in modern and postmodern times of the critical thinking that vindicates the potential of Dionysian pessimism, the end of the 'grand recits', and the necessity of new forms of sociality, democracy and common good. In particular, the tragic and sublime stage hosts the encounter with the other, who cannot be possessed or controlled, but invented and experienced in collaborative sharing, generosity in living, care and co-existence. Why does feminism react so negatively to this genre of fruitful virtuality? Badurina acknowledges that, in canonical renderings of classical tragedies, women have often been confronted with the predominance of male values; still, she insists the tragic must be de-colonised, and claimed back, so as to be able, as it is, to suit feminist contemporary declination. Her reference goes to the work of Croatian theatre scholar Nataša Govedić, who claims the therapeutic effects of drama and, specifically, of tragedy, both for individuals and for communities. In her view, tragedy shows the play of direct forms of democracy, the translation of participation into a generalised politics of care, the precious participatory exposure to the actual lack of hope, witnessing one's pain and the pain of the other, thus countersigning our social and cultural indifference...

Along a similar direction of thought, still in singularity (the invocation of the 'tragic turn' turns here into a firm opposition to the 'cognitive turn'), **Lada Čale Feldman** and **Ana Tomljenović** start their critical journey into contemporary times with a provocative assumption: if we – who is 'we'? the question of 'alliance' is central – are experiencing new forms of academic levelling, a sort of intellectual colonialism where everything turns into financial profits, and funds reach only the (English-speaking) centres of geographical, cultural and institutional power, then the so-called intellectual minorities, the vernacular languages, and the academic peripheries must configure themselves as subalterns who 'do not speak'. This happens not because they are unable to utter their desires, or because they accept the silencing hierarchical over-ruling of international and global financial and cultural powers, but because they defiantly refuse to be part of all economy. Their search is differently directed towards the 'uneconomic', that leaves its material traces in literature, proposing to gather around its 'subversive' force, sharing sexual difference across the variety of subaltern positions and invoking 'other' tactical and strategic (readings of) collaborations. Monique Wittig, in her theoretical essay (also in the 10th anniversary of her death), teaches this to Feldman and Tomljenović; more centrally, it is Elizabeth Bronfen, in reading the enigma of *The Birthmark* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, who offers them the critical space where, in radical difference from any cognitive turn, they read the material inscription of what cannot be appropriated, defined or possessed by any logic: the traces of the unconscious, its radical alterity to any established knowledge, its radicalism in escaping translation into rational 'revelation/interpretation'. In neo-colonial times, we 'others' gather around writing and language, supporting the Humanities in their declining conditions, specifically reading literature 'otherwise', in that the literary 'as if' gives strength to uneconomic desires, disseminated roots and different singularities, to the voices silently opposing the actual system of equivalences, profits and credits. In feminist writing, through imagination and creation, what 'glows' for the 'others' to read, learn and know, adamantly resists those logics of reading, learning and knowing that are aligned to the principles and values of contemporary neo-liberal economies.

What resists in **Brigita Miloš's** contribution is indeed the refusal to comply with any mundane feminist theory, even in its radical outpourings. Miloš questions if, for instance, we all feel represented by the appeal to 'unsubordinated sisterhood' claimed by Deleuzian

strands of contemporary nomadic feminism. In truth, the question is: who defines insubordination? What 'abstraction' does the definition require, in its parameters of 'feminist acceptance'? Is the superimposition from above – from critical theories that seem to know little of everyday life – valid for a configuration of practical and radical engagement? Is the label of 'insubordination' – and the cultural norms of feminist behaviour it implies – respectful of the other, approaching her with care, intimacy and love? Miloš's writing starts by evoking the statue of a sea urchin created by the Croatian artist Sanja Iveković, which figures as a trophy or a symbolic part of the award delivered by the Erste Foundation to achievements in social integration. In truth, the spikes of the sea creature materialise the gravity and the difficulties in handling/approaching the other, her alterity, her life and art, with attention and respect. Within the Deleuzian legacy, it is not Rosi Braidotti who inspires such a care, but Elizabeth Grosz who states, through her notion of 'freedom in desire', that it is not the abstraction of a gathering of 'undutiful daughters' that we can create the instances of a true insubordinate feminism. To show what might counteract abstraction, somehow practising what she states and interrogates, Miloš chooses the figuration of the (m)other, when it is used and abused in radical works of national poetry. Two poems by the revolutionary Janko Polić Kamov draw female alterity in the shapes of a Gypsy and of a mother obsessed by commodities. In both cases, female alterity is subsumed to the interests of the anarchist revolution; constituted as a 'helper' or a 'companion' in male fight, woman is here defined by the heteronormative necessities of sexual reproduction, already and only identified as an inspiring 'muse' or a commoditised 'other'. If it is ironic that these patriarchal traits appear in 'innovative poetry', acclaimed for its freedom of spirit and experimentation, for Miloš, the irony that we must practice, as feminists who do not fear the difficulties of our innovations, is the one that underscores a all mundane exploitation of women, wherever this danger comes from – well-established theoretical feminisms, or national revolutionary and liberating hymns!

If poetry is essential for the unbound lucidity of critical feminism, in a similar fashion, 'photography' can be central to the female envisioning of an existential interaction with alterity: **Silvana Carotenuto** reads the relation between the mother of *écriture féminine*, Hélène Cixous, and the art and the *tekhnè* of photography. Indeed, the poetics of the French-Algerian thinker gathers most of the elements discussed in the essays presented here: it impresses and develops the tragic turn; it favours the

secret of the unknowable; it partakes the need to be careful with alterity. The oeuvres identified by Carotenuto as the instances where Cixous' writing reflects (on) the photographic apparatus, are *Albums and Legends*, the novel *So Close*, and *Index Cixous*, a work done in collaboration with the American photographer Roni Horn. These texts develop Cixous' autobiography placing it always at the edge of alterity. Initially it is the encounter with the photos of her diasporic past – a 'tragic' past, exposed to historical wars, personal deaths, colonial apartheid, and generalised misogyny – that gradually reflects (on) her decision to become a writer. It then becomes the photo of her mother – Eve, the mother of humanity, our mother, Cixous's mother – that she considers as the 'masterpiece' announcing its productive affects: after taking the photo of her mother, the camera follows Cixous in her return 'so close' to the mother-country Algeria, during the painful visit to the grave of her father. In its witnessing, the eye of the camera reveals itself to be finite – it cannot 'take' the pains and the tears disseminated in the traumatic journey; on the other hand, it can reflect (on) the always-renovating beginning of her *oeuvre*. In *Index Cixous*, Cixous' face exposes to the camera of the other, the friend Horn, opening the 'index' of her visage to the 'singular plural' of art, that gathers the uniqueness of her gaze with the plurality of the images metonymically exposed. Will the other arrive to watch her indexed face? Will she respond to the singular/plural 'glow' in Cixous' eyes? If we foresaw this event, it would not be an 'event'; what we know is that we need – tragically, strategically, ironically – to offer absolute hospitality to its eventuality. The task of our future *oeuvres* is to produce 'other' forms of knowledge for the other's coming, if and when it happens, which will, perhaps, one day, open up the chance for us to unknot the secrets of our own alterity. This encounter will be a celebration of life, nothing else but the survival of life ...

Archiving Other Knowledges

The act of 'archiving' is crucial in feminist knowledge production. Information on women's lives and experiences have historically been so scarce that the search for materials in existing archives and the creation of new records has become one of the most important tools in feminist historiography. The three texts included in this section are based on their presentations at the Dubrovnik course in 2012, which was devoted to *Women's Heritage* as the starting point for examining the concepts and practices of feminist memory, history and archiving.

Tuula Juvonen outlines the main problems in queer archival activism. Starting from the critique of the historical practice of patriarchy, which denies women and queers the control over the creation and the interpretation of past records, she calls for the queering of the archive through several types of action that redress the prevalent conditions of silence and the absence of traces of lesbian and non-heteronormative relations. Referring to valuable examples of emerging queered archives, in New York or in Tampere, Juvonen discusses the politics of collecting queer documents and the issue of their access, especially in relation to the lesbian and queer communities that both produce and use the archive as a part of their claiming full citizenship. Thus, by reminding us of the key relation between memory and identity, Juvonen problematizes the role of professional archive management and, finally, the need for producing and sharing the subtle knowledge of queer interpretation, which is capable of producing meaning out of silence and even the most discrete traces of affect in writings and material objects.

Sabine Grenz leads us further into the discussion of the methodological, epistemological and ethical dilemmas in unearthing knowledge out of written texts; her case study is the diaries written during the Second World War by German women. As personal documents of a specific form, these diaries are here approached with the consciousness of their diversity, fragmentary character, deceptive solipsism, and often-vacillating construction. Among the various epistemological questions involved, Grenz dwells on the problem of the construction of textual selves, and, furthermore, on the textual construction of historical female selves – since her interest lies in the period of the Second World War. Although individual and subjective, these diaries are repositories of cultural memory; Grenz provides us with carefully chosen examples aptly illustrating her argumentation on the epistemological values of diarist texts. The ethical dilemmas she discusses are raised by reflecting on the researcher's relation to her material when confronted by the evidence of the victimization of her subjects (not in the last place, by the hegemonic gender order) and by their being part of the Nazi system.

Sabine Grenz's piece of methodological and epistemological analysis is supplemented by the presentation of the fifteen-year long international oral history project on Women's Memory by **Pavla Frýdlová**, one of the project leaders. Born out of the need for information on women's lives during socialism, the project results in the rich oral history archive with more than 500 biographical

interviews, as well as numerous books, films and other products and programs made by several national teams besides the original Czech one. Frýdlová gives us an insight into the selection of methodology, interviewees, and approaches to interviewing as a feminist interaction that demonstrates, once again, that any historical practice, especially a practice that actively produces its materials such as the aforementioned queer or oral history archives, is a political act. The main findings of the project – Frýdlová here chooses to highlight the economic independence, access and attitude to education, and the independent social identity of women – are certainly results of utmost relevance to any research on the history of socialist countries and on their gendered realities. The author's acknowledging of the cases of abuse of oral history archives and of documentations and materials for political purposes, directs our attention to the conditionality of knowledge production, and on the need for its feminist deconstruction as well as activist (re)construction.

The last contribution in this volume by **Marijana Hameršak** offers a specific view of the conception of children as both creative agents and consumers that were inherent to multimedia (radio, theatre, gazette) in Croatia during the period between the First and Second World War. With historiographical scrutiny and a feminist background, the article outlines how this new concept emerged in the period of the most intensive changes in women's social and cultural lives, connected with new expectations towards (educated) women as caterers and educators of children. It is also a period when consumerism arises as the key operative mechanism of modernity. Consumerism of cultural products confronts us with the question of the complex relationship between patriarchy and capitalist structures, the reproduction of patriarchal ideologies through children's literature and paternalistic attitudes towards children. Without offering solutions to all these problems, Hameršak critically observes two important cultural phenomena in the interwar period in Croatia – the penny literature of fairy tales and the children's project "The Children's Kingdom" (*Dječje carstvo*) – as a strand of commodification of childhood and children's culture throughout the provisory broadening of children's agency.

The authors included in this volume offer a whole range of modes, strategies and techniques of resistances to the mainstream production of academic knowledge; from the rejection of the 'rational' and hidden racialist script of neoliberal academy to

joyous pessimism, from the desire for freedom and experiment to subaltern alliances, from 'undutiful sisterhood' to auto-hetero-bio-graphy, from the minor transnationalism of multiple spatialities and temporalities to the queer principle of archiving contemporary women's lives. Such strong decentered 'standpoint' positions of transversal and transfeminist knowledge cannot avoid signalling their generous passions and/or critical solutions, sublime participation and confrontation always accompanying the birth of new reflections and creative visions. Thinking, reading, envisioning, writing – the drive for critique offered by these texts aligns itself to the production of feminist knowledge only strategically. In truth, *A Feminist Critique of Knowledge Production* wants to touch history, to engage with the present and its difficulties and dangers, to offer its creative engagement to *l'à-venir*. Feminist commitment, intellectual resistance, the experience of civic rebellions are different faces of our 'assault' on institutionalised knowledge. Knowledge itself only needs to continually restart and interminably offer its new beginnings: it is the universal 'weapon' of our fight over the past, present and future justice of feminism.*

* We would like to thank Susan Jakopec for her precious proofreading of *Editorial Introduction*; Silvana Carotenuto, Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Sandra Prlenda; Biljana Kašić and Sandra Prlenda: *A Curious Act of Knowing? Obstacles to the Politicality of Feminist Cognition and Feminist Traces within the Academia in Croatia*; Naila Ceribašić: *UNESCO's Program of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Women, and the Issue of Gender Equality*; Lada Čale Feldman and Ana Tomljenović: *Producing the Unknown, Preserving the Birthmark*; Brigita Miloš: *Scratches of Disobedience, Or How to Handle the (M)other*; Marijana Hameršak: *A Fairy Tale of One's Own: Feminist Critique of Early 20th Century Croatian Children's Popular Literature and Theatre*.

**From UNESCO Humanistic
Ideals to Antiracist
Politics of Knowledge**

For an Antiracist Politics of Knowledge: Elaborating on Transfeminism and Black Theoretical Thought

Marina Gržinić

I intend to discuss universal Europocentric knowledge and its racialized premises in today global capitalism through transfeminism and Black lesbian and feminist positions, as well psychoanalysis and contemporary activism, referring to the work of Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur, Hortense J. Spillers, Philomena Essed, Beatriz Preciado, Angela Mitropoulos, Žarana Papić, Brian Carr, and many other scholars from the so-called Black studies terrain, transfeminist studies and positions, and, last but not least, from former Eastern European positions. I am interested in talking about politics and not about colour, not even about gender, but about another knowledge that is transfeminist, migrant, politically subversive and sexually transgressive.

I start with the proposition given in the last years by a transfeminist theoretician Beatriz Preciado. She talks about global capitalism that combines pharmaco-pornographic levels of biopolitical life to what she refers to as the hot, punk capitalism, that is all centered under the belly, and connects biogenetic, pharmaco-pornographic and drug substances (in an enormous quantity). Technology is having a substantial place in producing a specific meaning that is mostly semiotically-technologically organized. This is the world of hot capitalism that develops overwhelmingly in the 'former' West and first capitalist world. On the other side, I propose to conceptualize global capitalism not as a coin that has two sides, but as a Mobius strip, a surface with only one side and only one boundary component. In such a frame, I argue, it exists a cold capitalism, not only a biopolitical,

but a necropolitical one, that extracts its surplus value from non-mediated dispossession, exclusions, looting, and death.

Biopolitics and necropolitics are working globally, though necropolitics functions mostly in the so-called periphery, making surplus value by death, social death of any kind (with the value of life equal zero), and where non-mediated violence is present. We see violence of unbelievable proportions against the LGBTQI people, beatings, killings and as well negating them the basic human rights. This is the former east of Europe reality. We also see this, literally, daily, in the sea corpses of those who want to come to the 'former' Western Europe, the refugees, the people without papers from Africa and Asia, the people who drown along the coasts of Italy, Malta and etc.

Therefore, on one side, we have the 'former west', the once first capitalist world that is the Christian-capitalist patriarchal regime of power, with its processes of financialization and liberalization, that goes hand in hand with the inclusion inside its capitalist (global neoliberal) matrix of power of all those once perceived as 'others', precisely, the non-heterosexual identities (though there is still a big discrimination of the transsexual and intersexual ones). On the other side, and at the same place and time, we have necropolitics, a brutal logic of violence, persecutions, discrimination and racializations in the former Eastern European space (ex-Yugoslavia, Russia and other post-Soviet countries). To be precise, it is not about the new 'enlighten logic' of the 'former west' against the 'former east', but it is a new process of discrimination that takes the 'other' into its borders to produce new others in the West, and these are the migrants, the refugees, the *sans-papiers* (paperless), the men and the women of colour coming from other parts of the world and from other religious backgrounds.

While some are made 'equal', others are left to die and are brutally abandoned. An illustrative case is the disaster on October 2013, when the death toll of African migrants who drowned (measured in hundreds bodies in one single day) near the Italian island of Lampedusa was an additional confirmation of the alarming crisis with refugees in the EU. Though, the most perverse situation happened afterwards when to these hundreds of dead bodies were given the Italian citizenship (so that they could be buried in Italy, which was obviously cheaper than sending the dead bodies back to their country of origins and to their respective families), while those few who survived were to be prosecuted as they tried to enter Italy and the EU illegally. This is the clearest

sign of the new category of citizenship; we have at least two categories, the necropolitical citizens and the biopolitical citizens. Citizenship can be, as we see, divided within itself into two: one is the category of the biopolitical citizenship (the EU 'natural' citizens), and the other is the necropolitical citizenship given to refugees and *sans-papiers* after they are dead, drowned near the EU islands and lands.

In this context, what is important is the construction of the transfeminist queer movement where the so called not-right and not-quite identities take advantage of the situation of the hot global capitalist pharmaco-pornography system of re/production, sex and labor, in order to point the finger towards these divisions and as well to radicalize their and our positions. If in the hot, punk capitalism we are an oppressed group of zombified positions, all on medicaments and dopes, that consume sex as the only food in the time of austerity, in the cold Europe and global capitalism, we only have blood, death, being beaten and killed. Therefore, the necropolitical horizon of dispossession and exploitation, part of the techno-sexual matrix of global capitalism today, fully teaches us that neither gender nor sex are natural conditions of our lives.

'Becoming human' is a specific process of racialization that works hand in hand with class racialization. Racialization transforms societies into racialized societies through stigmatization, and labelling based on the constructed category of race. This process is today going so far that we have a process of racialization being imputed without any 'race' prerogatives while, nevertheless, serving as a measure of discrimination, subjugation and finally dispossession. In Europe, it functions through the manufacturing of the former Eastern Europeans, of former 'non-subjects', so to speak, into gendered European white middle class subjects. It is about *us* acquiring our capitalist's conservative, chauvinistic, patriarchal, mostly petit bourgeois lineage, with which to safeguard the heterosexual family and the racialized nation's 'substance'. The European Union aims at the manufacturing of former 'barbarian communist' Eastern Europeans into 'humanized' and 'civilized' Europeans.

Of course, this process is provided with its "ghastly underside: the story of the racialized subject's *dehumanization*."¹ In 1998, Brian Carr elaborated this relation of the production of 'humans' by posing a question: what is left at the threshold of the process of

¹ Cf. Brian Carr, "At the Thresholds of the 'Human': Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Replication of Imperial Memory", *Cultural Critique*, 39 (Spring, 1998), p. 120.

manufacturing the humans? His answer is punctual: race! Kwame Nimako, the director of NiNsee (The National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and Its Legacy), in Amsterdam, bitterly states:

Now that the Berlin Wall (in 1989) had fallen, Western Europe had Eastern Europe to go to and they could do away with Africa. Africa was no longer relevant. African migration started to be controlled. This is the major preoccupation of Europe today – how to prevent Africans from coming to Europe. Now Eastern Europe has become the source of full agricultural production. Another factor is the civilization mission of the ‘former’ Western Europe in Eastern Europe. They are going to civilize the Eastern Europeans to teach them democracy, to teach them how to treat the Roma citizens, to teach them about race relations and human rights. Western Europe ‘solved’ all these problems – the problem of education, the problem of development, the problem of freedom – and it is the rest that has to be taught. From the point of view of race relations, it also marginalizes the black community, because once Europe becomes larger, the black community becomes small.²

Referring to Angela Mitropoulos, I can state that Europe is today, in its most basic sense, constituted by “the problem of the legal form of value, of its imposition and perseverance by origin and lineage.”³ Europe’s migration/labor, capital, sexual reproduction and race are nowhere more disputed and uneasy than at the frontier between the spectral former Eastern Europe and ‘former’ (note my use of quotation marks in this case) Western Europe, at the meeting point between ‘natural’ citizenship and ‘bastard’ migrants and descendants of the colonized, European Union and non-EU states, etc.

Thinking about former Yugoslavia, or better, about different states that came out of its shadow, impels us to rethink at least three discontinuities of the last thirty years. The first presents the space once known as Eastern Europe, that was, in the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), transformed into former Eastern Europe partly in order to be integrated from 2004 onward into the European Union or EU (to become in the future the United States

² Cf. Kwame Nimako’s talk at the workshop on *Education, Development, Freedom*, Duke University, Durham, USA (February 25–27, 2010). The workshop was organized by Walter Mignolo at the Center for Global Studies and the Humanities, Duke University, <<http://trinity.duke.edu/globalstudies/education-development-freedom>>, retrieved on January 16, 2011.

³ Cf. Angela Mitropoulos, “Legal, Tender”, *Reartikulacija*, 7, Ljubljana, December 2009.

of Europe, or simply to vanish!), and, partly, waiting at the EU's threshold. The second happened after the period of transition in the 1990s and was elaborated in the new millennium through a genealogy of contemporary performative practices and political spaces in former Yugoslavia that dismantle the singular and established contemporary history of art and performance, that has been imposed by Western Europe's historiography. The third is connected with the EU's hyperbolic regained whiteness (as formulated by Kwame Nimako) and with the reiterated ideology of Western Occidentalism, that, brutally, reproduced the regimes of racial and class coding governing economic, social and political inequality in Europe. It clearly exposes that which has and will have a pertinent political weight in the Europe of today: the question of race. Europe has to critically review its colonial and racial past and present.

This constructed genealogy (it always implies taking a political position) of former Yugoslavia and the EU can also be viewed through the optics of feminism, gender and queerness, which is a point of departure for this text. We can recuperate the aforementioned discontinuities by making the following point: we can trace a path beginning at a 'difference that matters', that establishes a relation between feminism and postmodernism, that develops in post-colonial theories of the embodied Other/s in the 1990s, and that presents itself as a queer positioning of affects and politics with a demand to take back the question of race after 2001. After the fall of the Berlin wall, in former Yugoslavia, we were part of a colonial narrative of rescue under liberation in Western terms. It reached its peak with the exhibition *Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, displayed in the Museum of Modern Art, or MUMOK, in Vienna from November 2009 to February 2010, curated by Bojana Pejić, and in every respect produced, i.e. initiated, and what is even more important, enabled financially by ERSTE Foundation. It was a project through which the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 2009 gained its ultimate 'sense'.

I will say that, in this case, it is important to differentiate between a 'naive, benevolent' support of women's practices in Eastern Europe, on one side, and the feminist and theoretical imperialism that can be unmistakably recognized throughout recent decades. As was exposed by bell hooks, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Goldie Osuri, for example, at the center of such imperialism lies a colonial politics of representation, expressions of cultural tolerance, and attempts to identify with the

Other (wo/man). Indeed, this imperialism works hand in hand with the worship of capitalism as freedom, the celebration of a privatized selfhood, and a gender politics that becomes a measure of biopolitical governmentality. It is important to understand that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, this Other was celebrated precisely by privileging identity politics and culture as divided from the social and political, not to mention the colonial and neoliberal.

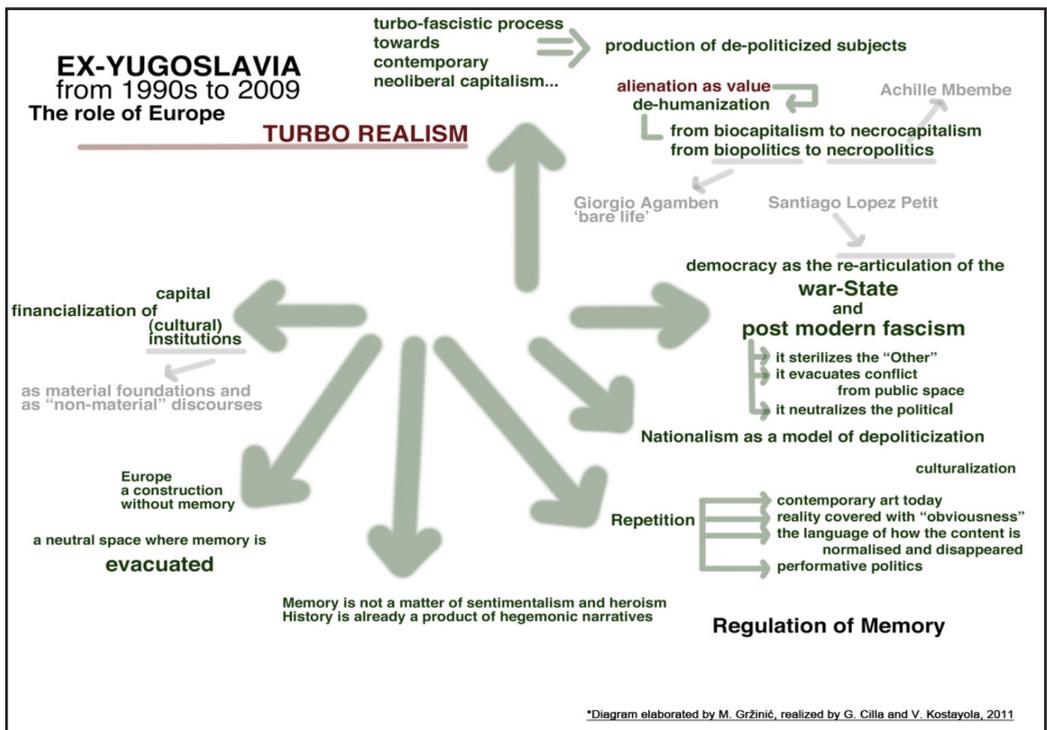
As Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue in their book *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*,⁴ the substitution of a rights-based conception of race in the 1960s with ethnicity theory in the 1970s and 1980s meant that the issues of systemic racism were replaced by those of adaptation and assimilation. Multiculturalism as the neoliberal domestication of artistic postmodernism in the field of culture, has become a privileged narrative of the nation that displaces racism, segregation and exclusion as the 'business' of marginalized groups. Omi and Winant's arguments make clear that the historical development of race has to connect to racism, race-class-gender interrelationships and everyday life, while insisting that an effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and 'decentred' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle. Therefore, parallel to this mostly or uniquely defined cultural postmodernism, another process must be envisioned and elaborated, a process that permeated the culture, social fabric, politics, and economy of former Yugoslavia and all its respective republics that are today new states in Europe. It was a process of the construction of second-rate citizens in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and former Yugoslavia, based on the myth of lost ancient territories disseminated by communist party nomenclature and the military apparatus of former Yugoslavia, that started the 'Balkan war' in the 1990s. The war resulted in a massive annihilation of people, an ethnic cleansing, and the destruction of cities in emblematic cases of contemporary genocides after World War II in the heart of Europe. The Srebrenica massacre, known as the Srebrenica genocide, refers to killings in July 1995 during the 'Balkan war' in Bosnia and Herzegovina, when more than 8,000 Bosnians (Bosnian Muslims), mainly men and boys, were slaughtered in and around the town of Srebrenica (Bosnia and Herzegovina) by units of the Army of Republika Srpska (in BiH) under the command of

⁴ Cf. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, Routledge, London, 1994. First published in the mid-1980s and republished, including new insights, in the mid-1990s.

General Ratko Mladić, supported by Slobodan Milošević and by the mass media and public opinion in Serbia.

After the war, the ethnic cleansing continued through a myriad of processes of racialization, dispossession, exploitation and deregulation. Žarana Papić described this process in Serbia with the notion of neoliberal turbo fascism.⁵ It has at its core a racialization that refers to the assigning of racial connotations to the activities of those termed as (ethnic) minorities. These processes are judicially, economically, and discursively and, last but not least, representationally conceived and normalized, and they have started to metastasize more and more.

At this point, in order to grasp a better picture of the state of the things, I will make recourse to a diagram. I refer to a diagram designed by Giulia Cilla and Vana Kostayola in Geneva (Switzerland) in 2011 onto what I was elaborating in series of lectures I presented upon invitation at CCC, Haute école d'art et de design Genève in 2011.



⁵ Žarana Papić, "Europe after 1989: Ethnic Wars, The Fascisation of Social Life and Body Politics in Serbia", *Filozofski vesnik*, (special number *The Body*, edited by Marina Gržinić Mauhler), Institute of Philosophy ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, 2002, pp. 191–205.

The diagram bears as its central title ex-Yugoslavia in the last 20 years with a focus on the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the role of 'former' Western Europe in the re/constitution of the former Eastern Europe as a defunct, concluded and buried story. In this redrawing of the EU and global capitalism, a key date is the 2001, when global capitalism entered a central stage performativity.

What we get in the context, after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 until today, is a turbo fascist process that goes from a transitional space of post-socialism toward a neoliberal capitalism. In general, I name it 'turbo realism'. I made a reference for such a coinage to the late Serbian theoretician and feminist scholar Žarana Papić, who described the process in the end of the 1990s in Serbia by saying, "I am freely labelling this as *Turbo-Fascism*". She continues:

It is, of course, known that Fascism is a historical term; that the history of Nazi Germany is not the same as that of Milošević's Serbia. However, in post-modernist and feminist theory we speak of 'shifting concepts,' when a new epoch inherits with some additions concepts that belonged to an earlier one, like, for instance the feminist notion of *shifting patriarchy*. In my view, we should not fear the use of 'big terms' if they *accurately* describe certain political realities.⁶

I think that what is conceived as the main characteristics of the turbo fascist elements of post-socialist transitional states, hiding toward fully developed neoliberal global capitalism (that has its proper fascism as well, that is 'postmodern fascism'), can be excellently implied in the present moment when discussing Europe and its transfeminist and migration processes. Therefore, I will quote Žarana Papić's designation of turbo fascism in present tense. I will modify her statement in the following way:

Serbian Turbo Fascism (Papić refers specifically to Serbia but we can extend this to post-socialist (former) Eastern European countries as well) has its own concentration camps, its own systematic representation of violence against Others, its own cult of the family and cult of the leader, an explicitly patriarchal structure, a culture of indifference towards the exclusion of the Other, a closure of society upon itself and upon its own past; it has a taboo on empathy and a taboo on multiculturalism; it has powerful media acting as proponents of genocide; it has a nationalist ideology; it has an epic mentality of *listening* to the word and *obeying* authority. The prefix 'turbo' refers to the specific mixture

⁶ Papić, "Europe after 1989", cit.

of politics, culture, 'mental powers' and the pauperization of life: the mixture of rural and urban, pre-modern and post-modern, pop culture and heroines, real and virtual, mystical and 'normal,' etc. In this term, despite its naive or innocent appearances, there is still fascism in its proper sense. Like all fascisms, Turbo-Fascism includes and celebrates a pejorative renaming, alienation, and finally removal, of the Other(s). Turbo-fascism, in fact, demands and basically relies on this *culture of the normality* of fascism that had been structurally constituted well before all the killings in the wars started.⁷

This turbo fascist reality of the former space of ex-Yugoslavia is to be connected with another more general process that happened after the 2001, and that the Spanish theoretician Santiago López Petit calls a change from *nation-State* to *war-State*.⁸ In fact, this change means that the former Imperial capitalist colonial states (the so-called first world western European states, and USA) transformed themselves into war-states. At the same time, the post-socialist countries or neoliberal turbo fascist countries remained nation-states without an international sovereignty, though having a mandate, a power to control and to systematically push terror as an evacuation of history, the re-establishing the other, the insistence on heterosexual and ethnic hegemony, etc., inside its border, that means only culturally, socially-institutionally, and exercising power. Nationalism plays an important role in such a context, and it is an atavistic format of ideology. These biopolitical measures transform themselves into necropolitical brutalities, beating and killing the members of the LGBT community, segregating Roma ethnic members, and ferociously attacking on the communist past and left positions. Turbo neoliberal fascism coincides with the general situation in neoliberal global capitalism in its production of an evacuated, privatized space that resulted in a process of de-politicization. The implications of all these processes are at least twofold: changes in the mode of life and, as stated above, in the form/mode of the State.

The mode of life envisioned by Michel Foucault and named biopolitics in the 1970s changed into necropolitics, a term coined and elaborated by Achille Mbembe in 2003 in order to capture a mode of life in Africa after 2001, when capitalism literally

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Santiago López Petit, *La movilización global. Breve tratado para atacar la realidad* [Global Mobilization. Brief Treatise for Attacking Reality], Editorial Traficantes de Sueños, Barcelona, 2009.

changed into neoliberal global capitalism.⁹ To understand the difference, I can state that Foucault's biopolitics can be described in an axiomatic way as "make live and let die". With necropolitics we can, on the other side, precisely define the transformation of regulation of life within extreme conditions produced by capital. Necropolitics is a coinage in-between necro (Death) and politics. Necropolitics regulates life through the perspective of death, transforming life, therefore, in a mere existence below life minimum. I defined necropolitics as "let live and make die." These two modes of life present a brutal difference in managing life and death; in biopolitics life is controlled; for the citizens of the sovereign first world capitalist countries it is about providing a good life; at the same time, today what is at the hand is a pure abandonment of these structure (let live), and death is managed, used and capitalized by the war machine. Today, in global neoliberal capitalism, the biopolitical and necropolitical modes of life reproduce one another by transforming many of the former biopolitical sovereign states into necropolitical ones. Why does this happen? Because capitalism is a system that lives on exploitation, dispossession and discrimination, that is not at all cultural (though it affects culture) but it is economic and, therefore, social and political. This has the consequence that art and its institutions are only biopolitical machines, and the social is necropolitical. Memory as a question of biopolitics, and history is the main terrain of necropolitics. Constantly under attack, erased, rewritten, evacuated.

Santiago López Petit states that what characterizes neoliberal global capitalism is another change, from the nation-State to the war-State. In fact, this change means that the former imperial capitalist colonial states are transformed into a war-state that exists with a transformation, or better to say, a fragmentation of all its social and public fields. Petit calls this fragmentation postmodern fascism. The latter functions with the sterilization of the other, the evacuation of conflicts, and the act of fragmentation/individualization. While turbo fascism is reserved for those regions coming out of the war situation in the recent history (the war in the Balkans, massive deregulation of the social, direct and brutal evacuation of history, erasure of thousands of people, etc.), postmodern fascism presents a process of implosion, a pastoral mechanism of fragmentation, almost invisible processes of ferocious privatization, all done under the formal system of judicial

⁹ Cf. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics", *Public Culture*, 15/1, 2003, pp. 11-40.

regulation and administration. The systems – necropolitics and biopolitics – work one next to the other.

The passage from nation-state to war-state has an important function in global capitalism as well. It is the answer to what happened after the fall of the Berlin wall (1989) that resulted in the proliferation of new states. This was possible because of the simultaneous disintegration of the Westphalian principle of the sovereignty of nation-States established in 1684. Therefore, the uneasiness provoked by the proliferation of new states was not solved as in the past with world powers' direct and brutal force of control. Rather, it was resolved through an intensified process of disintegration of the Westphalian principle of nation-States' sovereignty, and the transformation of the imperial nation-States into war-States. This logic enabled big international powers to succeed in maintaining order in the mass of new states, 'reborn' with the fall of the Berlin wall.

The war-state, especially in the first capitalist world (USA, Japan) and in the former western European context, is here to maintain the illusion of society, the biopolitical mode of life, while the necropolitical is pressing and 'metastasizing' inside the neoliberal capitalist biopolitical system. This measure means that, from its biopolitical feature (from the politics of taking care of the life the population though systematically controlling it), the contemporary state changes into a necropolitical regime (a politics of the state which is only taking part in the war of transnational capital abandoning the citizens to find a way of their own how to survive).

In this change from the nation-State to a war-State, we also have the so-called 'missing' link that is the racial-State. It is there, in fact, but not pronounced and named clearly! This passage from nation-State to the war-State goes through a racial-State that has racism at its core. This presents a new condition for rethinking memory and history and feminism and gender and queer. This presents a new condition for rethinking memory and history regarding feminism and its policy. The outcome is that, in the 1970s until today, the regime of biopolitics memory has been perceived as an intensified anthropological biopolitical mechanism while, in the time of necrocapitalism, it is history to be completely evacuated. This is why histories are completely evacuated. Let's conceptualize these processes by drawing a homophobic history of post-Yugoslavian space that is, in fact, a necropolitical one.

In 2001 Serbia's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community (LGBTQ) attempted to hold the country's first Gay

Pride in Belgrade. When the participants started to gather in one of Belgrade's principal squares, a huge crowd of opponents (right wing, fascist-orthodox organizations and individuals) attacked the event, injured several participants and stopped the march. The police were not equipped to suppress the riots, or to protect the Pride marchers. Non-governmental organizations and a number of public personalities criticized the assailants, the government and security officials. In 2009, a group of human rights activists announced their plans to organize a second Belgrade Pride. However, due to the heavy public threats of violence made by extreme right organizations, the Serbian Ministry of the Interior moved the location of the march out of the city center, thereby effectively banning the Pride. In October 2010, petrol bombs and rocks flew at the parade, after the authorities allowed it to go forward, announcing they would protect the participants. A presence of thousands of policemen guided the way for 1,000 marchers; several policemen were injured; a few dozen people were arrested in the wake of their anti-gay violence. In 2011, the Interior Ministry banned the Belgrade Pride Parade, allegedly because they saw/viewed the parade as an "obstruction of public transport, endangering health, public moral or safety of individuals and properties." In this case, not a word was uttered by the Serbian Ministry of the Interior related to the preoccupation of the obstruction of basic human rights.

In 2013, the planned Belgrade Pride Parade was cancelled once again, under the 'decision' of the Bureau for the Coordination of Security Services in Serbia. Ivica Dačić told TV Serbia that this "did not mean a capitulation to hooligans." He also noted that the security assessment reached by the Bureau was unanimous, that "nobody could guarantee a safe holding of the parade", while there were "serious threats to the peace and public order." Bureau's chair, Aleksandar Vučić, stated that the decision was made having in mind the citizens' interests. That means that, once again, the necropolitical interests of the majoritarian (racist, chauvinist, heteronormative) citizens suppressed the basic human rights of non-heteronormative others. These majoritarian interests prevailed and were presented just as a biopolitical measure protecting the safety of the citizens; in fact, it was a majoritarian necropolitical decision at the expenses of the others who were necropolitically – that is, terminally and brutally – suppressed with their basic human rights nullified.

Although the first LGBTQ event in Slovenia dates back almost 30 years ago, deep in the times of socialism, in 1984 when in

Ljubljana a first gay coming-out public project called “Magnus” was organized (the first coming out, moreover, in all the former Eastern European states), the first pride parade in Slovenia was not organized until 2001, and it was the result of an incident in a Ljubljana cafe where a gay couple was asked to leave for being homosexual. Though vandalism and beatings targeting the LGBTQ population held sway in the new millennium and repeated during the 2010s, the sign of a Slovenian society becoming more and more openly homophobic and transphobic happened in 2012, when Slovenians voted against the new Family Law. The law expanded provisions protecting the rights of children, such as outlawing corporal punishment, and existing same-sex registered partnerships to have all the rights of married couples, except adoption (excluding step-child adoption).

A conservative group called Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children, which proposed the referendum to ban the law, “opposed same-sex unions and demanded the referendum out of respect for motherhood and fatherhood,” which allegedly was a statement that would function as a ‘counter’ statement to the proposed definition of family in the new law, described as a “community of a child or children with one or two parents or guardians.” It was clearly presented in the debates (not exempted from an invigorated racist and homophobic rhetoric) that, if accepted, the Family Law would be a first comprehensive overhaul of family legislation in thirty-five years (the last one was approved in the 1970s). The new law was indeed rejected!

In 2011, the Pride Parade in Split, Croatia, was met with a face of shocking primitivism and violence. The parade was surrounded by hundreds of very hostile Split citizens who were shouting “Kill the fag”, making the fascist salute with their right hands, and throwing stones and various objects. The situation was shameful for Croatia, which, in 2011, signed the treaty of accession to become the twenty-eighth member of the European Union.

How can we rethink these cases not only as cultural identity ‘failures’ of dumb, and conservative post-communist national bodies, but as phenomena of a much bigger discrimination and deregulation of capital? In these former Eastern European countries, neoliberal turbo capitalism pushed forward the raw processes of capitalist’s racialization. What has been the result? A massive pauperization, millions of people without jobs on the street; in a word, a new division of labor not only in Europe, but on a new established line of geopolitical dispossession. The Capital has got a myriad of names – cognitive, immaterial, and financial

– but we can connect all of them with racialization. What we have as the promise of liberation by capital, therefore, is a paradoxical and cynical measure where liberation is presented as an infinity of fragmentations, but not of just any kind. It is a process of capital's racialization at work here. One of the functions of 'the colonial matrix of power', a term coined in the 1990s in Latin America, that frames historical colonialism's actualization by means of new forms of coloniality, is, according to Nelson Maldonado-Torres, a control of labor that works hand in hand with racial formations and racial knowledge production.

On the other side, this is hidden also by global capitalism's demand not to talk about racism, a demand made by saying there is no racism in contemporary global societies. A case par excellence is France, being a 'colonial republic' (can you see the absurdity of this coinage, with which the French republic describes its past colonial implementations of fraternity, freedom and equality, in Africa and elsewhere?). I suggest making a turn away from identity politics, away from a strict process of so-called culturization, and toward global capitalism's racializations. Racialization is not just a process of producing tropes; it is not only about a fast process of capital's narrativization of racialization, or the implication of immanent levels of dispossessions, so to speak; racialization is a process inherent to capital itself. This means that a process of racialization is actually at the core level of the organization of contemporary global capitalist society: it supported the process of identity politics, which is not simply a multicultural process, not simply a cultural differentiation in society, but a process of steady racializations within the racial scale of contemporary society.

Even more precisely, what occurs at the Schengen border (the frontier between the European Union and the rest of Europe) can be put in parallel with another border, the Tijuana border (thirty-two kilometres from downtown San Diego, and the busiest point of entry into the USA from Mexico), or, still, with the borders within the USA and Mexico, that influence employment, social security, the deportation of illegal workers, and the relations of increasing criminality and paralyzed social and political space.

Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur describes the situation in Austria as twofold.¹⁰ On the one side, we have migrants who

¹⁰ Cf. also Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur and Belinda Kazeem, "Café dekolonial. 'Sag zur Mehlspeis'leise Servus...'" *Reartikulacija*, 1, Ljubljana, 2007, <<http://www.reartikulacija.org/?p=418>>.

[The translation of the last part of the title of the contribution by Johnston-Arthur and Kazeem is "Decolonial Café. 'Whisper the Pudding Goodbye.'" The

were invited into the country by the government in the 1960s to aid the post-war reconstruction of the country, and, on the other, we have a new, vast group of refugees, fugitives, asylum seekers and deported persons who find themselves caught in the ever-changing immigration laws established and reinforced by transnational EU laws and implemented daily and improved nationally (as in August 2010, when France – supposedly ‘legally’, as it was based on EU laws – deported hundreds of Roma back to Romania and Bulgaria). I stated at the beginning that ‘the human’ and ‘race’ reside in an asymmetric, ghastly position; the humanization of former Eastern Europeans is done at the expense of racialized ‘non-subjects’ whose access to the representational status of the ‘human subject’ is fundamentally halted. Or more, following Carr, and as I tried to present in the first part of the essay, “the gendered white bourgeois subject is ‘made,’ of course, with racialized/colonized subjects being. . . ‘unmade.’”¹¹

What we witness today in Europe is actually what was announced by Partha Chatterjee already in 1993,¹² and which was reworked in the essay by Brian Carr, written in 1998. There exists a limit in the Foucauldian understanding of the modern regime of power, a limit on which the contemporary biopolitical resides today. Actually, when biopolitics was elaborated in the 1970s, it was a mode of governmentality only for the Capitalist First World, and its apparatuses. In that time migrants were invisible, the ‘Other’ did not exist, it was there but made invisible and mute. Therefore, in Europe we have two modern regimes of power working at once! One is the generalizable modern regime of power that goes from Foucault through Deleuze, Derrida, Agamben, etc., and is radicalized in the current times of crisis throughout the global world in modes of control, austerity and debt. This regime functions by demanding integration, and even more by the ‘distribution’ of debts (!), fear and fantasies. The other is functioning through exclusion, marginalization, de-symbolization and disfiguration.¹³ We have, therefore, two regimes

word *Leise* implies ‘quietness’ rather than ‘silence’ or the total absence of sound, and the contemporary Austrian (Viennese) meaning for the term ‘*Mehlspeise*’ refers to (sweet) desserts in general. The British would refer to dessert in general as ‘pudding’, which I think is better suited here than ‘dessert’ because it has a more colloquial feel.]

¹¹ Cf. Carr, *At the Thresholds*, cit., p. 120.

¹² Cf. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1993, quoted in Carr, *At the Thresholds*, cit., p. 146.

¹³ All terms are used by Brian Carr in citing numerous scholars, among others Hortense Spillers.

of discrimination, racialization, exploitation, that are almost the same, though the latter is not white!¹⁴ The entanglement of these regimes is visible in the myriad of class racializations. “Race thus stands at the vanishing point where sexual difference and the human resolve,” as stated by Carr, “into the ungendered figure of dehumanized racial ‘flesh.’”¹⁵

In relation to this conceptualization of racism and racializations it is also necessary to pose the question about a proper position of enunciation. I have to ask why a snow-white European scholar, as I am, enters the topic of Black studies. This is not a polite question for a political correct theoretical essay, but an important question for a former Eastern European, that I presently am as well. Being former is not an excuse nor an identity marker, but a social, political and epistemological condition of my work. I pose this questions as somebody who was born in hard core socialism, went through the processes of transition from socialism to bloody neoliberal global capitalism, and is as well rooted in the Western epistemological edifice of contemporary theory and philosophy that daily re-establishes the processes of racializations through a Western—maybe it is more accurate to say, an intensified—Occidental epistemological hegemony. Coming from the former Eastern European context in the European Union without borders, as it is presented ‘daily’, we, the former, ‘taste’ the conditions of racialization ‘without a race’, daily as well. In the processes described above of an unspoken, but reiterated reproduction of differences between the East and the West of Europe, racism, hegemony and discrimination constantly reverberate. This condition, along with an intensified dissymmetry in the global world regarding allocation of capital, discrimination, and dispossession, neocolonialism made me aware that, in order to understand and analyse such situations of racism and racialization, it is necessary to deeply enter in the findings of what is called Black studies/Black thinking, as these studies provide, historically and presently, the most important tools, strategies and tactics for the future.

This portraying of structural racism of/in Europe is further developed by Philomena Essed who, in her lecture “Racism in Europe: Humiliation and Homogenization”, argues that:

The European unification has been foremost a project of whiteness. Notions of tolerance, multiculturalism and anti-racism,

¹⁴ Cf. Homi Bhabha in Carr, cit., p. 146.

¹⁵ Cf. Carr, cit., p. 125.

.....

somewhat popular in the 1980s, have all but disappeared from political agendas. The turn of the century has been witness to the emergence of what I call entitlement racism: the idea that majority populations have the right to offend and to humiliate the 'Other.' Expressions of this form of racism vary according to racial, ethnic and religious group attributions and can range from assimilative paternalism to extreme cultural humiliation.¹⁶

Essed specifically concentrates on 'Dutch racism' by saying:

The Netherlands has passed through history as a tolerant country. That tolerance is mainly the legacy of the religious reform during the sixteenth century. It was the time when the repressive Catholicism was confronted and other Christian religions found their place in most parts of The Netherlands. 'Tolerance' is understood as almost equivalent to 'not racist'. However, can a tolerant country be racist? Or is it blindness that prevents a collectivity to perceive its own form of racism? Talking about Dutch racism, in The Netherlands, is something that only the brave do.¹⁷

In conclusion, it is obvious that my interest lies in the thinking of Black scholars who have developed a sharp critique of the normalizing processes of whiteness, with its structural racism, constructing parallel processes of constitution/erasure of history and its 'body', while powerfully elaborating on the question of agency against, and within, brutal racial violence and colonial dispossession.

¹⁶ Cf. Philomena Essed, "Racism in Europe: Humiliation and Homogenization," lecture at Macquarie University Art Gallery, Sydney, Australia, March 2012.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

A Curious Act of Knowing? Obstacles to the Politicality of Feminist Cognition and Feminist Traces within the Academia in Croatia

Biljana Kašić and Sandra Prlenda

Introduction

This paper is envisioned as a joint venture, with the aim of problematising the current status of Women's/Gender Studies in Croatia from two interrelating and overlapping positions and perspectives, namely inside and outside the academic system. Both locations are insecure, and both function as a defiant oasis of feminist knowledge-production within the almost 'naturalised' anti-feminist climate accompanied by a functionally operating educational agenda, a consumerist turn in higher education, the right-wing instigated fight against gender ideology, and cognitive capitalism. These problems urge us to stand against the long-term implications of the peculiar juncture of the neoliberal regime of knowledge production and the awaking of the idea of an anti-secular, religious, old-new paternalism over gender that appears in an aggressive, very well organised and systemic way. In this context, we will endeavour to articulate several recent trends in order to critically direct feminist attention to possible pitfalls in the encounter of feminist knowledge and academia.

Firstly, one can observe an increased interest by students in Women's Studies education, but also the lack of interest among academic authorities to integrate a Women's Studies program within the academic curricula. Secondly, there is an intentional de-politicization of the discourse of sex-gender issues carried out via the politics of gender mainstreaming and neoliberal narrative,

as opposed to the ideal of an emancipatory feminist knowledge. Thirdly, the trend of fostering ‘pure’, closed scientific disciplines is being opposed to the acceptance of feminist theory as trans-, cross-disciplinary theory in academic discourse.

By analysing these emerging paradoxes we are living with, we will examine the question of how and to what extent the subversive aspects of feminist knowledge can function as sites of resistance in favour of social change, as well as what place is left for the feminist commitment for decolonizing knowledge while crossing the academia/alternative education dichotomy.

Fig.1: Women’s Studies educational program posters (since 1995). Courtesy of the Centre for Women’s Studies, Zagreb, 2012.



In which Contexts do Paradoxes Concerning Women’s/Gender Studies Emerge?

In order to give more profound insights into the abovementioned paradoxes, we will point out certain processes, events and conditions of the contexts that enable, create and affect the status of Women’s/Gender Studies at the university, and critical knowledge in general.

The changes in the last two decades in European academia have created a springboard for the final affirmation of the neoliberal production of knowledge and neoliberal university, partially embedded in the Bologna process and its directives.¹

¹ Clare Hemmings, “Ready for Bologna? The impact of the Declaration on Women’s and Gender Studies in the UK”, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13(4), 2006, pp. 315-323; C. Hemmings, “Tuning Problems? Notes on Women’s

The skepticism towards the viability of humanities and social sciences, in the era of technicisation and so-called rationalization, is currently so prevalent that we are witness daily to the process of annihilating humanities across Europe, by closing down departments and programs on the pretext of economic (un)competitiveness. Women's/Gender Studies programs are among those that go off as easily as, for example, Slavic languages, in the continuous process of their reduction, mutation or decreasing institutionalisation across the world. When marketability is presented as one of the key factors for evaluating the need for specific forms and contents of knowledge, sometimes cynically masked by the more 'sophisticated' turn of phrase such as 'scientific excellence', politics and money become tightly interconnected, as the only factors in creating new programs. In Croatia's case, while a number of experimental interdisciplinary programs, such as human rights education, didn't survive long after the initial phase, there is a proliferation in bachelor degrees and programs in areas such as marketing, journalism, public relations, economy, management, and other similar studies that can offer youth the doubtful promise of employability in an economy which is steadily going downhill in the abyss of a de-industrialized, impoverished, and thoroughly colonized micro-market. At the same time, throughout this part of Europe, workers' rights and protection have been progressively abolished promising an increased flexibility of the work force, while the burden of professional success is completely individualized. Thus, cognitive capitalism and increasing precarisation tendencies go hand in hand.

Secondly, there is the intersection of neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities in new discourses on academia since "hybridization of neoliberalism with other political projects (e.g., neo-conservatism) and with other social relations (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity)" is one of the world-wide geographical demands that neoliberalism generates.² Humanities are being attacked from two sides: on the one side, the corporation-controlled media are clearly devaluating and discrediting humanities, basically proclaiming them "a waste of time";³ on the other side, they are

and Gender Studies and the Bologna Process", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 15(2), 2008, pp. 17-127.

² Clive Barnett, "Publics and Markets. What's Wrong with Neoliberalism?", in S.J. Smith, R. Pain, S.A. Marston, J.P. Jones (eds.), *The Handbook of Social Geography*, Sage, London and New York, 2010, pp. 269-296. <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/emergentpublics/publications/barnett_publicsandmarkets.pdf>, p. 8.

³ Within the discourse of utility, cost and marketisation of knowledge,

deemed suspicious as untrustworthy theorizations that have nothing to do with nature and natural in the neoconservative discourse. The neoconservative movement has gained strength in the last couple of years in Croatia, firstly galvanized around the issue of health and sexual education in schools, and then culminating in the referendum for changing the constitutional definition of marriage, to specify it as exclusively between a man and a woman.⁴ This was an organized transnational movement that was partially imported to Croatia through the channels of Catholic organizations that systematically seek to undermine all emancipatory gains, especially in the area of human rights (LGBT issues, women's rights) and women's/gender issues. In the public sphere, there has been a mobilisation of religious discourse that simultaneously seeks to produce submissive, obedient citizens, and targets homosexuality and what they call 'gender ideology' as primary culprits for the erosion of the idea of traditional society. At its core, and accompanied by the current intellectual backlash against liberating cognitive discourses, it is a movement against constructivist thinking, invoking essentialism and presumably traditional (traditionalist) values of ideologically imposed and sanctioned certainties (of nature, sex/gender relations, anthropology, metaphysics). A critical analytical framework against these trends is still missing both in the public sphere and in Croatian academia, although there have been valuable contributions to the better understanding of the roots of the anti-gender neoconservative discourse.⁵

Women's Studies Programs in Formal and Non-Formal Settings

In this context, perhaps there is no surprise in witnessing the lack of interest among academic authorities to integrate a Women's Studies program within the academic curricula, however the situation is almost absurd when we consider the

Croatian media have often invoked the figure of the 'eternal student', especially of humanistic disciplines, thus attacking the presumably inefficient socialist system of cost-free education with more flexible regulations that did not financially penalize the prolongation of studies.

⁴ The referendum was held on 1 December 2013, as the first national referendum initiated by citizens after collecting a sufficient number of signatures. With two thirds of positive votes, the referendum de facto prevented any future change in legislation that would allow same-sex marriages. The campaign for the referendum was led under the motto "In the name of the family", although the relevant legislation concerned only marriage, and not family.

⁵ Jadranka Rebeka Anić, *Kako razumjeti rod? Povijest rasprave i različita razumijevanja u Crkvi*, Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, Zagreb, 2011.

peculiar, almost unique status of Women's/Gender Studies in Croatia. Paradoxically, the only comprehensive and systematic, as well as interdisciplinary place for Women's Studies education still exists outside the academic system, in the area of non-formal, alternative education.⁶ On the other side, gender studies as a recognised interdisciplinary field of science functions as an empty signifier for a not yet established academic scientific program. Namely, as of 2009, Gender Studies entered into the official categorization of sciences, fields and disciplines recognized by the National Council for Science that was result of an initiative led by the Centre for Women's Studies and the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology from the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb.⁷ Since the Croatian legal framework for higher education and science poses a very low barrier for entrance into the university system, this move was seen as an important precondition, and a relatively most easily obtained, necessary step in the direction of introduction of a Gender Studies program.⁸ However, there is no Gender/Women's Studies program yet at any university, although some women's studies topics have been integrated within the educational curricula of some faculty departments during the last two decades. More precisely, since 2000 courses with a feminist content were introduced at several universities,⁹ mainly within the social sciences and humanities, and later those art-related, with a major role being played first by departments of literature (Croatian and foreign literature), and then departments of ethnology, sociology, anthropology,

⁶ Women's Studies, as an interdisciplinary and pluri-perspective field, has functioned through an independent Centre for Women's Studies education since 1995/1996, by gathering theorists, artists and activists in the creation of a complex innovative program in order to dialogise key questions of contemporary feminist theoretical thought at the crossroads of disciplines, artistic practices and women's activism. During the process of educational learning students are, apart from the various knowledge they obtain, encouraged to articulate their own voice and become aware of their own theoretical affinities concerning women's/gender studies issues and how to use a feminist perspective in their research. Cf. A. Čakardić (ed.), *Privilegiranje rubova. Intervencije i prilozi feminističkoj epistemologiji*. Centar za ženske studije, Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo, Zagreb, 2010.

⁷ *Pravilnik o znanstvenim i umjetničkim područjima, poljima i granama* [Ordinance on scientific and artistic areas, fields and branches], from 22 September 2009 (n.d.), <http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2009_09_118_2929.html>.

⁸ Cf. Gabrielle Griffin, "The Institutionalization of Women's Studies in Europe: Findings from an EU-funded Research Project on Women's Studies and Women's Employment", in E. Blimlinger and T. Gerstenauer (eds.), *Women's/Gender Studies: Against All Odds*, Studienverlag, Wien, 2005.

⁹ It is worth noting that most of these courses retain an elective status regardless of the disciplines within they are taught.

and philosophy at the philosophy faculties throughout Croatia. In addition, certain feminist and gender content also began to be taught within departments for social work, law, history, political science, art departments and interdisciplinary studies such as cultural and media studies. However, the few attempts to propose a full program were not fruitful chiefly because of the ignorance and resistance from the academic side, especially by practitioners of disciplines such as psychology, which supposedly have a 'natural authority' upon sex/gender issues.¹⁰ It is not less significant to note that a mixture of academic arrogance, and consistent cynical criticism, when feminist theory is at stake, have successfully masked the embedded misogynist disciplinary background and overall lack of knowledge.¹¹ Apparently, this integration approach that includes various dispersive feminist approaches and interventions in combination with the interplay of power relations and different gate-keepers inside universities, especially during the last seven or eight years of implementation of the Bologna process, in absence of a gender/women's studies academic unit demonstrate its well-known weakness and fragility.¹² Thus, practitioners of feminist and gender studies are easily caught and tangled in the web of conflicting interests and power plays within the academia that does not produce any sensible strategy of feminist education at the university level.¹³

¹⁰ V. Barada, J. Janušić, B. Kašić and J. Pešut, *Institucionalizacija ženskih studija u Hrvatskoj – akcijsko istraživanje*, Centar za ženske studije, Zagreb, 2003.

¹¹ Biljana Kašić, "Women's Studies: Ideological Images, Common Problems and Dilemmas", in G. Jähnert, J. Gohrisch, D. Hahn, H.M. Nickel, I. Peinl and K. Schäfergen (eds.) *Gender in Transition in Eastern and Central Europe. Proceedings*, Trafo Verlag, Berlin, 2001; B. Kašić, "Women Studies in Croatia: Challenging Contexts and Boundaries", in T. S. Pavlidou (ed.) *Gender Studies. Trends/Tensions in Greece and other European countries*, Tessaioniki, Zitis, 2006.

¹² G. Bowles and R. D. Klein, "Introduction: Theories of Women's Studies and the Autonomy/Integration Debate", in G. Bowles and R. D. Klein (eds.), *Theories of Women's Studies*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1989.

¹³ As an example of the aforementioned power play, we can cite an attempt to create a Master's specialisation in Gender Studies in the sociology program at one Croatian faculty (Faculty for Croatian Studies) proposed by professor J. Kodrnja, which was easily dismissed by her superiors, as she had given her support to students protesting against increasing tuition fees and the neoliberal onslaught on affordable, equal opportunity education.

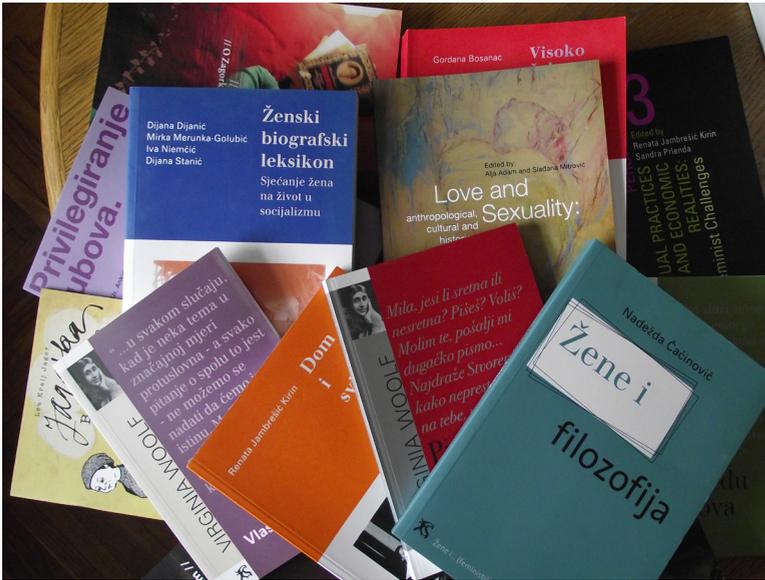


Fig. 2: Books published by the Centre for Women's Studies, Zagreb. Courtesy of the CWS.

The main question which continues to provoke argument, because it is rooted in the real context of our academia, is how can it happen that the verification of a scientific field exists without its academic field framework and structural background, and what are the long-term effects of Women's/Gender Studies absence at the university both upon potential students as well as the very respective cognitive field?¹⁴

At the same time, the interest in the non-formal, comprehensive one-year Women's Studies program offered by the Centre for Women's Studies in Zagreb has been significantly increasing.¹⁵ While explaining their motivation,¹⁶ prospective students express the need for both core feminist knowledge and systematization of Women's/Gender Studies theoretical insights (citing genealogy

¹⁴ Another case demonstrates the paradoxical situation of Gender Studies in Croatia. Since the inflexible regulation of scientific disciplines and sub-disciplines prevented the validation of a PhD awarded in Great Britain for a thesis dealing with women's human rights as a PhD in Law (human rights are apparently not a subdiscipline of law in the Croatian scientific system), Gender Studies were considered as an alternative solution in the validation procedure. However, with a PhD in Gender Studies, one cannot teach at the Faculty of Law, thus this particular scholar's entire academic career in legal studies was jeopardized.

¹⁵ For example, the trend in the last three years has shown that the number of candidates interested in enrolling in Women's Studies at the Centre has climbed up to 80, for only 35 places in the regular program every year.

¹⁶ This overview is based on an analysis of 80 letters of motivation received by the Centre for Women's Studies in 2012.

of feminist theory, feminist history, politics, biopolitics, body control politics, engaged art, LGBTQ issues as centres of interest). Since many of those students have taken courses with gender/women's studies content at the university, this directs our attention to the potentially questionable results of the integration approach to women's/gender studies at the academic level, and its illusory expectations concerning the wider impacts on institutional education.¹⁷ Another motivation for being a part of the Women's Studies program seems to be the politicality of the feminist approach¹⁸ that is tamed in academia. Namely, the wish for social activism, meeting proactive people, recognition of injustice and discrimination and wish to contribute to the fight against discrimination by learning, in order to share knowledge with others, are all important aspects invoked in this regard by the women's studies candidates. Women's Studies and feminism are seen as important spaces of critical epistemology and a fresh perspective on knowledge.¹⁹ There is also the dimension of awareness raising as outwardly directed action, but also as a personal transformation, personal growth and development of identity based on feminist knowledge.

Finally, non-formal Women's Studies are themselves in a precarious position as a result of the same process of pseudo-rationalized, market-driven mainstreaming of so-called lifelong learning and civil society engagement in general. Functioning within the structural constitutive paradox of civil society seen as a set of alternative agencies for social, educational and cultural services and policy implementation, the question remains how it is possible to claim autonomy while having to adapt programs in order to receive public grants.

¹⁷ What happens is the fragmentation of knowledge, since the individual elective courses cannot provide sufficiently sophisticated tools of analyses in a complex area of study. The students mention dispersed knowledge (*rasuto znanje*), and the wish to have some kind of rudder, or tail wind. A law student who had enrolled in one of the earlier Women's Studies programs said that only after attending the program did she realize that there was a bigger picture, a much larger critique of knowledge, and that it was possible that anti-discrimination legislation, violence against women and, for example, the study of literature can be related to in a meaningful way.

¹⁸ bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", in A. Garry and M. Pearsall (eds.) *Women, Knowledge, and Reality. Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, pp. 48-57.

¹⁹ Nora Sternfeld, *Unglamorous Tasks: What Can Education Learn from its Political Traditions?*, 2012. <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/unglamorous-tasks-what-can-education-learn-from-its-political-traditions>> (08/13).

Politics of Gender-Mainstreaming and Neoliberal Narrative vs. Feminist Emancipatory Knowledge

Following the neoliberal production of hegemonic discourse on politics, economics, law, etc., articulated by various experts with the intentional ignorance of its implications on cognitive or social processes, it is not odd that a similar process can be seen operating in relation to knowledge on women's and gender issues. It is particularly evident in the creation and interpretation of the political concept of gender equality and the politics of gender mainstreaming on the part of the new political and legal elite without any theoretical and critical reflection processes that such concepts and politics carry.²⁰ The situation in Croatia in this regard is similar to the situation in other European countries, which feminist theorists such as Portuguese researcher Emanuele Lombardo and Dutch researcher Mieke Verloo problematise in the text "Discursive Dynamics Gender Equality in Politics: What about 'Feminist Taboos'?"²¹ Through a distinctive analysis they clearly show how the use of the political concept of gender equality and the insistence on a normative and fragmented approach to the feminist concerns in the last decade has affected the process of de-politicization of the discourse on sex/gender issues, and consequently how some feminist scholars could paradoxically be trapped in hegemonic discourses on gender equality policies. One of its implications is an increasing valuation and expression of feminist articulation primarily through normative lenses, while issues such as patriarchy and multiple layers of sex/gender imbalance, or the complex problem of identity and discrimination are constantly being dissociated from the cognitive-interpretative spectrum. Also, female political participation as one of the most pressing topics of gender equality tends to be reduced to normativity and quantitiveness. Vlasta Jalušič calls this emerging process the trend of de-politicization and the process of de-gendering, because the "gender dimension in analyses is often reduced, neutralized, or abolished."²²

²⁰ Judith Squires, "Is Mainstreaming Transformative? Theorizing Mainstreaming in the Context of Diversity and Deliberation", *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 12(3), 2005, pp. 366-388.

²¹ E. Lombardo, P. Meier and M. Verloo, "Discursive Dynamics in Gender Equality Politics: What about 'Feminist Taboos'?", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 17(2), 2010, pp. 105-124.

²² Vlasta Jalušič, "Stretching and Bending the Meanings of Gender in Equality Politics", in E. Lombardo, P. Meier and M. Verloo (eds.), *The Discursive Politics of Gender Equality: Stretching, Bending and Policymaking*, Routledge, London, 2010, p. 111.

Along with the competitive and pragmatic expert knowledge that is simultaneously produced and affirmed within normative hegemonic rationality and the normativistic neoliberal educational policy paradigm, the global commodification of cognition and knowledge within the key paths of the global economy directs us to various, often unpredictable impacts on the sense of knowledge production and process of knowing. However, through the universalizing trajectory of neoliberalism, the implementation of particular educational policies seems to support either strategies feeding governmentality in the Foucauldian sense, or concrete bureaucratic agendas (their 'efficiency'), parallel with rendering 'the social' to its functional residual aspect needed for the global market exchange. This means, according to Clive Barnett's analysis in his paper "Publics and markets. What's wrong with Neoliberalism?" that "social relations of gender, ethnicity, or race, for example, are considered as contextual factors shaping the geographically variable manifestations of general neoliberalizing tendencies" rather than critical social formations.²³

What does this mean for Women's Studies and for issues that feminists within Women's Studies deal with? Certain issues such as modern slavery that affects women as a result of the global capitalist libidinal economy, as well as the feminization of poverty, or violence against women can, on the trail of the abovementioned trends, emerge as an educational interest only as an articulation of (exoticised, spectacularised, othered etc.) difference that is trivialised, or rather consumed via the market's commodification of cultural difference, or as a particular example for 'rational' explanation of the economic crisis, but not as a cognitive or ethical requirement of (feminist) critical knowledge.²⁴ On the one hand, this means that knowledge that is not marketable seems to be inappropriate and potentially excluded from the academic curriculum. The key question that can be immediately posed is: how can critical, emancipatory knowledge be marketable? What feminist knowledge can possibly be marketable? And what are the possible implications of this kind of 'marketability'? On the other hand, if every academic graduate degree is only measured or 'counted' on the labour market and according to its patterns of consumption and its values, will Women's Studies disappear just because no one will need that type of knowledge on the national

²³ Barnett, *Public in Markets*, cit., p. 23.

²⁴ Graham Huggan, *The Post-colonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, p. 12.

or international labour market? And which types of implications will this 'logic' produce in the long-run?

Nevertheless, there are new emerging questions posed to feminism that we are witnessing nowadays. Is it even possible, having in mind the anti-feminist nature of the neoliberal rationalities and marketing university, to talk about knowledge that acts as the power of social change?²⁵ Not only is the radicality of knowledge in the sense of exposing its political/critical horizon not thinkable within the increasingly neoliberal academic setting that academic management, regulations and monitoring put upon academic programs and their expected goals, but the "(Faculty have progressively (...) favoured professionalism over social responsibility, and have (...) refused to take positions on controversial issues" and thereby becomes disconnected from what public interest can be.²⁶ Social responsibility is certainly one of the theoretical premises of Women's Studies since feminism is *per se* an ethico-political project above all responsive for crucial 'social affairs' such as injustice, discrimination, subjectification, subjugation, or in other words, political freedom that power puts at stake.²⁷ Or, on the other hand, will Women's/Gender Studies, being part of the academic structure, have to practice the policy of exclusion of the Other(s) (poor, socially marginalized, ethnic minorities, other classes etc.) following the current trends of university marketing, instead of enabling the ethics of equal chance and access to the university that is an incontestable foundation of the feminist production of knowledge?

Disciplining Disciplines and Feminist Trans-Disciplinarity

The third paradox that produces an ambiguous status of feminist theory and knowledge within academia is connected with the neoliberal trends towards the centring of scientific disciplines around their core subject and methodological axis,

²⁵ Adrienne Rich, "Toward a Woman-Centered University (1973-1974)", in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978*, WW. Norton and Company, Inc, New York, 1979; T. de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts", in Id., *Feminist Studies/ Critical Studies*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1986.

²⁶ Sophia A. McClennen, "Neoliberalism and the Crisis of Intellectual Engagement", *WORK AND DAYS*, No. 51/52, 53/54, Vol. 26 & 27, 2008-09, pp. 459-471, <http://www.worksanddays.net/2008-9/File24.McClennen_011309_FINAL.pdf>, p. 461.

²⁷ W. Brown, Ch. Colegate, J. Dalton, T. Rayner, C. Thill 2006b, "Learning to Love Again: An Interview with Wendy Brown", *Contretemps*, January, pp. 25-42. <<http://sydney.edu.au/contretemps/6January2006/brown.pdf>>, p. 25.

although keeping the image of academic knowledge as desirably 'interdisciplinary' or 'transdisciplinary'.

What does this mean specifically? On the one hand, there is the reduction of inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary fields of knowledge to either an instrumental or utilitarian 'ingredient' useful for collaborative projects that only mimic or perform interdisciplinarity, and on the other hand, the reinforcement of respective disciplines.²⁸ The process is mainly connected to the hegemonic dictates of the neoliberal and profit-oriented university that effectively disciplines scientific disciplines in a such a manner that the faculty departments have been forced to strengthen their professional and market-verifiable competitiveness in a technicised and almost biopolitical manner, trying to offer knowledge which responds to the phantasmagorical construction of the (global) labour market economy. Thus endeavours towards the reduction of feminist knowledge as a utilitarian component in the function of certain disciplines or the (ab)use of feminist theory as symbolic 'capital' for very distinctive disciplinary research, or for insuring the status of that very discipline follow the same path. One of the key concerns nowadays is how to provide or keep a space for feminist knowledge within a disciplinary framework. By giving an example from the Department of Sociology that one of the authors is affiliated with, it is apparent that the respective department would rather agree to introduce a course on 'Feminist Sociology' or 'Sociology of the Family' than in the long-term keep the course 'Feminist Theories' within the sociology framework. There are two supposedly functional reasons for this: one is that the course 'Feminist Theories', which is conceptualized as interdisciplinary, apparently 'confuses' students with its experimental openness and use of an epistemological multi-layered approach that is different from the sociological one, and second, that in the long run it does not ensure very specific practical skills and knowledge needed for sociologists as a profession.²⁹ If we use one of the cognitive

²⁸ Angeliki Alvanoudi, "Teaching Gender in the Neoliberal University", in D. Gronold, B. Hipfl and L. Lund Pedersen (eds.), *Teaching with the Third Wave New Feminists' Explorations of Teaching and Institutional Contexts. Teaching with Gender. European Women's Studies in International and Interdisciplinary Classrooms*, ATHE-NA3, Utrecht, 2009, p. 45.

²⁹ Nina Lykke explained the concept of interdisciplinarity "as transgressing 'borders between disciplinary canons and approaches in a theoretical and methodological bricolage that allows for new synergies to emerge' (...)" (Lykke according to V. Vasterling, E. Demény, C. Hemmings, U. Holm, P. Korvajärvi and T. S. Pavlidou, "Practising Interdisciplinarity in Gender Studies. Travelling Concepts", in *Feminist Pedagogy: European Perspectives Series*, Raw Nerve Books

explanatory examples such as intersectionality that is a primary analytical tool that both sociologists and feminist scholars deploy for theorizing identity, discrimination and oppression, then we can witness how its understanding often means relying on very determined clusters with quantitative indicators that very often enable abstract deductions of the different positions people hold in relation to gender and other social identity categories at the same time while the complexity of relations around sex, gender, race including critical reflections of socio-cultural hierarchies, social tensions and power relations is not an issue. With this, it is not only the idea around which the matrix of feminist educational curriculum is built that is diminished, but also the critical charge that activates the sense of such a cognitive agenda. As we know, since sociology is neither a particular case, nor an exception in this regard, feminist knowledge cannot be seen only as a critical tool either within or crossing disciplinary fields. It is a much more complex procedure in terms of epistemological shifts, dimensions and approaches, material conditions and various contextual demands, and the politics of knowledge within which the challenges of inter-, trans- or multi-disciplinarity are negotiated and articulated.

Concluding Remarks

In place of concluding remarks we will rather keep our attention once more on the main question: What can we as feminist scholars do and how to act? Appearing at the same time in a space 'in-between' in terms of disciplinary expertise/profession and in a space 'across' disciplines, private-public dichotomy, spaces of being, mainstreaming agendas etc., feminist scholars face a role of agencies of multiple displacement and exiles to the most extent. What to do then? Keeping the subversion of the dominant concepts and cognitive discipline codes and so-called 'new-old' pragmatic and functional knowledge requires an intense processing of dealing with cross-disciplinary conceptual translations and affirmation of critical knowledge.

Yet the invention of new ways of unmasking and resisting the neoliberalisation of universities including development of argumentation against neoliberal trends in knowing and their devastating implications is at stake nowadays. Seen another way,

Ltd, York, 2006, p. 63; see also M. Liinason and U. Holm, "PhDs, Women's/Gender Studies and Interdisciplinarity", *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 14(2), 2006, pp. 115-130.

as deliberative 'agents' of Women's/Gender studies legitimation, we should break the silence and speak up about the injuries of neo-liberal academia by exploring the ways in which scholarly experiences and 'affective states'; as Rosalind Gill remarkably pointed out in her article "Breaking the silence. The hidden injuries of neoliberal academia", "(...) may be gendered, racialized and classed".³⁰ Feminist commitment for decolonizing knowledge is sufficiently different to move on in this regard. Or rather, how to deconstruct a neoliberal pragmatic dictate of 'the emergency as a rule'?

³⁰ Rosalind Gill, *Breaking the silence: The hidden injuries of neoliberal academia*, 2010. <<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/cmci/people/papers/gill/silence.pdf>>, p. 4.

UNESCO's Program of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Women, and the Issue of Gender Equality

Naila Ceribašić

In view of UNESCO's program of intangible cultural heritage, all peoples of the world harmoniously contribute to the wealth of cultural diversities and intercultural dialogue, all various, however mutually different, concepts of heritage are equally valuable for humanity, and common people and grassroots communities are always in control of their expressive culture. According to the basic document, namely the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, heritage means "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills ... that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage". Communities 'constantly recreate' their heritage and it "provides them with a sense of identity and continuity".¹ In principle, they (in particular the actual bearers of practices that communities identified with) are in command of identifying and defining heritage and its safeguarding, which represents a main step away from customary top-down conceptualizations and practices led by experts and state administrators.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the level of implementation, usual disputes revolve around the issue of who owns a tradition, who is included and who is excluded, and who has the right to define the features of a tradition and set its borders. There is a

¹ UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003, 2, p. 1. <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>>

growing body of analysis that points at the compartmentalization and essentialization of traditions protected by UNESCO.² The recognition of an element on the international scale, and the consecutive rise of respect towards it, seems to inevitably feed further development in the direction of its separate and pure uniqueness. For instance, as argued by Nino Tsitsishvili, the recognition of Georgian polyphony as a masterpiece of humanity gave wings to the protectors of its 'authentic' features, and additionally marginalized several other important traditions in Georgia, traditions of ethnic exchanges, such as *duduki*, the *zurna*, and the *mugham*.³ More often than not, a multiculturalism of difference (also called corporate, managed or difference multiculturalism) has been promoted under the wings of UNESCO which, while celebrating cultural pluralism, reinforces the compartmentalized, that is, essentialist and bounded expressions of group identity, ethnic in particular.

UNESCO, Gender Equality and Women's Intangible Heritage

The gender aspect of the program has not up to now incited much scholarly attention, excluding several expert meetings organized by UNESCO itself. As summarized in the final report of one of these meetings, one often encounters "contradictions between the reality of traditional cultures and the notion of gender equality", and/or the ambiguity of whether heritage programs are basically empowering for women or whether they confine them within traditional, usually basically patriarchal social arrangements.⁴ Two extremes concerning women's intangible heritage came to the fore – while there were participants who emphasized "women's special roles in transmitting intangible heritage" and "the necessity to pay particular attention to them",

² Within the program, 'element' is the official term for what was previously and elsewhere called tradition, folklore or, more specifically, a traditional or folk genre, repertory, skill, art, craft, etc. I have also accepted the term 'element', however not without a certain discomfort because of such a quick acceptance of an initially completely constructed, administrative, and only supposedly neutral term. In the meantime, 'element' passed its infancy stage and started to run a life on its own, which, as I have realized, deserves to be called by its own name.

³ Nino Tsitsishvili, "National Ideologies in the Era of Global Fusions: Georgian Polyphonic Song as a UNESCO-Sanctioned Masterpiece of Intangible Heritage", *Music and Politics*, 3/1, 2009, pp. 1-19.

⁴ Cf. UNESCO Final Report: Expert Meeting 'Gender and Intangible Heritage' (8-10 December 2003; Intangible Heritage Section, UNESCO), 2003, p.1. <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00125-EN.pdf>> (10 January 2014).

other participants “did not want to allow any such attention because it might mean ... discrimination to women” – even if positive, celebratory discrimination.⁵

The dilemmas between affirmation and antidiscrimination, speech in the name of pluralizing versus work in essentializing, as well as between cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, seem to be derived from the basic tension between human and cultural rights, and the irresolvable question of how to accommodate both of them. Cultural rights restrict individuals in their freedom of choice, but increase a group’s visibility, recognition and power in society by promoting its common roots, traditional expressions and shared values, while with human rights it is the opposite. In that, the more the group in question is different from the dominant group and its mainstream culture, i.e., the more the group in question is marginal, minority, unprivileged, oppressed, the higher the pressure is on individuals from such groups to accept community values and give up their individual preferences.⁶

One of the most vocal critics of the cultural rights paradigm and accompanying multicultural agenda from a feminist perspective is Susan Moller Okin with her study titled “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women”.⁷ According to Okin, there is a fundamental conflict between the feminist “belief that women should not be disadvantaged by their sex” and a “group’s beliefs, practices and interests”, which are generally determined and articulated by “the more powerful, male members”, and are consequently “potentially, and in many cases actually, antifeminist”.⁸ Cultural rights often permit oppressive practices, and therefore one should be skeptical regarding their endorsement.

But UNESCO, in contrast to Okin, is devoted to finding a middle way that would accommodate both human and cultural rights. According to Valentine Moghadam and Manilee

⁵ *Ibid.* Besides this report, the main literature encompasses UNESCO report from the 2001 meeting on women and intangible heritage and articles published in the journal *Museum International* 59/4, 2007. A growing number of independently conducted researches deal primarily with tangible heritage.

⁶ Cf. Krister Malm, “Music in the Field of Tension Between Human Rights and Cultural Rights”, in S. Pettan, A. Reyes and M. Komavec (eds.), *Glasba in manjšine: Zbornik referatov 1. mednarodnega posvetovanja Študijske skupine Mednarodnega sveta za tradicijsko glasbo (ICTM) Glasba in manjšine – Music and Minorities: Proceedings of the 1st International Meeting of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) Study Group Music and Minorities*, Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, 2001, pp. 31-36.

⁷ Susan Moller Okin with respondents, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1999.

⁸ Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad*, cit., pp. 10-12.

Bagheritari, UNESCO is, on one side, devoted to the idea of “gender equality and women’s inclusion while arguing forcefully against discrimination and blatant forms of gender oppression”.⁹ In the UN’s 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which constitutes “the contemporary global women’s rights agenda”, it is stressed that “women’s human rights cannot be violated on the grounds of cultural or religious norms”, and states which joined the convention (187 at the end of 2013) are requested “to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes, or on stereotyped roles for men and women.”¹⁰

On the other hand, however, the UN and UNESCO as one of its organizations are strongly devoted to cultural rights and group rights, in particular precisely through the program of intangible cultural heritage. As already emphasized, it is a program which positions groups as active agencies in defining their heritage, provides them with some power, acquired through international attention and recognition, and works “for the well-being of the community concerned ... in the sense defined by the community itself”.¹¹ A possible additional argument against the priority of human rights and gender equality over cultural rights would be in the relativity of the notion of ‘equality’, namely in the understanding that inequality in terms of power to dominate and humiliate is based on European- and American-oriented views and theories, and that it is not proper to apply them to other gender systems, which are by themselves “crucial cultural elements ... in need of safeguarding.”¹² That is, that the interpretations, within the communities, of what gender and gender balances are, need to be taken into account, respected and supported.

Following these discussions, the idea of this essay is to analyze the position of women in the program of intangible heritage with the help of three perspectives. Firstly, I outline the gender structure of the Croatian national register of intangible cultural heritage,

⁹ Valentine Moghadam and Manilee Bagheritari, “Cultures, Conventions, and the Human Rights of Women: Examining the Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the Declaration on Cultural Diversity”, *Museum International*, 59/4, 2007, pp. 9-18, p. 16.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 10.

¹¹ UNESCO Final Report, cit., p. 10.

¹² Ivi, p. 11.

indicating with this example the implementation of global politics on a national level. Then I turn to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which is UNESCO's principal mechanism for the promotion of intangible heritage worldwide.¹³ Finally, striving to capture the practice of a globally representative element at the ground level, I focus on 'Bistritsa Babi', a group of elderly women from Bistritsa in western Bulgaria, who make an element accentuated as female and archaic, but at the same time participate in other, non-archaic musical routes and global flows. At the end, I comment on UNESCO's latest emphasis given to the gender aspect of safeguarding, and its immediate effects.

The Gender Structure of the Croatian Register of Intangible Heritage

At the moment, there are 131 cultural elements listed in the Croatian national register.¹⁴ To the largest degree, the list is comprised of traditional culture 'hits', 'our very best', elements that have been supported continuously and from long ago by state, county and local funds, or are even economically viable. *Traditional skills* are represented in the greatest number (a total of 67 elements), those connected to various handicrafts, specific local or regional gastronomy, clothing, agriculture, fishery and traditional architecture. In that, expectedly, women play a central role in traditions such as lacemaking, diverse types of embroidery, hair styling, and preparation of dishes. For instance, as with lacemaking, which since 2009 has been also included in UNESCO's Representative List, it is clearly emphasized that its custodians are women, in particular older women, that "[e]ach variety of lace has long been created by rural women as a source of additional income and has left a permanent mark on the culture of its region", and that "[t]he craft both produces an important

¹³ The Representative List was established in 2008, encompassing previous "masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity", which were declared in 2001, 2003 and 2005. Each subsequent year a number of new elements were added to the list: 76 in 2009, 45 in 2010, 18 in 2011, 27 in 2012 and 25 in 2013 (see <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/lists>>). Besides the Representative List, three other, less utilized mechanisms are the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices, and the International Assistance request greater than USD 25,000. Up to the end of 2013, there are 35 elements in need of urgent safeguarding, 11 best practices and 281 representative elements of humanity, making a total of 327 elements (see <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/lists>>; 18 January 2014).

¹⁴ See <<http://www.min-kulture.hr/default.aspx?id=3650>> (18 January 2014).

component of traditional clothes and is itself testimony to a living cultural tradition.”¹⁵ This is clearly an example of women’s heritage, but even more, this is an example of ancient, endangered heritage safeguarded by women as a more traditional, more conservative part of the community on the whole. In other words, the lacemaking implies a very traditional role of women in keeping the old cultural values alive, although, on the other side, by mentioning an additional source of income, it indicates a certain level of women’s independence, power and/or empowerment.

The second largest group on the Croatian national list consists of music and dance styles and genres (a total of 28 elements), which are mostly gender-inclusive for both men and women. Besides that, genres that are primarily men’s domain are related overwhelmingly to the field of instrumental music, while within the primarily women’s domain are two genres of church folk singing, a ritual wedding song called *svatovac*, and a soloist genre called *rozganje* which was performed in the past mainly at weddings, functioning as a mode through which women drew attention, and thus, as interpreted by scholars who dealt with the subject, in a way opposed to the patriarchal setting of the community.¹⁶ With regards to the music genres included on the national list, the general conclusion is that the list reflects the customary, canonized notion of women as overwhelmingly only singers, in particular singers of genres connected with traditional spheres of family and church life.

The third largest group of elements included in the Croatian national register consists of 17 annual customs associated with local areas. Among them, women, actually girls, are main bearers in the spring procession of *kraljice* (meaning queens) on the feast of Pentecost.¹⁷ They go around the village, visit selected households, sing seasonal songs and dance. Girls playing the roles of kings are distinguished by their tall flower decorated hats and by sabers that they use for ritual dancing, while other girls, those playing the roles of queens, are dressed as brides. In 2009 the custom of

¹⁵ See <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00245>> (18 January 2014).

¹⁶ Grozdana Marošević, “Culture as a Determinant of Folk-Singing Style: Group and Solo Singing in the Karlovačko Pokuplje Region”, *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 23/2, 1992, pp. 207-221; pp. 218-219.

¹⁷ Another female-dominated annual custom included in the national list is the spring procession of girls from the village of Komletinci, who on the feast of Saint Philip and James carry newly leaved branches and sing the occasional song (*filipovčice*). The rest of the included annual customs are gender-inclusive (10 elements) or male-dominated (5 elements).

kraljice from the village of Gorjani was included in UNESCO's Representative List. Today members of the community themselves interpret *kraljice* as reminiscence to the times of the Ottoman invasion, when men were defeated or absent from the village, and therefore women took sabers to defend their homes.¹⁸



Fig. 1: *Kraljice* on the feast of Pentecost in Gorjani, 2003 (cortesy of Vido Bagur).

Consequently, in the Croatian national list of intangible cultural heritage women overwhelmingly appear as central bearers in relation to the three K's tradition (*Kirche, Küche, Kinder*): traditions connected with feeding, dressing, raising children, and implanting traditional family values and religious beliefs. What is basically supported is a very patriarchal social arrangement, with only some traces which indicate, or which could be interpreted to indicate women's power, as in the case of lacemaking and *kraljice*.

¹⁸ The notion of brave female defenders is, however, not included in the nomination file (see the "Nomination form" at <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00235#identification>). It is historically ungrounded, yet it is probably omitted for an additional reason, namely in order not to jeopardize the inscription by mentioning "expressions that might inadvertently diminish mutual respect among communities or impede intercultural dialogue" – that is, in this case, by mentioning the Ottoman invasion. Throughout various UNESCO documents related to the management of intangible heritage, it is asked that such expressions be avoided. The above quotation is taken from the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. 2013. "Decisions: 8th Session, Baku, Azerbaijan, 2-7 December 2013". Decision 6.a/17. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00692> (18 January 2014).

The Gender Dynamics in the Representative List of Humanity

In this section I take a bird's-eye view by analyzing primarily the basic descriptions of elements included in the Representative List while neglecting their elaborations in the nomination files, with the exception of only elements detected as women-exclusive according to their basic descriptions. The reasons for such a limitation are twofold. On one side, the material would otherwise be too extensive and difficult to process, while at the same time the background information and insights into the broader context would be insufficient anyway. On the other side, the basic descriptions undoubtedly testify as to how gender figures at the program's highest and most visible level, since these descriptions make up the only information available in UNESCO's widely circulated brochures,¹⁹ as well as the first layer of information on UNESCO's website.²⁰ Also, since by their nature the basic descriptions summarize the most important components of elements in question, their inclusion of gender reference(s) means that gender is indeed recognized as a relatively relevant social dimension, and vice versa.

As for this last aspect – the understanding of gender as an important factor in defining and reflecting community, and one of the key dimensions of social identity – it was treated differently up to the 2009 cycle of proclamations and the following cycles. The number of gender-silent descriptions substantially decreased from circa three quarters to circa half of the total number (see table 1).²¹ This is even more significant if we take into account that a number of elements described in a gender-silent way are actually gender-exclusive, usually a men's domain.²²

¹⁹ UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity, Baseline Arts, Oxford, 2008. <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001870/187087eo.pdf>>. UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity, Baseline Arts, Oxford, 2009 <http://www.unesco-bg.org/file_store/188328e.pdf>. UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity: 2010, 2011. Paris: UNESCO. <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002170/217032e.pdf>>

²⁰ Cf. <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/lists>>

²¹ 'Gender-silent' means a complete absence of any gender indication. In line with that, the category of "gender reference whatsoever" includes a spectrum from the direct mentioning of the role of women, men and/or their relationships, to very indirect, indifferent, almost incidental gender indications (for instance, the usage of the possessive adjectives 'his' and 'her').

²² Similarly, Moghadam and Bagheritari noticed that the photographs included in UNESCO's brochures "largely depict men", where it is not clear whether "the photographs mirror the reality of such practices" or "these were the choices of the photographers", cit., p. 15.

Table 1: Inscriptions on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

	2001-2008-2009	2010-2012
total number of elements	166	93
↓		
gender-silent	c. 120	46
<u>gender reference whatsoever</u>	c. 40	47
↓		
shared equally or differently by women and men	c. 12	31
male	c. 12	10
traditionally male, women joined recently	–	3
<u>female</u>	14	3
↓		
practiced by women, specifically female	9	3
women preserved from ancient times	3	–
traces of patriarchy	2	–

The discourse employed in the representation of female heritage did not change a lot after 2009. Yet, nevertheless, I find as significant the appearance of elements that testify to the female breakthrough into traditionally male domains (3 proclamations after 2009),²³ together with the disappearance of the interpretative framework which places them in pre-modern, ancient times and close to ‘nature’ (5 proclamations up to 2009).²⁴

²³ This group includes: i) a poetic dueling from Cyprus, which is mostly performed by “old men but talented female poets have recently started performing” (inscribed in 2011); ii) a male rite of passage from Belgium, in which “women, however, increasingly take part as godmothers and supporters” (inscr. in 2011); iii) a music tradition from Iran, which “is passed on either through traditional master-pupil training, which is restricted to male family members or neighbors, or modern methods in which a master trains a wide range of students of both genders from diverse backgrounds” (inscr. in 2010). As noted above, all the quotations in this section are taken from the basic descriptions, and can be found in the above mentioned brochures and on <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/lists>>.

²⁴ Thanks to women, three of these elements have been preserved from ancient times up until today: i) traditional dances and polyphonic singing found in the Shoplounk region of Bulgaria (proclaimed in 2005); ii) singing, handicrafts, wedding and religious ceremonies from Estonian islands (procl. in 2003); and iii) Novruz ceremony that marks the New Year and the beginning of spring in Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan (inscr. in 2009). Two elements that expose traces of a patriarchal social order and matrilineal cultures are: i) a ceremony from Benin, Nigeria and Togo which “pays tribute to the primordial mother *Iyà Nlà* and to the role women play in the process of social organization and development of Yoruba society” (procl. in 2001); and ii) narrative chants of the matrilineal Ifugao community in the Philippines, where elderly women hold a

However, both before and after 2009 the remaining depictions of women-exclusive elements (a total of 12) are relatively neutral in describing traditional women's roles and practices. This group includes Croatian lacemaking and the procession of *kraljice*, together with ten other elements: i) lacemaking in Cyprus that testifies to the "unique mastery of [women's] craft", "is at the centre of daily life for women ... and a proud symbol of their identity" (inscr. in 2009); ii) a tradition of embroidery from north-eastern Hungary, which creates an "auxiliary income, enabling women to buy the fine fabrics and supplies necessary for making elaborate costumes" (inscr. in 2012); iii) a weaving craft from the Republic of Korea, which is a "female-led family operation where mothers transmit techniques and skills to their daughters or daughters-in-law" (inscr. in 2011); iv) rites and craftsmanship from Algeria associated with the preparation of a bride and her costume for a wedding (inscr. in 2012); v) Chinese paper-cut which is a "predominantly female pursuit" (inscr. in 2009); vi) polyphonic singing from Estonia which is nurtured primarily by women (inscr. in 2009); vii) a festive music, dance and poetic genre from Brazil which is "generally performed only by women" (procl. in 2005); viii) a Japanese tradition that celebrates the New Year, which is "a showcase for the talent of local girls" and "employs a medley of centuries-old songs and dances to entertain and reaffirm the continuing cultural identity of the performers and their community" (inscr. in 2009); ix) a seasonal harvest and fertility ritual from the Republic of Korea which once functioned as a "rare break from restrictive rules governing the behavior of rural young women who were not allowed to sing aloud or go out at night", and is nowadays "mostly preserved ... by middle-aged women", contributing "to harmony, equality and friendship among the women dancers" (inscr. in 2009); and x) a Palestinian narrative expression called *Hikaye*, which "offers a critique of society from the women's perspective", "draws a portrait of the social structure that directly pertains to the lives of women" and often describes "women torn between duty and desire" (procl. in 2005).²⁵

Additionally, it is worth mentioning some interesting examples beyond the category of women-exclusive heritage – from heritage enacting a clear gender division within a community (for instance,

key position in the performance, as well as in the community as a whole, "both as historians and preachers" (procl. in 2001).

²⁵ The procedure of 'proclamation' was related to previous UNESCO program of the masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage. Since 2008 selected elements are 'inscribed' on the Representative list of Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

the Andean Cosmivision of the Kallawaya culture from Bolivia, where women participate in a number of rites, care for pregnant women and children, and weave textiles with motifs and decorations relating to the Kallawaya cosmivision), to heritage that bears witness to women's vital role in the transmission of knowledge (such is the case with the Mediterranean diet), to men-exclusive heritage that embodies resistance to the oppression of women in a male dominated society (demonstrated by *Namsadang Nori*, a vagabond clown theatre from the Republic of Korea), to, on the other edge of the spectrum, heritage where women function as a paradigmatic Other (represented by a healing dance from Malawi, where most patients are women who suffer from various forms of mental illness, and are treated for some weeks or months by renowned healers).²⁶

The conclusion that can be drawn with regards to the inscriptions on the Representative List (in particular up to 2009) is similar to the one concerning the Croatian national list. Namely, women predominantly appear as bearers of handicrafts and clothing, singing and dancing, and some specific rites and festivities, confirming the patriarchal pattern of female social roles. An excellent, all-encompassing example of such a female position, judging from the basic descriptions, is provided by women from the Estonian islands Kihnu and Manija. On the other hand, there are only a few exceptions that indicate female resistance to the expected roles, as in the case of Palestinian *Hikaye*.²⁷

It is difficult to say to what degree all these proclamations and inscriptions – and more broadly, the heritage production initiated and supported by UNESCO – are empowering to women or, conversely, a discriminatory operation that confines them to traditional, patriarchal social roles. In other words, what are up to now the reasons and effects of all these listings for the possible 'well-being' of women? In order to put some more light on this issue, the following section is dedicated to one particular example, the example of "polyphony, dances and rituals from the Shoplouk region", which already by its title is accentuated as female heritage, namely as heritage preserved by 'Bistritsa Babi'. This is one of

²⁶ In line to the demand of avoiding "expressions that might inadvertently diminish mutual respect among communities or impede intercultural dialogue" (cf. footnote No. 18), one could argue that the same should be applied to intergender relationships, which the healing dance from Malawi does not seem to respect.

²⁷ For more on these two elements see <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00042>> and <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00124>> (18 January 2014).

only two heritage elements with such a gender-based title. It was proclaimed a masterpiece in 2005, while its male counterpart – “Men’s group Colindat, Christmas-time ritual” from Romania and Moldova – was inscribed on the Representative List only in 2013.

Bistritsa Babi

Bistritsa Babi are presented as custodians of a centuries-old tradition.²⁸ It remains unknown why and how they preserved this archaic tradition, in contrast to numerous other communities (and singing groups) in the Shoplounk region, and in contrast to men in their own community. Explanations that can be found in popular press as well as in UNESCO-related writings operate, expectedly, with the idea of spontaneous transmission from generation to generation, all the way from pre-Christian times, a transmission that developed independently from the outside world, in an uncontaminated, natural way, springing instinctually from women’s physiology by virtue of their assumed pastoral upbringing, resulting in the inherently earthy power of their voices, etc. But what is actually behind such a narrative is a dynamic of a different nature. Namely, the archaism of Bistritsa Babi is a clear example of heritage production within (and for the purpose of) a particular marketing niche, and at the same time, looking from the perspective of the Bistritsa Babi themselves, it represents a rather successful mode of so-called strategic essentializing.

Similarly as in many other villages throughout Bulgaria, Bistritsa Babi are actually a part of a folklore group established in Bistritsa after the Second World War, in 1949, based on the pre-war activities.²⁹ For decades, together with the male members of the group, they nurtured songs and dances canonized as typical for their local region, and the older women in the group, indeed, were the main knowers and practitioners of the old singing style.

²⁸ See <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00095>> (18 January 2014).

²⁹ My insights are based on field research conducted during the participation of the folklore group “Bistritsa” at the International Folklore Festival in Zagreb in 2003, 2009 and 2010, as well as on the material they gave to the festival organizers on these occasions. On the other side, I base my arguments on ethnomusicological literature on Bulgarian music, in particular on an article by Donna A. Buchanan. Bistritsa’s polyphony (so-called interferential diaphony) is analyzed in detail in G. F. Messner, *Die Schwebungsdiaphonie in Bistrice: Untersuchungen der mehrstimmigen Liedformen eines mittelwestbulgarischen Dorfes*. Hans Schneider, Tutzing, 1980. As for the name Bistritsa, it is adjusted to English from the Bulgarian *Bistrice*. This is an additional detail that speaks in favor of Bistrice’s globalization.

This is, after all, the case with many folklore groups in Bulgaria and elsewhere. However, an important difference in relation to a number of other folklore groups in Bulgaria, in addition to their indisputable musical mastery, can be attributed more to their tight contacts with researchers, various folklore experts and festival organizers (who, of course, had the power to promote them in broader society), what happened partly by chance, partly due to tourist initiatives that developed in the village in the meantime, partly due to the closeness and good connections with the Bulgarian capital. As such, the Bistritsa folklore group, inclusive of both men and women, and older and younger members, already starting from the 1960s and especially the 1970s, had frequently participated at folklore festivals throughout Bulgaria and also abroad, presenting their local heritage as an example of unique Bulgarian heritage.



Fig. 2: Folklore group “Bistritsa” at the International Folklore Festival in Zagreb, 2010. Photo by Davor Šiftar, reproduced (courtesy of the Festival).

The turn towards a unique Bulgarian women’s heritage happened in the second half of the 1980s, hand in hand with the broader process of commodification and marketing of Bulgarian ‘mysterious’ voices. These were voices of women from professional folkloric choirs, in particular the women’s choir of the Bulgarian State Radio and Television, which were featured the most prominently on two groundbreaking editions: *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* vol. 1 and 2 (1987, 1988). As emphasized by Donna Buchanan, who analyzed the development of the *Le Mystère* frenzy in detail, “the artistic and commercial success of these albums was phenomenal; *LMVB*, Volume 1 reached *Billboard’s* Top 200 chart, selling over 250,000 copies by 1991, while Volume 2 was awarded

the 1990 Grammy Award for Best Traditional Folk Performance.³⁰ Later on, the *Le Mystère* trend reached Bistritsa Babi, too. They separated – temporarily and situationally – from their male friends in the folklore group in order to accommodate the new craze for exotic female voices, marketed, as pointed out by Buchanan, “within discourses of feminine mysticism, ruralized authenticity, and cosmological phantasmagoria.”³¹ Bistritsa Babi and other Bulgarian performers became a part of “a larger marketing trend that looked to non-western and early music styles as exotic or ancestral sources of spiritualism for the postmodern era.”³²

And a decade later, Bistritsa Babi found their place among UNESCO’s masterpieces of intangible heritage. Besides the archaic style of singing with voices clashing and cutting one into another in narrow intervals, and *horo* circle dances, the wedding customs, *Lazarovden* and *Babin den* are especially emphasized. The custom of *Lazarovden* takes place on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, when on that occasion young girls dress as maidens for the first time, with richly adorned head pieces, go around the village, and greet the hosts of the houses they visit with wishes for health and fertility. The custom of *Babin den* (Granny’s day) is dedicated to elderly midwives and is intended to ensure the health of mothers and children – more specifically, through a ritual which ensures that the mother’s milk will flow like a river, the second one that protects a child against the dark forces, and the third one that strengthens grannies by pushing them into January’s ice cold river.

These then are the different faces of the same framework program: the *Le Mystère* trend, followed by UNESCO’s recognition. Bistritsa Babi capitalized on Western lust for unspoiled authenticity, which opened doors to them for travel and performances on international stages, brought various students of Bulgarian music and dance, and tourists in general to Bistritsa, and also attracted local girls and women to join the enterprise. As emphasized by UNESCO’s authorities, one of the main expected and usual outcomes of UNESCO’s recognition lies in the increased awareness of the values of traditional culture, and increased confidence and pride among inheritors and bearers to continue practicing their heritage. Indeed, to sing and dance in Bistritsa Babi is popular nowadays among Bistritsa girls

³⁰ Donna A. Buchanan, “Review Essay – Bulgaria’s Magical *Mystère* Tour: Postmodernism, World Music Marketing, and Political Change in Eastern Europe”, *Ethnomusicology* 41/1, 1997, pp. 131-157; p. 136.

³¹ Ivi, pp. 133-134.

³² Ivi, p. 152.

and young women, and some of them are starting to develop a kind of career as Bistritsa singers and music instructors. Thereby the phenomenon of Bistritsa Babi seems to be an example of women's empowering, which, on one hand, is strongly embedded in essentializing, while on the other hand uses such essentialized images to help their positioning within today's global cultural flows. But still, what is clearly visible, overlooking the unquestionable mastery of their music-making, is the image of feminine mysticism and the toughness of patriarchy.

Towards a New Trajectory

Gender was highlighted and was a recurring topic at the last, 8th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which is the leading operative organ of the 2003 Convention, and which, among other tasks, decides on inscriptions on the lists. Informed and influenced by the audit and recommendations of UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service, the Committee recalled "the importance of gender and generational roles and responsibilities in the practice, safeguarding and transmission of intangible cultural heritage",³³ it commended states parties "for increasingly addressing the gender aspects of intangible cultural heritage" and requested the Secretariat to "revise all relevant documents and forms ... to include gender-specific guidance and questions".³⁴ An appreciation of gender equality was especially accentuated in the nomination of Viennese horsemanship and the Spanish Riding School. In their attempt to convince the Committee to inscribe the element on the Representative List regardless of the unfavorable recommendation by the evaluation body, the Austrian delegates emphasized that the Spanish Riding School is of utmost importance for the people and a vivid part of their culture, which they corroborated by a recent success, namely the admission of female evelles to the school.³⁵ This persuasion, however, did not bear fruit.

³³ See Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. 2013. "Decisions: 8th Session, Baku, Azerbaijan, 2-7 December 2013". Decision 6.a/11.

<<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00692>>, (18 January 2014).

³⁴ Ivi, Decision 8/7; Decision 5.c.1/11.a.

³⁵ In the nomination file, it is stated that "in September 2008 the Spanish Riding School put an end to an endless gender discussion and admitted the first two female riders. Since then these two young women have been joined by four more and now make up the majority of the elevelle group. With this decision the principle of equality was enforced" <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/download.php?versionID=20578>>.

Among the elements that the Committee decided to inscribe in the Representative List (25 in total), women are the most prominent in the Imzad music and poetry of the Tuareg communities in Algeria, Mali and Niger. The governments of these three countries anticipate that the inscription will contribute to the enhancement of the status of women, including the raising of their living standards and economic promotion through the development of craftsmanship and tourism.³⁶ Along the same line, the importance of women for the practice and transmission of Imzad received a prominent place in the Committee's decision as well as in the speech of thanks by the representatives of three countries after the proclamation.³⁷ However, the whole nomination file, as well as the accompanying video and photographs, reveal some additional emphases and possible readings. For instance, it appears that although the musical instrument (*imzad*) is built and played exclusively by women, the songs are composed, recited or sung mostly by men. Or, it appears that a revival project initiated in Mali in 2009 leaned on the expertise of a male musician, who identified a dozen women to be organized into workshops and trained them. Or, among other functions and meanings, according to the writers of the nomination file, the instrument "glorifies the qualities of honesty and bravery of men who are seen as heroes", and "the music establishes the traditional status and role of women as earth mothers."³⁸ Accordingly, it seems as if the new top-down demand to highlight the importance of gender dynamics and women's contributions has resulted in certain exaggerations concerning the actuality of women's practices and anticipated future benefits for them.

Besides such an (over)emphasized centrality of women, the new gender awareness finds its reflection in the emphasis given to the harmonious sharing between men and women in terms of their equal authority over an element and participation in its performance. This appears in the 'regardless of gender' or 'both women and men' and similar wordings, and is present in short descriptions of several elements proclaimed in 2013. Such

³⁶ Cf. sections 1/v, 2/iii and 3.b/ii in the nomination file <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/download.php?versionID=20738>>. The craftsmanship is mentioned because women build the instrument.

³⁷ See Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. 2013. "Decisions: 8th Session, Baku, Azerbaijan, 2-7 December 2013". Document ITH-13-8.COM-Decisions-EN; 8.2/R.1-R.2. <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00692>>.

³⁸ See section 1/iv, as well as sections 1/i-ii, 3.a and 4.c in the nomination file.

.....

assertions are mostly but not always justified by data provided in the nomination files. Thus, for instance, an Armenian epic-telling art (proclaimed in the previous, 2012 cycle), allegedly, “has no gender, age or professional limitations”. The same wording appears in the short description and the nomination file, without any additional information, but the accompanying video and available literature do not support such a statement. Rather, akin to the case of Imzad, it appears as if the general politics of gender equality and gender inclusiveness prevailed over reality on the ground.

Another imaginable variant of sharing between men and women – one that would manifest itself through paying equal attention and respect to different roles or activities of men and women, without giving preference to either of them – has not appeared up to now. Namely, despite a new trajectory of gender awareness, it is always such that elements are either completely undiscriminating, inclusive of both men and women on an equal ground, or that one gender runs the show, while the other is non-existent, invisible, on the very margin or, at best, plays an auxiliary role. In other words, there are no elements where one gender would do things which are generally considered (i.e., canonized) as valuable, while the other gender would simultaneously do other things which – informed by a new gender awareness – would be understood and interpreted as equally valuable, depending on the perspective. Not to mention the differences within gender groups that would spread beyond a customary age and marital differentiations, which are also non-existent.³⁹ An awareness of various perspectives and complex identity positions stands as a challenge for the future. But there is no doubt that already at present, equipped with the navigation kit delivered from the cruise ship of UNESCO at large, the program of intangible cultural heritage on a global scale has started to sail away from the land of exclusively cultural belonging and patriarchal dominance towards a promised land of human rights, gender equality and economic benefits, hopefully for the well-being of all people involved.

³⁹ It is perhaps needless to say that the heterosexual matrix, too, is not challenged at all, neither in the programmatic documents, nor in the nomination files.

Non-Formal Educational Methodology as a Tool for Emancipatory and Feminist Thought

Karmen Špiljak

In a bit over 10 years of my work as a non-formal trainer and educator, I've often wondered how different structures affect knowledge and power relations and how to challenge them. In this time, I've experienced many educational moments that got me thinking about the effect of educational approaches on learning processes.¹ These moments often included reading academic texts, discussing structural discrimination and feminism, explaining the necessity for women-only groups, and so on. When I reflect on my entire educational path, I realised it was these moments that shaped my political and feminist thoughts much more than anything else I experienced in formal educational settings. It made me wonder what it was that made such a difference.

The majority of my work as an educator/trainer in non-formal education is connected to political and civic education in NGO environments.² However, I have also run workshops in high schools. When I compared the level of engagement and understanding of participants in formal and non-formal settings, I observed a difference that resembled my own experience. A lot of learners who were previously passive, not interested or disruptive, behaved differently when they were involved in non-formal learning. Could it really be that such an obvious difference

¹ Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

² UNESCO International standard classification of education ISCED, Paris, UNESCO, 1997.

was produced only by engagement through more active methods? It was this change in students' reaction and involvement in the non-formal approach compared with the formal approach that got me digging deeper into the subject.³

I take my experience as a starting point for further reflection and initiatives to explore the connection between educational methodology and the production of feminist knowledge. My reflection on the current production of feminist knowledge in the classrooms is strongly linked to a re-evaluation of power relations and knowledge. Even though it is important to deconstruct master narratives, to reveal the white supremacy behind them and to bring out racist and sexist colonial tendencies, it is equally important to examine the tools that are used in educational processes. A closer look will show that the methodology used still largely reproduces oppressive teacher-student hierarchies. What I would like to propose is that the development of feminist and emancipatory thought is possible through a non-formal educational approach that is rooted in Paulo Freire's groundbreaking work: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.⁴ I would like to start my analysis of educational methodology and emancipatory thought by asking some key questions: what are the main roles in educational processes? Who defines knowledge and how? What is the flow of knowledge?

One of my key interests is the role of methodology. I am not trying to propose that methodology is or should be the essence of education, nor that it is a magic wand that can do away with all structural inequalities and oppression. I see methodology as a tool for the development of educational processes: it cannot be a solution for everything, but it can and should be a part of some solutions. When designing educational processes in non-formal education, choosing the method is usually the very last step in the planning process. It happens only after the educator has set the goals and objectives, examined the group dynamics, conditions of time and space and the educational flow. The role and purpose of methods is to support the goals and objectives. Often they are used to solve difficulties or problems in the group, such as domination, language problems, bad group dynamics, tiredness, and so on. Though methods are the last thing to be chosen, they're usually the first thing to be noticed.

³ Helen Colley, Phil Hodgkinson, Janice Malcom, *Informality and formality in learning: a report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre, Learning and Skills Research Centre, London, 2003.*

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York, 2005.

I would like to explore the use of non-formal educational methodology that is situated in the contemporary non-formal educational framework, as well as its potential to break down traditional formal educational hierarchies, environments, structures and methodologies. My search for the connections between methods and the (un)planned outcomes of educational processes is guided by questions that connect the learner to the educational processes. When thinking about the effects of educational methodology, I want to examine how they affect learners in several different aspects:

- developing self-awareness and identity,
- understanding and reproducing power structures,
- positioning one's own reality within a broader context,
- developing critical thinking,
- empowering marginalised and discriminated groups.

But first, I would like to take a step back and return to Paulo Freire's notes on "banking education", which I still find very pertinent and contemporary.⁵ A close examination of formal educational processes shows that no matter how flexible the system, existing hierarchies still gravely affect our perception of knowledge. In his analysis of formal education, Freire concluded that the role of teachers is active (to deposit knowledge) while the role of students is passive (to accept the same knowledge). This process, as he noted, reproduces existing oppressive structures that serve the interests of the oppressors. The act of education is therefore reduced to the mechanical repetition of given information. Freire described how such an educational approach affects people:

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their "humanitarianism" to preserve a profitable situation.⁶

⁵ Paulo Freire, *Education for critical consciousness*, Continuum, New York, 2005.

⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, cit., p. 73.

Most of Freire's findings still stand today. The typical Western class environment indicates a hierarchical division between teachers and students. The formal educational approach in schools and universities leaves little space for the development of emancipatory and feminist thinking. In the framework of Western formal public education, knowledge is situated outside of the reality of each individual, and the individual is situated outside of the subject matter of knowledge. Not much effort is made to establish a connection on how a certain piece of information given in school relates to the learner and her-his world.⁷

A gap that results from this lack of connection is one of the key elements in the individual's disconnection from society. She_he will not understand the purpose of learning and will see it as the absorbing of information. Consequently she_he will eventually stop trying to understand the purpose or challenge the reasons, and will instead adapt to the passive role of following. Freire describes this as the "changing of consciousness": "Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated."⁸

Bridging the gap between knowing and understanding is crucial for the production of emancipatory thought and knowledge; but additional pressure to comply with formal methodology is applied through the professor-student ratio (1:30, in universities even 1:200 or more) and the examination of knowledge by grading systems. While the professor-student ratio makes it harder to manage educational processes due to the high numbers of students, grades establish additional hierarchies among the students. In most cases testing of knowledge is planned in such a way that it examines the student's lack of knowledge rather than the scope of it. This leads to the further alienation of learning subjects from the knowledge itself.

By encouraging competition, uncritical consciousness and the passive consumption of knowledge/information, formal educational structures imprint the students with the basic values and skills of the capitalist system. Thus, students are robbed of essential tools for emancipatory thinking – e.g. tools to understand gendered realities and class consciousness. Though

⁷ I use the form 'she_h'e as a grammatical form that also leaves space () for the gendered definitions beyond dualism.

⁸ Freire, cit., p. 74.

the system affects all students, its scope depends on the student's class/gender/skin colour/sexuality/religion. In terms of sex and gender, the banking concept of education merely reproduces the existing power structures that benefit the most socially privileged groups: those who are socialised to exercise power and control. It doesn't empower women and marginalised groups for active participation: it tells them they either have to compete ruthlessly or remain at the back.

Freire's alternative to the banking concept of education is the 'problem-posing concept'. The problem-posing approach deconstructs rigid hierarchies and empowers oppressed groups through a redefinition of knowledge and its distribution. Knowledge ceases to be situated outside the individual, but is placed within the individual and rooted deeply in the student's and the teacher's socio-cultural environment. Experience, previously disqualified as non-objective, becomes one of the sources of knowledge.

This switch causes a change in paradigm, namely that every subject with experience becomes a subject of knowledge while knowledge is defined as a process, not the product. Rather than offering information to fill students' heads or giving the 'right' answers, the problem-posing approach aims at giving students tools to critically examine information and connect it to everyday reality. Because knowledge is produced on both sides, now teachers as well as students become learners. When educational processes stop being product-focused, they start disconnecting from capitalist values. Furthermore, knowledge ceases to be a mere tool for class mobility and becomes an emancipatory act that enables the individual to position her/himself within a broader social, political, cultural and historical context.

A similar approach to education can be found within the contemporary non-formal educational framework, which does away with traditional formal educational hierarchies, environments, structures and methodologies. There are at least three reasons for this: firstly it is non-formality itself. There are no agreed-upon standardised measures to evaluate the quality of non-formal education and compare it at the international level.⁹ This gives the non-formal approach a certain freedom and flexibility to develop and implement learner-focused processes. Learners can evaluate the educational process on a daily basis, while

⁹ Florin Popa, *Youthpass and recognition essays: Recognition of non-formal learning in Europe: Challenges and opportunities*, Jugend für Europa, Salto-Youth, <<https://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/downloads/>>.

educators examine the feedback and adapt the sessions and flow accordingly. This gives participants a sense of active involvement in the process and a sense of empowerment to be able to affect and change things. Secondly, it is completely voluntary and normally doesn't lead to certification, putting knowledge for the sake of knowledge in the foreground. And thirdly, the ratio between educator/facilitator and participants is 1:15-20, depending on the context and methods: when using open space, the ratio can be bigger, but in most cases there would be at least 2 educators per a group of 20-30 participants.

Instead of using a typical classroom setting, non-formal educational processes are conducted in non-formal settings (e.g. chairs in a circle without tables, outside, on the floor without chairs) and using non-formal methods. The difference made by the change in setting is much bigger than I expected. This was especially visible with participants that were used to more formal environments and communication based on speeches and presentations. The simple removal of tables and lectern disrupted the space and consequently changed the behaviour participants related to that space. Because it was disruptive for all of them (for some more than for others) and they had no established protocol of behaviour attached to the new setting, they were all in a more or less equally confusing situation.

This means that those who were used to communicating through political speeches or presentations had to adopt to new methods of discussing, while those who usually stayed in the background and didn't want to expose themselves needed to play a more active role. As a result more people were empowered to speak, when not being under pressure of exposing themselves physically and taking the position of 'the knower'. It means that with the use of different methods (silent discussion, fish tank, drawing...) eventually everyone was able to express her_his opinion, despite possible language or other difficulties.

Working in small groups (4-6 people), using experiential learning methodologies (e.g. simulation games) and dynamic methods of discussion disrupts power-relations and challenges the exchange, expression and development of opinions in a participatory way. Emancipatory non-formal educational methodology is largely based on extracting and sharing participants' knowledge and experience,¹⁰ and using it as a starting point for reflection and in

¹⁰ It would be unfair to claim that all non-formal education is automatically emancipatory, as it is often also used to promote business skills and capitalist values.

final connection with participants' realities.¹¹ Though it cannot be used for all subjects equally, it remains a valuable tool of learning. The experiential learning cycle (see Figure 1) grounds the learning process in experience, which is either recalled or acted out through a common activity. The process continues with reflections about that experience and generalisations of key findings. The next step is relating new information to one's own realities, and reflecting on the application of the new knowledge in life.

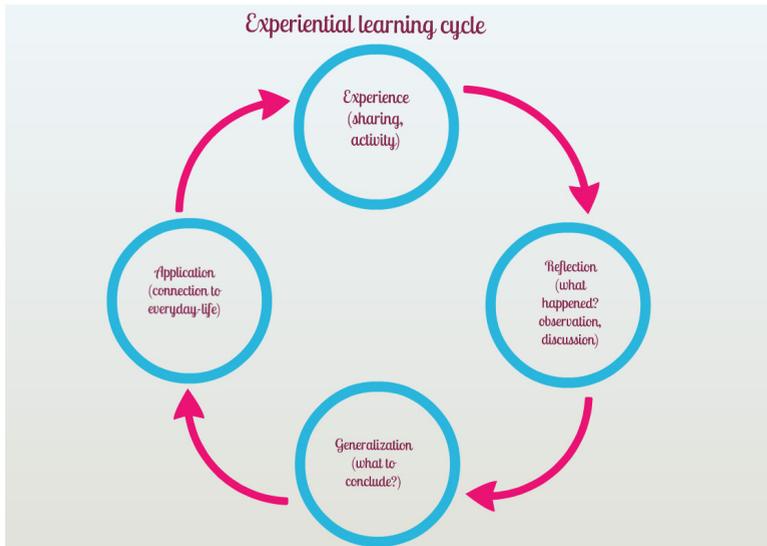


Fig. 1: David Kolb's experiential learning cycle in graphical representation by K. Špiljak.

Non-formal methodology is also successful in tackling the use of “domination techniques”.¹² Interrupting; long monologues; ignoring; ridiculing; face-palming; sexist/racist/homophobic jokes and so on can be challenged directly and reflected upon. Additionally, strong facilitation can tackle unequal time distribution and power-relations. Part of the success in combating domination techniques lies also in smaller groups, which make it much easier to notice, address and tackle the issues, bringing about a bigger awareness and deeper understanding of the

¹¹ Brenda Bell, John Gaventa, John Peters, Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (eds.), *We make the road by walking, Conversations on Education and Social Change*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1990.

¹² Cf. “Domination techniques: what they are and how to combat them”, The Centre for Gender Equality, Norway, 2001; <http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/daphnetoolkit/files/projects/2002_181/int_domination_techniques_norway.pdf>.

problem. Once awareness about domination techniques is raised, anyone in the group can challenge their use.

In today's discourse about the production of knowledge, there are debates on how open the current educational structures are to the development of feminist and emancipatory thought, whether they empower oppressed groups to become active participants and to what extent they reproduce existing power relations. Large proportions of these debates focus on inclusion/exclusion of feminist perspectives in the educational texts. There is, however, a lack of discussion on how feminist and emancipatory practices could be strengthened by changing the educational methodology and the material conditions of current educational practices, not just within schools, but also within feminist educational environments. Still, much more space is given to the exchange of information than to the exchange of opinions in discussion.

It is often the case that formal structures and settings are used in feminist gatherings, conferences and seminars. In feminist classrooms the space for debate and challenging opinions is much more open than in classical schools, nevertheless a classroom remains a classroom and brings into action all of the formality of the setting and the implied structural hierarchies (tables, lectern, microphone). Power structures reveal themselves when observing who is speaking and for how long, what kind of domination techniques are being used and by whom, who facilitates discussions and how, what is the ratio between space given to inputs and dialogue and how many opportunities for structured feedback are included in the official program. Often, the case would be that a less formal and more friendly setting didn't automatically deconstruct power relations between professors and students. It was still professors who got to speak more and paid less attention to who was speaking and how long, while it was still mostly students who noticed this kind of things but didn't feel empowered to challenge them on the spot. The mere fact that students didn't challenge them reflects the adopted powerless position of the passive learner.

Formal settings and structures empower only the empowered to take active part, while they leave little space for an open discussion in which to develop a deeper understanding of the issue. Knowledge thus becomes an individualised process, and understanding of a subject matter is left to each individual participant. A deeper understanding, that comes through sharing and discussion of different perspectives within the group, is left to the few eager enough to do it in their free time.

My understanding of an emancipatory education is largely based on active participation and breaking down the oppressive structures that don't permit, let alone encourage real dialogue. Emancipatory education means stepping away from the concept of teaching and moving closer to the concept of education that goes both ways. It would probably be unrealistic and perhaps unnecessary to expect that all feminist educational practices be based on non-formal concepts and methodologies, or that non-formal methodologies would automatically solve the oppressiveness of the structure. It is, however, necessary to examine if and how the feminist classroom actively fosters and encourages dialogue, and change it accordingly. In the words of Audre Lorde: "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House."¹³ An educational methodology that perpetuates hierarchic teacher/student relations, and that creates a space where a dialogue of equals is not encouraged or possible at all, is the master's tool; therefore it is important that we recognise it as such and strive to change it.

¹³ Audre Lorde, *Sister outsider*, Crossing Press, Berkley, 2007, pp. 110-114.

**Three Key Words in
Transnational Feminism:
Ethics, Politics and
Critique**

Politics and Ethics in Feminist Knowledge Production from the Perspective of Literary Studies

Vita Fortunati

In this part of my contribution, I try to demonstrate how women criticism interested in transnational literatures, highlight the importance of ethics in its methodology. In discussing the centrality of ethics, these critics enter the debate with Levinas, the philosopher who stresses the supremacy of ethics over philosophy. The concepts of ‘responsibility’, ‘justice’ and ‘proximity’ to the other are taken up by those women who underline how, in the dialogue with women who belong to different political and historical contexts, attention is central, implying, as it does, different ways of being.

Being responsible means to be willing to answer the other, and for the other, in a disinterested inter-relationship. Talking to the other, then, becomes something more than simply talking or speaking to the other; it implies seeing otherwise. In his illuminating pages on the iconicity of the face, Levinas states that being aware of the other, speaking to the other, and meeting the face of the other, are anchored in an indissoluble manner. Answering is becoming responsible; becoming responsible is to respond. In this sense, and only in this sense, speaking becomes “dialogue”.¹

Women highlight not only the importance of being humble when approaching the other, but also the needed willingness to

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Linggi, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1969.

understand the other. They, indeed, underline how fundamental is this new way of relating to the other, with feelings and the sphere of affection gaining immense value. The thought of 'how' to relate compels one's gaze to widen, forcing constant and thorough reassessment; the thought of 'how' to relate obliges forgotten thoughts to be remembered, encouraging the emergence both of implications and of misunderstandings embedded in daily actions. According to this perspective, the thought of 'how' means to know things, but also to 'perceive' and to 'feel' them, that is, to practice them with affection. Women critics underline that, in the dialogue with women belonging to other cultures, it is not sufficient to know them; what is to be emphasised is the importance of a 'new ethics'. This is, indeed, an innovative aspect, since a new ethics, as they articulate it, does not mean being focused on the self but on the willingness to listen to the other. It does not mean the imposition of our thoughts over them, but our attentive understanding of their 'other' imaginings. In truth, the concept of proximity relies on feelings, the fundamental ingredients that build up this new dialogue among different feminisms.

If, in the past, women critics in dialogue with other feminisms used to stress the concept of 'situated knowledge', there is nowadays an increased attention to ethics and to the sphere of affection. In this sense, the features of the production of feminist thought and its scholarship are re-visited, or better, re-visioned: the actions of knowing and reading are not enough. As Levinas underlines, true reading should always presuppose a mode of being which is not focussed on itself but ready to open itself up to the other, to the emergence of other thoughts and different voices. Reading must, in fact, bring the world of others into my own. Only in this way can reading subvert, from its very foundations, the assumption that the world is one; only in this way will reading not limit itself to exterior and functional relationships.

The concepts we are trying to foreground appear very interestingly in the book edited by Françoise Lionnet and by Shu-mei Shi on minor transnationalism. In their introduction, the authors underline that, in order to study what has been defined as "minor transnationalism", it is necessary to abandon the vertical perspective, where a group is hierarchically put in a higher position, and to find the transversal one.² We should not think of the binary opposition of center versus periphery; differently, we need

² Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction", in F. Lionnet and S. Shih (eds.), *Minor Transnationalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2005, p. 8.

to underline the relationships among minor transnationalisms. It is the reason why the model of 'rhizome' proves useful to understand the new geography ("The Third Space", as defined by Azade Seyhan)³ born out of the migratory flows and diasporas experienced by contemporary communities'. The rhizome encourages the building up of lateral 'networks' among minority groups. Our new planetary geography is not founded on hierarchy or vertical structures, that imply, in order to gain citizenship or recognition, the incorporation of minor communities into major ones. For historical reasons, politics of resistance among ethnic communities have prevailed over solidarity, thus preventing international 'minority alliances'.

The women critics who are ready to operate in this field of research, must constantly challenge the founding paradigms of Western culture, learning to be taught by women who have different life-stories and experiences. Such willingness is evident in the essay by Susan Stanford Friedman where she hopes that women find not only new transnational theories and methodologies, but also the opening up of their archives: "I ask that we widen the archive out of which we theorize about narrative, that is, move outside our comfort zones, engage with narratives and narrative theories from around the world."⁴ The relationship with the other comes back in more complex terms when migratory flows stratify and complicate the very concepts of ethnicity, race and citizenship: "...the fluidity and complexity of our transnational moment, where migration, travel, and diaspora can no longer be clearly distinguished by intention and duration, nor by national citizenship and belongings."⁵ From a methodological point of view, what Shu-mei Shih tells about 'the affect' that results in the meeting of the other, is very important: "...the prominence of affect as a subjective expression of desire, feeling, and emotions in discursive and political encoding of difference". The importance lies in the fact that all this has a direct effect on the relationship with the other:

The key to transnational communication is the ability and willingness to situate oneself in both ones' position and the other's

³ Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2001, pp. 3-21.

⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman, "Towards Transitional Turn in Narrative Theory: Literary Narratives, Travelling Tropes and the case of Virginia Woolf and the Tagore", *Narrative*, 19, January 2011, p. 24.

⁵ Shu-mei Shi, "Toward an Ethics of Transnational Encounters", in *Minor Transnationalism*, cit., p. 74.

position, whether on the plane of gender, historical context, or discursive paradigms The challenge before us is how to imagine and construct a mode of transnational encounter that can be “ethical” in the Levinasian sense of non reductive consideration of the other, for which the responsibility of the self towards the other determines the ethicality of the relationship.⁶

Women scholars refer to Levinas because, in his thought, the other is never reduced to a mere object of knowledge, and subjectivity is defined in terms of the heteronomy present in the other. The importance of the dialogue takes into consideration the history of colonization and the political-social spaces where imperialism happens. Only in this way can we think of a transnational politics based on interaction, communication and representation. The importance of ethics on the behaviour women should assume towards the other, makes them aware that, in the dialogue and in the exchange, one limit is to adopt “a monistic perspectival narrowness in scholarship”. Women propose a transversal and transpositional politics, where being ethical is able to shift position towards the other, towards many others, beyond the binary logic of First World hegemony and Third World nationalism. This politics is sustained by the idea that the Third World might have a predominant role in the political, social and cultural transformation of the world.

Similarly to the ethical position of writers and critics, translators too, as G. C. Spivak underlines, should follow an ethical-political direction, in the awareness of the difficulty of translating cultural specificities.⁷ Spivak calls for a “third ear”, which can expand the reader’s capacity to listen to, and transcend, the limitations of hyphenation and hybridity, so as to be able to create meanings opening up new possibilities of community and culture beyond boundaries. Today the notion of ‘cultural translation’ should be widened into ‘transnational translation’, where the awareness of cultural differences makes clear our need to mediate and relocate ourselves as critics.

Scholars have affirmed that, since the dreadful tragedy of 9/11, a new phase has been entered, in which, contrary to the tenets of postmodernism, it prevails a narrative marked by a sense of responsibility. After 9/11, against the enormity and terrible novelty of this tragedy, a certain type of postmodernism, with its jocular

⁶ Ivi, p.100.

⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Politics of Translation”, in V. Lawrence (ed.), *The Translation Studies*, Routledge, London, 2000 [1992].

manner, ostentatious irresponsibility and deconstructive frenzy, appears frivolous. This 'new era' is focused on the concept of responsibility; it is the reason why "a narrative of responsibility" emerges as well.⁸ With this term, as Maurizio Ascari affirms, we do not want to identify a literary genre but, rather, a trend whose specificity consists of its performative dimension. The relationship this type of narrative sets up between the author and the reader, requires them to answer both cognitively and emotionally to the ethical and aesthetic complexity it lays down. In the era of globalization, these 'narratives of responsibility' offer a significant model of reading because they explore conflicts and traumas. They underline the importance of literature and, mainly, of language as privileged instruments of mutual understanding, atonement and reconciliation. They also provide the reader with priceless psychological tools to relate to the other, suggesting we should keep our ego's boundaries permeable and flexible. Finally, they suggest each and every one of us should play an active role in establishing ethical values in our contemporary society.

In women's criticism, a central concept is that literature, in a period where the logic of capitalism prevails, becomes the place where ethical values are set against the logic of global financial capitalism and American pragmatism.⁹ Similarly, Emily Apter proposes a model of comparative transnationalism that contrasts the idea of a monoculture perpetuated by globalism and by the logics of capitalism.¹⁰ In his study, Michael Cronin talks of a "transnational history of translation" where "it is no longer possible to limit histories of translation to literary phenomena within the boundaries of the nation-state."¹¹ According to these perspectives, what is affirmed in *Writing Outside the Nation* by Azade Seyhan, who follows the line of Arjun Appadurai, is central: literature and imagination are fundamental tools to understand "displacement, disorientation and agency in the contemporary world."¹² The writings by migrant women constitute a testimony where, through autobiographical forms (life-narratives), women

⁸ Maurizio Ascari, "Introduction", *Literature of the global age*, McFarland Company, Jefferson, North Carolina and London, 2011, pp. 5-37; Stephen Burn, *Jonathan Franzen and the End of Postmodernism*, Continuum, London, 2008.

⁹ David Palumbo-Liu, "Rational and Irrational Choices: Form, Affect, and Ethics", in *Minor Transnationalisms*, cit., pp. 41-73.

¹⁰ Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006.

¹¹ Michael Cronin, *Translation and Identity*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 23.

¹² Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, cit., pp. 7-10.

express their feelings, experiences in exile, and lives, in other and new countries.

Women critics spotlight the function of literature as a trigger to our imagination, the opening for us of alternative worldviews. The ‘narratives of responsibility’ often take the form of life-narratives and autobiographies, because they provide a useful documentation to explain the complexity of our current situation, characterised by rapid evolution and, mainly, by new geographical configurations where the European space is marked by a proliferation of micro-contact zones between intra and extra-cultures which have been brought into contact by migration. These narratives recount the present by means of memory, because there is no identity or future without memory. This is true at the individual level, and on the collective plane, since controversial, divided memories – for example, the recollections of those people who have experienced a conflict – risk to replicate, if and when they are not elaborated, the vicious circle of destruction.

The importance of the ‘narratives of responsibility’ also foregrounds the role played by emotions at the cognitive level, and their impact at an ethical level.¹³ In this sense, with their analysis of the human condition, they explore the emotional dimensions of conflicts and traumas, offering a significant point of view on the recent events that loom largely in our collective imagination, such as the War in Afghanistan, the Gulf War, or global terrorism. As Rosalia Baena states, life-writing follows a complex dynamic of cultural production: “where aesthetic concerns and the choice and manipulation of form serve as signifying aspects to experiences and subjectivities.”¹⁴ Autobiographical writings are forms of identity construction, essential to negotiate ‘transculturality’.

In conclusion, I would like to present the important examples of two migrant women choosing to use the Italian language in their novels: the Albanian novelist Ornella Vorpsi, and the Moldavian journalist Lilia Bicec. These women left their countries for different reasons: the former due to political problems,

¹³ Drawing on her experience, Martha Nussbaum describes the death of her mother in a New York hospital, while she was lecturing in Dublin. The news caused her a crushing grief, and a deep sense of guilt due to her absence from her mother’s death bed. This autobiographical passage marks the beginning of the reappraisal of emotions as a fundamental factor in our lives and as a guiding light that directs our ethical judgements. Cf. M. Nussbaum, *The Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, and New York, 2003.

¹⁴ Rosalia Baena, “Introduction”, in R. Baena (ed.), *Transculturating Auto/ Biography. Forms of Life Writing*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, p. VII.

the latter for economic reasons. Ornella Vorpsi is a writer, a photographer and a painter; Lilia Bicec used to be a journalist, but, in order to survive as an illegal immigrant in Italy, she worked as a charwoman and a nanny.

Ornela Vorpsi writes novels where her painful autobiographical experiences - attending school under the dictatorship of Enver Hoxa, and breathing in a reality of abuse - of power, oppression, and violence, surface again and again. Here, reality and fiction blend, and the themes are those of feeling alien, lonely and nostalgic. Vorpsi's relationship with Albania is ambivalent, in-between hate and love. Hate is related to the feeling that Albania is a country of abuses, injustices and pains, a State art of propaganda where the author could not develop her artistic potentialities. On the other hand, she strongly feels nostalgic for her country, its food and drinks (the Albanian grappa or *raki*, called 'salep'), a deep nostalgia that once came upon her when walking through the shops of rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis in Paris: "I remembered with nostalgia and tenderness that the infusion of this powder had an exquisite smell, worthy of *One and a Thousand Nights*."¹⁵ Albania is like a wound that cannot heal, a weight or a burden persistently carried in Vorpsi's body and mind. The form she chooses to recount her experiences is the fragment, a technique which suits well her memory going back and forth in time.

Miei cari figli, vi scrivo (Dear children, I write to you) is the novel Lilia Bicec published in Italian, in the form of letters she wrote, but never sent, to her children.¹⁶ She writes these letters to find relief from the solitude she feels in Italy, her children necessarily left behind. In these letters she describes the difficult and painful experiences of her arrival in Italy as an illegal immigrant. She deals with her feelings of alienation in a country that, at first, is hostile to her condition of illegality, and, together, her difficulties in communicating in Italian. At the same time, Lilia is a woman who does not let herself be overwhelmed, deciding to build a life for herself and her children. This is why, once she finds a job, she starts studying once again, teaching herself Italian, and above all, keeping on reading any moment of her free time. She reads, she writes to her children, and she tells them the story, for example, of their grandparents who endured the dreadful deportation to

¹⁵ "...con nostalgia e tenerezza mi sono ricordata che l'infusione di questa polvere aveva un delizioso profumo, degno delle *Mille e una notte*". Ornella Vorpsi, *La mano che non mordi*, Einaudi, Torino, 2007, p. 25.

¹⁶ Lilia Bicec, *Miei cari figli, vi scrivo*, Einaudi, Torino, 2013.

Siberia, when Russia ruled Moldova. In these letters, we are made acquainted with the history of Moldova, practically unknown to the Italian public. Lilia Bicec's novel, *Miei cari figli, vi scrivo* is an example of writing that bears witness to its therapeutic value for the writer, enabling her to understand how, through her experience of migrating to Italy, her identity has changed, undergoing a profound process of transformation. Distance enables her to understand how the relationship with her husband has never been founded on mutual esteem, and how hard work has meant the possibility of reconstructing her life and identity. This reconstruction has been the result of great pain: a year after their arrival to Italy, one of her two sons is killed in a car accident. The pain is immense, but Lilia survives, even founding a new and Italian companion; at the moment, she works in Brescia on behalf of the women who emigrate from Moldova.

These books have an ethical and political value. They are ethical in showing that prejudices existing in Italy against migrant women, often arise from the ignorance of other cultures and other histories; in these cases, the culture and the history of Albania and Moldova. Ignorance greatly influences our attitudes towards the people coming from other countries, conditioning the dialogue we might have with them. These are books where the main issue relates to an identity that is, at least, double, sometimes multiple, implying, as a consequence, a processual constitution that passes through painful experiences, and which can be reconstructed, in a strange twist, by writing in a language different from the mother tongue. Cultural nomadism does not mean the cutting out of roots of belonging, but rather the idea that, by passing through different cultures, identity is strengthened, accessing the critical capacity of building up a new future.

Transnational Perspectives in Feminist Studies: Minor Transnationalism and its Implications in the (Post)Yugoslav Context

Jasmina Lukić

At the beginning of the introduction to the volume entitled *Minor Transnationalisms* (2005), Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih reflect on the conditions of their professional encounter, emphasizing that an interdisciplinary framework was needed for them to meet and to start their cooperation.¹ It was an encounter at a conference, which prolonged into the lasting cooperation, even co-authorship. This small note is indicative in a number of ways. Picturing them in an engaging conversation, it keeps alive an important tradition in feminist writing, that of personalized criticism, bringing in front of us two real women, with their concrete personal and intellectual backgrounds, and their current locatedness. But it also points to interdisciplinary frameworks as important prerequisites for theoretical advancement, a liberating precondition for scholars and researchers to go beyond not only their disciplinary boundaries but also institutional limitations imposed by internal academic divisions and power relations. Finally, this meeting brought them to think about their own position with regards to existing power-structures, thus making them aware of the relevance of the so called 'minor' perspective: "Had we not met through an arbitrary gathering in a major metropolis, the seat of power, our minor orientations would have

¹ Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally", in F. Lionnet and S. M. Shih (eds.), *Minor Transnationalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2005, pp. 1-25.

remained invisible to each other. We realized, in retrospect, that our battles are always framed vertically, and we forget to look sideways to lateral networks that are not readily apparent.”²

Pointing to the current tendency to mainstream all minority discourses and to focus on their relations with the center rather than among themselves, Lionnet and Shih have decided to study “the relations between different margins.”³ In order to do that, they return to Deleuze and Guattari’s text on Kafka, where the concept of minor literature was introduced. Before them, Azade Seyhan has also taken Deleuze and Guattari and their concept of minor literature as a starting point for her theorization of translational literature.⁴ Lionnet and Shih, on the other hand, are not primarily interested in cultural production, but in the establishment of a more flexible as well as a more complex and comprehensive approach to the relations among various actors on the transnational scene.

Deleuze and Guattari have developed their theory of “minor literature” using Kafka’s work as their primary example. In their view, “[a] minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that it in language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization”. Such is the case of ‘Prague German’ used by Kafka, and such is the case of “what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language”.⁵ This dynamics of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ languages is of particular importance, because it dissociates the concept of ‘minor literature’ from that of ‘minority literature’: the two can be related, but not equated. ‘Minor literature’ is not necessarily focused on issues of ethnic identity, which is only one of numerous elements that come into play. Being ‘minor’ means being subversive, or, as Deleuze and Guattari would put it, being “revolutionary”:

The three characteristics of minor literature are deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific

² Ivi, p. 1.

³ Ivi, p. 2.

⁴ Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2001.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Translated by Dana Polan, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1986 [1975], pp. 16-17.

literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature.⁶

Speaking about a model of minor literature as described by Deleuze and Guattari, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih emphasize that it follows a traditional center/margin dyad, as it was theorized within the tradition of Derridean deconstruction:

The deconstructive procedure has the paradoxical effect of exercising the muscles of the European philosophical and literary tradition, which becomes even more complex and indeterminate for an infinite play of meanings. Critiquing the center, when it stands as an end in itself, seems only to enhance it; the center remains the focus and the main object of study. The deconstructive dyad center/margin thus appears to privilege marginality only to end up containing it. The marginal or the other remains a philosophical concept and the futuristic promise: the other never “arrives”, he or she is always “à venir”.⁷

To this dyadic structure Lyonnet and Shih oppose a concept of ‘minor transnationalism’, which combines Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘minor literature’ with the idea of transnational studies. This move is based upon an assumed difference between globalization studies and transnational studies; in the first case, the dyad logic is preserved, and globalization is seen as centripetal and centrifugal at the same time and assumes a universal core or norm. In the case of transnational studies, the focus is on a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation of the center. In that sense, transnational is “less scripted and more scattered.”⁸

Indeed, the higher level of diffusion in itself does not solve the problem of vertical power-relations and the dominance of the model ‘above and below’, as Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih perceive it in globalization studies. That is why they bring into the transnational the ‘minor’ or ‘minoritized perspective’: “What is lacking in the binary model of above-and-below, the utopic and the dystopic, and the global and the local is awareness and recognition of the creative interventions that networks of minorized cultures produce within and across national boundaries.”⁹

⁶ Ivi, p. 18.

⁷ Lionnet and Shih, cit., p. 3.

⁸ Ivi, p. 5.

⁹ Ivi, p. 7.

In opposition to the binary system of globalization studies, Lionnet and Shih propose the model of 'cultural transversalism', which offers a possibility to address productive dimensions of relations between minor and major cultural articulations:

The cultural transversalism also produces new forms of identification that negotiate with national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, thus allowing for the emergence of the minor's inherent complexity and multiplicity. New requirements of ethics become urgent, and expressions of allegiance are found in unexpected and sometimes surprising places; new literacies are created in non-standard languages, tonalities, and rhythms; and the co-presence of colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial spaces fundamentally blurs the temporal sequence of these moments.¹⁰

Starting from this last quote, I would like to argue that Lionnet and Shih's model of minor transnationalism is extremely useful for critical analysis of the regional context that we live in. Furthermore, I believe that it can be very useful in a number of debates which are going on simultaneously with regards to the region, its historical and current particularities, and various lines of (re)groupings that go on reproducing new regional identities and new regional minorities. Thus we can apply it to both Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav contexts in order to examine complex relations between various social groups, as well as various forms of minor's inherent complexity and multiplicity.

Applied, for example, to Yugoslav literature, minor transnationalism offers a framework for understanding the complex dynamics of both the creation and functioning of specific Yugoslav cultural space, where different national literatures did exist historically and were also institutionally supported. Yugoslav (cultural) space was formally divided into republics as administrative units with a high level of autonomy, bordering after 1974 on the prerogatives of nation states. This situation, together with distinct histories and cultural traditions, created somewhat different contexts for various national literatures within the common country. It was more visible in the cases of literatures written in clearly separate languages, like Slovenian and Macedonian, but the differences in the literary histories of Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian or Montenegrin literatures were also undeniable. At the same time, the shared experience of life in the common country and the shared cultural space created a common

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 8.

socio-political and socio-cultural context in which inherited and institutionally preserved internal (cultural) borders were seriously challenged, and often disregarded. Ješa Denegri's description of the scene, although aimed primarily at visual arts, also applies well to literature:

The concept of 'Yugoslav artistic space' implies a geographic region and political milieu in which occurred the artistic life of the 'second Yugoslavia' (1945-1991), at the same time polycentric and decentralized, and unified and integrated. It was polycentric and decentralized because it was created out of several cultural spaces and their capitals, former republics of the previous state which are now independent subjects; and it was unified and integrated since the unfolding of this life was bound by the numerous personal and institutional ties between many actors on the Yugoslav artistic scene of that time.¹¹

In such a context, mutual cultural relations between regional centers were often equally if not more important than relations with 'major' centers from global point of view. Similarly, in post-Yugoslav spaces minor transnationalism offers a model for understanding negotiations between various actors on the regional cultural scenes, from national to international and transnational ones.¹² Such negotiations are much needed, but not always easy and unproblematic. Facing the new requirements of ethics, these negotiations have to address the painful issues from the recent past which are still haunting the region, in the first place the responsibilities for war crimes and violence. They also have to offer much needed new alliances against continuous processes of marginalization of various social groups, which occur in the name of new political ideologies. In other words, we have persistently to address the fact that social divisions are in constant flux, and that new marginalized groups are produced all the time, based not only on national or ethnic, but also on class, gender and other axes of social oppression. The model of minor transnationalism can help us reflect on our own intellectual histories, regional alliances and cooperations, as well as about the issues we find most urgent to address. Feminist

¹¹ Ješa Denegri, "Unutar ili izvan 'socijalističkog modernizma'? Radikalni stavovi na jugoslovenskoj umetničkoj sceni 1950-70", in Irena Lukšić (ed.), *Šezdesete* [The Sixties]. Zagreb: Hrvatsko filološko društvo, 2007, pp. 47-48. The translation is mine.

¹² Cf. Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, "Transnational Migration", in *Studies*, M. Martiniello and J. Rath (eds.), *An Introduction to Migration*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2012, pp. 108-110.

knowledge production in the region has already done significant work to address many of these issues, but more is needed. And in the best tradition of transnationalism in feminist studies, the recent history of feminism in post-Yugoslav spaces can be also interpreted using the same model.

Returning to our central theme of feminist knowledge production, I would like to set this discussion of minor transnationalism into a somewhat larger frame. In her analysis of the current situation in academia, Martha Nussbaum speaks of an on-going crisis that, to a large extent, remains obscured, although it might prove to be devastating for the world of democracy in the long run.¹³ This is the crisis of the humanities, which in the world of marketization of knowledge are being more and more suppressed and devalued. The most significant consequence of this devaluation is the subsequent marginalization of critical thinking, which according to Nussbaum – and it is easy to agree with her here – is the prerequisite for democracy. As Nussbaum claims, the humanities are developing specific moral abilities in human beings, which are based upon an inborn capacity, but a capacity that requires to be developed through proper education. It is through the humanities that we develop a ‘moral imagination’ that has the ability to hear and appreciate narratives of the other, those who are different from us.

It is not difficult to see that the general trend of suppression of the humanities necessarily affects feminist knowledge production as well. Thus, it is not surprising that Nussbaum uses it as a particular example for conscious suppression of critical thinking at universities, referring to a congressman from Ohio who explicitly says that he would not fund women’s studies. Probably because he recognizes that women studies produce knowledge that changes the world, and which is necessarily subversive in that sense. Transnational feminism adds significantly to this subversive potential. Developing “transnational sensibility” which is both “a methodology and a mode of inquiry”,¹⁴ it contributes to a further

¹³ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for profit: why democracy needs the humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2010. See also Martha Nussbaum, “Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach”, 2013.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYfGDhbHUK>>, University of Chicago Law School, Published on Jun 27, 2013 (November 27 2013).

¹⁴ Silvia Schultersmandl, “Transnational Sensibility in Feminist Theory and Practice”, in M. S. D. Alexandru, M. Nicolaescu and H. Smith (eds.), *Between History and Personal Narrative: East European Women’s Stories of Migration in the New Millennium*, LIT Verlag, Vienna, 2013, p. 272.

development of the critical capacities of feminist theory, and thus to the critical capacities of humanities in a more general sense of the term.¹⁵

¹⁵ Cf. Jasmina Lukić, "The Transnational Turn, Comparative Literature and the Ethics of Solidarity: Engendering Transnational Literature", in M. S. D. Alexandru, M. Nicolaescu and H. Smith (eds.), *Between History and Personal Narrative: East European Women's Stories of Migration in the New Millennium*, LIT Verlag, Vienna, 2013, pp. 33-52.

Z. Bauman's Concept of Liquidity and Feminist Transnational Action in Higher Education: the Case of GEMMA

Sonia Fernández Hoyos and Adelina Sánchez Espinosa

Introduction

The field of Women's Studies has by nature a multidisciplinary composition as it collects a wide array of knowledges deriving from the exercise of many disciplines that come together by their finding in gender the transversal element to them all. It is, thus, a multiple field, where the generation of new knowledges is produced precisely because of the coming together, intersecting and eventually summing up of all the knowledges produced by the formerly individually isolated disciplines which now become invigorated by their coexistence, by their sharing of this new interdisciplinary space. In this paper we want to make the point that together with transdisciplinarity, transnationality is equally inherent in Women's Studies and that it is now the moment for feminist cooperative action which can use this transnational potential and take the discipline further into the construction of new transnational knowledges. These knowledges are, in our opinion, essential before the present situation of neoliberal destruction of the humanities and the blatant attack on critical thinking that is now taking place at national level all over the world. Our familiar local and national landscapes are becoming more and more elusive day by day. They are becoming hardly usable for the new situations that we are made to face by states that consider culture and the humanities an expendable unmarketable commodity. We are now before national spaces where even the masquerade of political correctness is wearing out

in spite of national protest, where the demands of the markets and the austerity of the 'crisis' are killing individual liberties. We are confronted with new places, like Spain, where we both come from. It is gradually becoming a grotesque distortion of the homeland we once felt comfortable with, an alien setting where dearly achieved rights such as the rights to abortion, to free education or health for all, to non-confessional training, to pensions, and so on and so forth ... are about to become items in the old curiosity shop of the good years in the past. And this attack on freedom is first attained by a meticulous destruction of critical resistance, the resistance of knowledge, and particularly the resistance of that precious knowledge generated by collective critical thinking ... that type of thinking that empowers the individuals when in collective action.

What follows focuses first on transnational studies and on how cooperative action at transnational level can, indeed, be a salient strategy to counteract the current immediacy of the temporary with the collective construction of cooperative permanent structures beyond the limits of the nation. We argue here that, before the constant threat of what Zygmunt Bauman would call "liquidity", we can generate a certain degree of stasis by women action at transnational level.¹ It is from this new cooperative stasis that we can actually produce new knowledges capable of, if not changing, at least confronting and eventually influencing the individual policies of national states. The paper then harbours upon GEMMA, The Erasmus Master Degree on Women's and Gender Studies, as a case in point that proves these tenets.

Transnational Studies

Since Homi Bhabha started interrogating the disciplinary models of comparison and distinction in the light of new community forms, it has become evident that disciplines need reformulation.² They must rethink their goals and methodologies. They must even rethink themselves. The study of cultural manifestations within the current global world can no longer be restricted by old-fashioned geopolitical boundaries. It trespasses, indeed, national frontiers.

In a global society marked by permanent change and liquidity the concept of 'transnationalism' becomes fundamental since it

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000.

² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994.

proposes horizontal relations in clear preference to the verticality of traditional conceptions of the disciplines which prioritised a national focus. Hierarchy is substituted now by transversality and lateral/rhizomatic connections (following Deleuze) become the relational mode. Fluidity, constant change, and mobility demand a new approach from criticism, understood in its widest sense. They demand an approach beyond the Nation. Thus, as Susan Friedman puts it, it is necessary to make the “shift from nation-based paradigms to ‘transnational models’ emphasizing the global space of on-going travel and transcontinental connection.”³

The advantage of transnationality lies in its being multifunctional. It allows a simultaneous multiplicity of exchanges and adaptations. It works on several levels since it contemplates the national together with what happens within the constraints of national borders and also outside these. Transversality becomes the leitmotif, relinquishing, once and for all, the binary oppositions (center vs. margins/periphery, among many others), the very polarities that had been the weakest point within postcolonial theory.

Comparativism is, thus, fed by an approach that implies the revision of the concepts of nation and state, the role of knowledge productions across multiple geographies and disciplines and the need for meta-theoretical reflection on the practice of the disciplines themselves now in the making.

GEMMA. A Case Study or “How to Fight the Neoliberal Attack on the Humanities: Transnational Consortia and the GEMMA Case”

The Bologna process has given transnational comparability of degrees a bad name. But this is simply because of the degeneration of what started as a brilliant idea. Many of us subscribed faithfully to Bologna in the late 90s, since we believed that it was about time we validated transnationally what we, and our students, had learnt at national level. We took it, then, perhaps rather naively, as the utopic universalisation of knowleges, as the first step for a European Space for mobility, a passport for the exchange of learned experiences beyond our own local settings. Unfortunately, the process, as we know, has become something else. It has been manipulated into a tool for the extermination of diversity and the

³ Susan S. Friedman, “Migrations, Diasporas and Borders”, in David Nicholls (ed.), *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages Literatures*, MLA, New York, 2006, p. 906.

mutilation of the least marketable knowledges, those associated with creative practices and critical thinking, those skills that multinational firms find so inconvenient nowadays.

However, one of the good things about this Bologna process has been the funds employed for the promotion of transnational degrees, and in particular the Erasmus Mundus call for masters taught by several universities in different countries. A transnational and cooperative master had been the dream of many people working in networks such as the ATHENA network, created by Rosi Braidotti, which brought together over 100 Women's Studies and Gender centers/programmes over some 15 years. ATHENA, also financed by the Socrates programme within the European Commission, made it possible for lots of us to get to know other feminists from countries other than ours, people who felt like us and with whom we shared many concerns. Thanks to it, we became working partners first and friends immediately after. That was the first new feminist knowledge we generated: the knowledge of good cooperation, which in many cases developed into the knowledge of real friendship. We are here together today because it was so. And these are essential cooperative knowledges, the most instrumental knowledges to counteract the current blind servitude imposed by the Europe of 'governance' and 'excellence', a Europe that prefers competition to cooperation, that forces its citizens to prove their 'excellence' by accepting longer working hours and by stepping over competitors while those who protest simply become surplus. It is either "excellent" or "exceeding".⁴

Because, at the end of the day, what do we want knowledge for? Certainly we don't want to generate the *clindex* type, 'liquid' knowledge demanded by inhuman firms. We want to acquire and generate knowledges that empower us to achieve things. And I'm marking here the difference between achievement and success, that terribly patriarchal word that makes us servants of the market, of the judgment of others but seldom represents our own aspirations and desires. No. I'm talking about knowledges that can produce wellbeing, the joy of life, *jouissance*, the

⁴ Here two clarifications: 1. the new employment Act in Spain (which legalises precarious jobs and flashbacks to the times before basic rights for the workers were re-instaurated after Franco's death, in negotiations with the Trade Unions); 2. the 14/2012 Royal Decree on education, the infamous so-called "urgent measures for the rationalisation of public expenditure on education" which 'rationalises' the funding of education by increasing student fees and forcing university professors to take on a 50% extra teaching load, thus automatically generating an increase on the unemployment rate among the least senior staff at universities.

.....

authentic pleasure which makes life worth living. It should be cooperation rather than competition. Or better still: it should be Solidary cooperation, i.e. partnership, friendship, solidarity, sharing. These are things that you learn when you sit at a table with your working partner but also when you walk to a meeting with her/him chit-chatting about silly anecdotes, when you share breakfast with them in the hotel where you are bound to stay for those few days, at the coffee break, during the celebratory drinks afterwards. You learn to lead the way and to be led in turn. You learn to listen, to respect the other. You learn to be flexible enough to make room for other points of view that may sometimes be very different from the way we thought when isolated inside the ivory towers of our respective institutions. Rosi Braidotti's ATHENA was the best exemplification of her inspiring nomadism. A network of curious nomads eagerly inquiring into each others' knowledges.

GEMMA came out of the networking we had started within ATHENA. We had been discussing how to put together a joint master degree for a number of years but we simply did not have the funds to implement it. When the Erasmus Mundus call started in 2004 it became the golden opportunity to finance our long cherished project. And so we got together as a consortium, we had three physical meetings in the course of two years, we communicated daily via email and eventually submitted the project to the European Commission in 2006, which selected it as one of the 23 lucky ones after a very tough competition with around 300 applications. The project was selected once again in 2011 for the period 2012-2018.

GEMMA is, thus, the result of a long harmonisation process of different educational structures, different traditions and cultures. The GEMMA consortium is made of seven European universities (Bologna, Central European University, Hull, Lodz, Oviedo, Utrecht) with (as from 2011) the association and collaboration of eight other Higher Education Institutions outside Europe (Buenos Aires, Campinas, Chile, Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo, Internacional de Florida, Nacional de Colombia, Rutgers, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Méjico) and other associated partners committed with the promotion of equality in various ways, either as Institutions for Equal Opportunities (Instituto Asturiano de la Mujer; Comitato per le Pari Opportunità at University of Bologna); Documentation Centers and professional associations (Associazione Orlando – Women's Documentation Center; Biblioteca Amilcar Cabral; ATGENDER - The European

Association for Gender Research; IES, International Education of Students) or Publishing Houses (Colección Feminae UGR; KRK Ediciones; Peter Lang AG International Academic Publishers). Although such a large consortium is difficult to coordinate, this composition is one of the strongest points of the project. On the one hand, it is highly representative of trans European feminisms since it joins the European North, South and Centre, older and newer EU members. It also makes it possible for students to choose mobility among the 7 European universities participating according to the languages they speak (the consortium languages are English, Italian and Spanish) and the academic fields they may be interested in, since all these institutions add their best offer creating a multidisciplinary and *à la carte* programme. On the other, the association with North, Central and South American partners gives the project a new trans-Atlantic dimension. This way the programme becomes representative of feminisms at a global level by joining 15 highly recognised institutions at all of which there are already either PhDs or Master Programmes in Women's and Gender Studies. The functioning of these institutions is based on their complementarity: we all cooperate by bringing to the project our best practices, which gives the consortium a unique added value. While the European institutions run the master simultaneously on all sites, the new partners from outside Europe collaborate facilitating mobility of the GEMMA students and faculty and offering online modules that deal with their own specifically situated experience of feminism. The associate universities have started to develop an online programme synergic with GEMMA. The goal is to combine their new modules with the existing ones and to eventually create a transnational master permanent structure in America, with some modules being physically taught at each site and virtual mobility (the only way to make mobility possible given the cost of running a programme which would involve moving among institutions in the three American subcontinents).

Finally, the rest of the consortium members work as a bridge between the academia and other social actors involved in gender and equal opportunities. They facilitate dissemination of the research produced within the GEMMA community (as is the case with publishing houses) or/and internships. It is worth remarking that both teaching and research practices are changing as a result of our networking. We are now sharing teaching in transnational modules and we are also developing transnational research in three ways: one, as the natural outcome of these transnational

teaching experiences;⁵ two, as the way to disseminate the results of the jointly supervised students' theses and, three, as the result of the feminist research conferences the GEMMA partners have organized from the beginning of the programme in 2006.⁶ All these experiences will soon be collected in the "Teaching and Researching with GEMMA" book series published by associate partner Peter Lang.

All in all, this new consortium enhances the singularity of the original GEMMA in 2006 by making it a transatlantic extended consortium with added non-Eurocentred approaches from Ibero-American feminisms and by making the programme even more interdisciplinary and intercultural. There is also the obvious added value on future prospects of students and scholars. For the former there is the genuine multicultural experience, with new student's networks being created around the world for every generation of GEMMA students. For the latter, there are new thematic networks resulting from the exchange of scholarly research.

GEMMA is not only the consortium, but the truly unique master programme devised by it. The curriculum is wholly interdisciplinary, combining the Social Sciences in a rather simple structure. The duration is two academic years, four semesters, 120 ECTS and all the institutions involved teach the whole programme. The first semester is the core component, covering the main issues in European feminisms and it is divided everywhere into the same three modules: Feminist History, Feminist Theories and Feminist Methodologies. A complementary offer for optional modules taken first at the home and then at the mobility institution makes up for the contents of the second and third semesters, respectively. The

⁵ Some of the publications generated as a result of the GEMMA collaboration since 2006 are: A. Sánchez Espinosa et al (eds.), *Cuerpos de Mujeres: Miradas, Representaciones e Identidades*. Colección FEMINAE, Universidad de Granada, 2007; E. Oleksy, et al. (eds.), *Gender and Citizenship in a Multicultural Context*, Peter Lang, Oxford, New York, Wien, 2008; R. Buikema and I. Van der Tuin (eds.), *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture*, Routledge, 2009; E. Oleksy and D. Golanska (eds.), *Teaching Visual Culture in the Interdisciplinary Classroom*, Athena, Utrecht, 2010; R. Buikema et al. (eds.), *Theories and Methodologies in Postgraduate Feminist Research. Researching Differently*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011; E. Federici (ed.), *Translating Gender*, Peter Lang, Oxford, New York, Wien, 2011; *Transnational Women's Literature* (forthcoming).

⁶ The 6th, 7th and 8th European Gender/Feminist Research Conferences were all organised by GEMMA partners. They dealt with cutting edge research in Gender Studies around the issues of "Gender and Citizenship in multicultural contexts" (Lodz, 2006), "Gendered Cultures at the Crossroads of Imagination, Knowledge and Politics" (Utrecht, 2009) and "The Politics of Location Revisited. Gender @ 2012" (CEU, 2012).

specific offer at each institution is based on its excellence and in some cases students can also do internships at equal opportunity institutions and take summer courses. The fourth semester is entirely devoted to the writing and defence of the master thesis, which is supervised jointly by faculty of the two institutions that conform the student's mobility path. The thesis is eventually presented at either of these institutions. If the student decides to take advantage of a third mobility to any of the associate partners outside Europe, a third supervisor from this new institution can also take part in the process. The student graduates by getting two degrees, one from each degree-issuing institution together with a diploma supplement that specifies any extra activities forming part of the students' experience.

GEMMA is also much more than all this. It is, at the end of the day, what the students make of it, what they create in their own transnational communities. Generation after generation, students have brought their own imagination into the programme and the accumulated capital can now be seen by the newcomers in the various GEMMA blogs, websites, Facebook, twitter and linked-in profiles, the GEMMA newsletter, the GEMMA cinema forum, the various celebrations for International Working Women's Day (as in the Granada Feminist March events) or new GEMMA alumni associations such as *Fabrika Crítica* in Granada. It is, finally, the first agora where students start their research, some of which has had such impact on their home countries that new policies have been implemented in response to their findings.⁷ Indeed, in order to disseminate the students' research we organise a biannual GEMMA graduation ceremony, followed by an open forum called "Voices of GEMMA", a space where GEMMA graduates have the opportunity to present the results of their master theses to the GEMMA community and other non GEMMA public.

Thus, to bring this contribution to a close, to the initial despair, to the liquidity of knowledge and existence, to the constant flux of our efforts in the hands of destructive capitalism, transnational networks, such as GEMMA, offer hope, open up to the solidarity and cooperation with so many soul sisters and give us reason

⁷ See, for instance, the research by Fatima Muriel on the need of Colombian support policies for women victims of displacement and war violence in Putumayo or Marcela Laguna on the empowerment of women leaders in Chiapas. These projects have been financed by the Erasmus Mundus scholarship and have also obtained prizes by the University of Granada and the European Parliament in consideration of their social impact.

after reason to keep going in our struggle to create knowledges which can generate happiness. Yes. That's the word: happiness. Public and common – shared beyond our limited spaces into transnational joyful communities.



Gemma
Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree
in Women's and Gender Studies

Erasmus Mundus
Fondo Social Europeo
Máster Erasmus Mundus
Máster Erasmus Mundus en Estudios de las Mujeres y de Género
Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies

Instituto de estudios de la mujer
UGR Universidad de Granada

HEINRICH HEIMANN UNIVERSITÄT WÜRZBURG
CEU CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF ALBA
UNIVERSIDAD DE ORENSE
RUTGERS THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
Universiteit Utrecht



**Women's Assault on
the Production of
(Mainstream) Knowledge**

On the Advantage of Tragedy for Feminism

Natka Badurina

Postmodernism has introduced into the feminist epistemology some turnarounds which have gained ground in feminist theory and practice over recent decades: the end of all-encompassing interpretations of the world and grand narratives of progress and liberation, situated knowledge, the discursive nature of cognition, the breakdown of the subject, and the mobile boundaries of identity. All of these were useful for feminism to deconstruct patriarchal knowledge, its binary categorization and its claims of universality. However, at the same time, feminism has sacrificed to this assembly of new concepts its historical subject – the category of the ‘woman’ fighting for emancipation – and has turned into a bundle of diverse “threads and plaits”,¹ that is, intersecting groups following diverse and, only occasionally, strategically aligned political goals. Nowadays, feminist knowledge refracts through the category of intersectionality based on the theory of subjectivity as a product of various discursive practices,² and it seeks, of the enquiring and cognitive procedure, responsible personal advocacy, constant modifications of the knowledge-shaping position, and a critical and genealogical outlook on the origin of previous knowledge.

The aim of this text is to demonstrate that this new form of knowledge is closely linked to notions of pessimism, a tragic worldview, tragedy as a literary genre, and the traumatic and

¹ Diana Coole, “Threads and plaits or an unfinished Project? Feminism(s) through the twentieth century”, in Michael Freeden (ed.), *Reassessing Political Ideologies*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, pp. 154-174.

² See, for example, Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies. A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*, Routledge, New York and London, 2010.

sublime experience. By pointing out these links, I would like to reflect critically on the traditional feminist scepticism towards tragedy as a masculine, patriarchal, anti-democratic, hierarchical and disempowering literary genre, and assert that the tragic orientation is not only consistent with postmodern epistemology in general, but also particularly fruitful for feminist knowledge, because it perfectly fits its desire to be democratic, open to the Other, devoid of tyranny and violence, and inclined to link knowledge and art.

Postmodernism, Pessimism and the Sublime

Although the postmodern era has witnessed the loss of the ideological legitimization of science, because of which science can no longer be portrayed through a grand narrative of progress, truth and justice, we would not necessarily describe it as pessimistic. Postmodernism has not been the first to face the dissolution of grand narratives. The first to face it was Modernism – the paradigmatic, Viennese, early-20th c. Modernism – which really did react to it with pessimism.³ For Postmodernism, usually seen as relaxed, playful and free from nostalgia, we might rather say that it has joyfully surrendered to this new condition. Postmodernism does not regret science's not being all-encompassing any more; nonetheless, this does not imply that its acceptance of the fact can be described as optimistic. On the contrary, postmodernity is more similar to the Nietzschean joy of pessimism. The Enlightenment's failed promise of the victory of reason has been taken by Postmodernism as acceptance of the limits of knowledge and of (artistic) expression, and settling for life in the disturbing vicinity of the inexpressible.

What is it that cannot be expressed, nor embraced by reason and knowledge? In the late 18th century, at a time when faith was rising towards reason, in parallel with optimism and the idea of progress, their shadow also emerged – the notion of the sublime, as that which threatens human reason with its inconceivable and intimidating greatness. According to Lyotard, Postmodernism has rediscovered this pre-Romantic and Romantic notion of the sublime, and reinterpreted it in its own way, tolerant and subversive at the same time: as a total separation of the form and the content, a complete unrepresentability, that is, the absolute otherness which challenges every pretension of society

³ See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern condition: a Report on Knowledge*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984, pp. 37-41.

to consider it natural and necessary.⁴ Postmodern art refuses to provide the chaos with a harmonizing shape, and thus, in keeping with Lyotard's technique of bringing together the speculative, the aesthetic and the political, it takes it upon itself to undermine methods employed by capitalism to determine reality, disclosing its aestheticizing logic as artificial, rhetorical and partial.⁵

Many theorists oppose the optimism of Modernism and the essential, all-embracing, and also hedonistic pessimism of Postmodernism – its passionate discovering of the tragic meaning of life, accompanied by the dark, unpredictable and inexpressible – that is, sublime – side of the world, which inevitably brings to mind Nietzsche's *amor fati*, that is, pessimism's "yes" to life and its ephemerality.⁶ For the French theorist of the tragic, Michel Maffesoli, in the postmodern era, this kind of stoicism has caused sudden outpourings of human generosity, solidarity and humanism: "For the acceptance of what is can go hand in hand with a wish to become involved – not to master a given situation, but to go along with it in order to induce it, should the occasion arise, to give the best of itself".⁷ Thus, the tragic world view and respect for the sublime can be a path whereby economic action is turned into ecological interaction, that is, to use the concise notion offered by Maffesoli, Hegelian-Marxist rational "mastery", which is characteristic of modernity, is turned into the fatalist and transgressive "sovereignty" of Bataille. Such surrender of rational control over the situation, and acceptance of fate, is precisely what tragedies are all about: a tragedy is "raising questions about the relation between the mastery of enlightened reason and human exposure to contingency".⁸ This means that, in the postmodern era, the West is discarding its rational individualist philosophical foundations, which used to be the source of its optimism, thus leaving us with yet another turn to add to all those that have occurred in the postmodern era: thus far, the most famous have been the cultural and linguistic turns, and now we might add the 'tragic turn'.

⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?", in Lyotard, *The Postmodern condition*, cit., pp. 71-85.

⁵ See also Philip Shaw, *The Sublime*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 125.

⁶ See, for example, Michel Maffesoli, "The Return of the Tragic in Postmodern Societies", in Rita Felski (ed.), *Rethinking Tragedy*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2008, pp. 319-336.; Joshua Foa Dienstag, "Tragedy, Pessimism, Nietzsche", in Felski, *Rethinking Tragedy*, cit., pp. 104-123.

⁷ Maffesoli, "The Return of the Tragic", cit., p. 325.

⁸ David Scott, "Tragedy's Time: Post-emancipation Futures Past and Present", in Felski, *Rethinking Tragedy*, cit., pp. 199-217, quoted text on page 209.

Are there historical and philosophical arguments in favour of this psychological path, which, according to Maffesoli, leads from a tragic worldview towards empathy and social togetherness? How can we explain that we might be better to those around us if we are not hoping for improvement, if we are not torn between the poorer present and the better future we have to create ourselves, with our own reason and labour? Joshua Foa Dienstag argues that Nietzsche's "Dionysian pessimism" had a strong democratic accent.⁹ According to Nietzsche, pre-Socratic tragedy brought together performers and their audience in their common awareness of the illogical and irremediable nature of the world, of the horror of human existence. Since this condition was everybody's concern, actors, chorus and public were joined in an egalitarian unity. Athens was at the same time a town of democracy and tragedy. For Nietzsche, Socratic optimism (which, in contrast, is based on systematized and overarching understanding, and the faith that, if we know and understand, we can achieve happiness) was problematic not because it was democratic (since the pessimism which preceded it was just as democratic, if not more), but because huge numbers of Athenian citizens were attracted to an easier road and empty hopes, trivial and Apollonian. The true irrational behaviour lay in an optimistic hiding of the truth about the world as inconceivable, not in its acceptance. Unlike the comfortable indulgence in optimism, Dionysian pessimism (which consents to the world as an incomprehensible chaos) offers at the same time desperation and pleasure; and this pleasure, as a Dionysian mystery associated with the corporal and the sexual, implies dissolving boundaries between myself and the other,¹⁰ thus providing yet another link between the distant history of the tragic outlook and its Nietzschean interpretation on the one hand, and Postmodernism – in this case, its deliberation on the boundaries of identity – on the other hand.

Dienstag recognizes the democratic nature of Nietzsche's Dionysian pessimism in the 20th century theorists of democracy, who were critical of liberalism. Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault both found inspiration in Nietzsche, because their ideas of social justice are not based on a firm cognitive individual, but rather on an unstable and changing subject. One prejudice that is difficult to shed is that democratic theory must be based on liberalism, individualism and 'optimism'. As mentioned above,

⁹ Dienstag, "Tragedy, Pessimism", cit., pp. 109-111.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 113.

prior to Socrates, the Greek polis experienced tragedy and democracy at the same time. With Socrates and Plato – with whom, according to Nietzsche, real tragedy died – universal political participation was replaced by ruling over the town, imposition from above of rational norms, and subordination to the ruler.¹¹ In the postmodern era, which has abandoned the optimistic narrative of progress, the conditions have been met for a rebirth of tragedy and a revitalization of the tragic worldview. It is up to us to make use of the favourable social potential of that fact, which ties the tragic world view with specific forms of democracy, as described by Arendt: these forms of democracy arise from the acceptance of the fact that the transcendental is unrepresentable, that new mythologies are impossible, and that the political arena is the only one that can protect human life from a lack of meaning.¹² In these forms of democracy – which might be labelled ‘direct democracy’ – everybody shares the sense of the tragic, and everybody gets involved in political life with no illusions about common progress, and with a readiness to risk their own integrity. With its emphasis on the private and individual man-entrepreneur, and its story of progress which will inevitably happen, liberalism frees us of the obligation to participate, and lulls us in the conformism of a representative system, which creates pleasant, easy and stable

¹¹ Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1998; and Alessandro Dal Lago, “Introduzione – La città perduta”, in Hannah Arendt, *Vita activa*, Bompiani, Milano, 1991, p. XXIII. It is interesting to note that, despite his drawing inspiration from Nietzsche, George Steiner ignores Nietzsche’s interpretation of democracy in the framework of Dionysian pessimism, and cites “optimism of democracy” as one of the reasons for the death of tragedy. This is precisely the subject matter of Dienstag’s revision of his thinking. Dienstag’s research is based on a submission which is exactly opposed to Steiner’s explicit thesis on tragedy as undemocratic; nonetheless, he shares with Steiner the Nietzschean theoretical starting point, which allows the conclusion that tragedy died with the ascent of optimism, and that, in the postmodern period, conditions for its rebirth have been met. Therefore, if we view the contemporary discussion on tragedy through the sharp and still vibrant polemics of Steiner (according to whom tragedy died with Modernism) vs. Terry Eagleton (according to whom tragedy never dies), Dienstag’s theoretical approach to tragedy is closer to that of Steiner, unlike Eagleton, who is interested in the durability of the dark and irrational side of civilization, that is, the “dialectic of the Enlightenment”, reflected both in Modernism and Postmodernism (so that in this respect there is no particular gap between the two epochs), Dienstag describes (d)evolution of pessimism as inversely proportionate to modernist optimism and, from this, he deduces its return in the Postmodern era. Transversely, from their opposed positions, Steiner and Eagleton still agree that tragedy is undemocratic, thus depriving it, in the view of Dienstag, of a great and positive social potential.

¹² Cf. Dal Lago, “Introduzione”, cit., p. XXVI.

comfort.¹³ In contrast, Arendt argues, every political action is an interaction with others, and the pleasure and Eros derived from pessimism call for mobile and interactive identities, and not for their stability.¹⁴

Both tragedy, as literary genre, and the tragic worldview revive an interest in what – portrayed as contingency or fate – escapes the control of an enlightened mind. That is what makes tragedy an important corrective measure for the blindness of the Enlightenment. In an attempt to illustrate this blind spot of the Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer took, *inter alia*, the example of a tragedy – and that was the tragedy that western civilization has turned into its paradigm: *Oedipus the King*.¹⁵ Oedipus's seeming triumph over the riddle of the polymorph nature embodied in the sphinx, the triumph summarized in the anthropomorphic response 'man', reduces multiplicity (of nature, of the sphinx) to the self (man), and knowledge of the other to self-identity. (According to Adorno and Horkheimer, it is this desire of the reason to have absolute power over the other that paves a path that leads to anti-Semitism). What looks like a victory of reason

¹³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, cit., pp. 220-225.

¹⁴ The road of the sublime and tragic in politics is never free of ambushes, and the current-affairs circumstances in 2013, as I write this paper, do not allow me to ignore such ambushes. A new Italian political movement which did surprisingly well in the elections, *Movimento cinque stelle*, is based on mass participation supported by new communication technologies. The movement rejects all attempts to align itself to the left or the right side of the political spectrum; it accepts the "degrowth theory" and discards the idea of economic growth and its statistical indicators, presenting as their goals what they believe are the everyday, concrete and pragmatic, social (and environmental), rather than political, interests of citizens; such interests should be topics of continuous referenda; and the movement's members take pride in their 'commonness' and anonymity. The movement despises all established institutions of (representative) democracy, along with the intermediary function of the media in communicating with the public (because of their inevitable ideological contamination), and it safeguards its anti-political profile by engaging in debates exclusively on the party's web pages. However, at the same time, *Movimento cinque stelle* is led by a charismatic leader who does not hesitate to impose internal discipline, whose authoritarian blog tames the multitude of opinions expressed in forums, who demands that decisions be made with a hundred percent consent, and at mass gatherings uses a spectacular, cabaret-style and cheaply effective discourse that incites the crowds. What is more, his undefined politics leave room for affinities with fascism. For our purposes it is particularly interesting that, prior to his political career, Beppe Grillo was a comedian, and thus his character is an exemplary manifestation of the postmodern overlapping of the sublime and the ridiculous, the tragic and the comic.

¹⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2002, p. 1-10. Cf. also Samir Gandesha, "Enlightenment as Tragedy: Reflections on Adorno's Ethics", *Thesis Eleven*, No. 65, May 2001, pp. 109-130.

over myth in this process, which is a parable of Enlightenment, in reality bears a germ of a new, and no less anthropomorphic, myth. Oedipus can master nature, but he cannot master his entire self, because he is not entirely composed of reason – and this is the reason for his blindness and ruin.¹⁶ Tyrannical reason is blind to its mythological nature, and thus it is a task of art to disclose it – art that obviously cannot be anything but tragic. If the character of Oedipus represents enlightenment for Adorno and Horkheimer, then the tragedy centred on him represents the art that points to his dialectic.

The capacity of art to bring to one's attention what is inaccessible to the mind is still defined as sublimity – but the sublime has been profoundly redefined, when compared to Kant's understanding of the proud ego, which, in its wonderful intellectual and moral effort, struggles against the immensity of the Thing in itself. From Romanticism onwards, the sublime has been more and more an irrational trepidation caused by powerlessness in the face of the unutterable, which crushes ego in anxiety (Leopardi) or blows it away in Panic ecstasy (Nietzsche). Both modern and postmodern art are based on the transformed concept of the sublime, which questions the subject. Art does not establish any distant knowledge of the pre-rational premonition of the unutterable,¹⁷ but regenerates the primordial experience by reliving it, producing a shudder or shock which reminds us of the time preceding the separation of the subject and object, compared by Adorno to an erotic experience.¹⁸ In parallel with the transformation in the understanding of the sublime, its manifestations are also changed: from Kant's magnificent portrayals of sublimity (as a storm, volcanic eruption, desert, stellar skies), which hinted that on the other side of their occurrence here was the Thing as a positive givenness, to an understanding that the world of perception

¹⁶ "Lying at the heart of the dialectic of enlightenment, then, is the problem of a subject that, having lost its ability to reflect upon itself, has become, like Oedipus, tyrannical." (Gandhesha, "Enlightenment as Tragedy", cit., p. 117).

¹⁷ On the difference between knowledge and the sublime, see Frank Ankersmith, *Sublime historical experience*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2005. See also Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, cit., p. 6, on the alienation of the unique cognitive subject from the object of cognition, as a necessary prerequisite of its knowledge and power: "Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them". In contrast to the enlightenment, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, magic practices are exercised through a mimesis, rather than separation from the object, which makes them similar to what Ankersmith describes as sublime/traumatic.

¹⁸ Cf. Gandhesha, "Enlightenment as Tragedy", cit.

cannot present the transcendental Thing in any way, so that it becomes completely irrelevant which material particle will be used as the sublime object that will indicate this shortcoming.¹⁹ The disproportion between the size of the unutterable and the banal occurrence, which should refer to it, is also the way in which the postmodern sublime opens up to the ridiculous, and the tragic loses its need for the 19th-century pathetic.²⁰

The dialectic of the enlightenment, as Gandesha points out in his interpretation of Adorno (discussed together with Levinas), contains strong ethical and political implications: the totalizing systems of knowledge cannot approach the Other without violence. The ethics arising from Kant's categorical imperative, which is based on sameness and identity, is unacceptable for postmodern thinkers.²¹ The recognition of an absolute otherness of the other in postmodern philosophy has yielded a number of new directions of thinking which have considered the position of subaltern subjects, ranging from postcolonialism to feminism. For our purposes, it is important to underline that art (also as a way of cognition), which arises from what Adorno defines as shudder, and Levinas as epiphany of the Other, cannot be a carrier of any enlightenment project – and it has to be tragic.

Irrespective of the political risks – always present – of sublime enthusiasm potentially overheating the captivated masses, nowadays we are clearly much more worried because of the traps of the beautiful (but not sublime) consensus, which feeds capitalism and consumer society, and promotes a consumerist approach to knowledge. Such an approach can be seen in the spheres of science and education, especially when it comes to

¹⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, London and New York, 1989, pp. 201-210.

²⁰ The lowering of the mode in modern tragedy (of which an example is the classic works by Anouilh) has not killed tragedy as a literary genre, nor has it eradicated the tragic disposition, which proves that, even if we say that everything human is historical, discursive and changeable (in the postmodern tradition), the tragic disposition will nonetheless look like an almost transcendental constant feature of human life. The fact that this conclusion is very close to religious views does not create any problem for one of its most ardent champions, the neo-Marxist theorist Terry Eagleton. See Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence. The Idea of the Tragic*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2003.

²¹ The link between postmodern anti-categorical approach and feminist thinking, especially as regards their views of history, has been researched by Snježan Hasnaš, "Problem kategoričnosti unutar različito osviještenih, odnosno neosviještenih polazišta teorije ili filozofije roda u njihovom odnosu prema povijesti", in Ankica Čakardić et al. (ed.), *Kategorički feminizam. Nužnost feminističke teorije i prakse*, Centar za ženske studije, Zagreb, 2007, pp. 153-157.

the evaluation of scientific work and the financing of research. In that respect, we can say as a paradox that optimism (taken as optimistic expectation of a general growth judged by the gross national product) is 'beautiful', while pessimism (that is, allowing something to escape that overarching story) is 'sublime' – which at this moment seems incomparably better.

Feminism and the Tragic

As mentioned at the beginning, feminism has embraced many features of postmodernist thinking, but it seems still unaware of the latter's tragic overtone. It seems that, for its historical emancipatory projects, and for the multitude of its present-day forms, comedy and the comic have been more important.²² Moreover, what has contributed to feminism's dislike of tragedy was the fact that feminist critics saw tragedy as a genre exalting masculine power and the ideology of sublime male reason, disastrous for women's roles in society. One recent example of strong feminist criticism of tragedy is the 2002 book *The Birth of Pleasure* by Carol Gilligan, in which the author rejects the thesis that tragedy cures the trauma, and asserts the opposite: that tragedies, such as *Oedipus the King*, push into oblivion the pleasure, the loss of which has caused the suffering, thus detaining us in melancholy. Gilligan's explicit intention is to make her book "an escape from tragedy".²³

As pertains to the canonical tragedies, especially the historical ones written since Romanticism, feminists must be conceded the point; indeed, those literary worlds are completely dominated by male heroes who go on suicidal missions to face unavoidable disaster, while the girls and women who follow them quietly are entirely unworthy of facing the sublime. But we need a broader definition of tragedy as a genre, especially in view of Greek models, and, even more importantly, we need to take into consideration the historic transformation of what we label as the tragic outlook of the last two centuries, that is, of the Modernist and Postmodernist periods.

Kathleen Sands has established that feminist aversion to tragedy has a lot in common with the aversion to tragedy shown by Christian theology.²⁴ Sands is substantially keen on Steiner's

²² The Croatian journal on women's studies *Treća* No. 1-2, Vol. XIV, 2012 is dedicated to the topic of laughter.

²³ Cf. Kathleen M. Sands, "Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism in the Time After Time", in Felski, *Rethinking Tragedy*, cit., pp. 82-103, quoted text on p. 96.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

thesis on the death of tragedy resulting from Christian solace,²⁵ and concludes that the aversion to the tragic world view always relies on optimism, which is in turn based on a guarantee provided by legitimized knowledge – irrespective of whether it is legitimized by God, as in theology, by man, as in humanism, or by nature, as in rationalism. Any reference to a superior authority, any belief in a positive absolute, produces authoritarian and antirational knowledge, which is just as antirational even if it makes reference to reason itself, because such a reference is not an explanation, suggestion, choice, but rather legitimation, assertion, authority.

Feminists are, of course, critical of many aspects of Christianity as well, especially those featuring in its variants of the tragic narrative of suffered evil. Exaltation of martyrdom, love as sacrifice for the other, self-sacrifice without justice, are but some of the number of theological elements which have caused grave damage to the woman's position in society. However, the goal of such feminist criticism is not to dispute optimistic projection in general, but to base optimism on an absolute that would be different from that of God. (The absolutes championed by feminism are, according to a classification proposed by Sands, an ideal of justice that transcends history, natural equality and the ideal of women's spiritual power, all of them abstract guarantees that are difficult to turn into strategic bases for action). Furthermore, referring to absolutes is, at its core, undemocratic, and thus askew with feminist postulates. In this respect, feminist criticism of the Christian variant of tragedy is just a mild correction of Modernism, not a call for radical conversion to a worldview that would be prepared to pay the price of recantation of the legitimizing and redeeming projection and metaphysical supports – the price being the acceptance of tragedy. According to Sands, if it is aware of what we have lost – our ideals of the world and the absolute – feminist thought can find its way out of melancholy and become, as described above, tragic in the Dionysian (and democratic) sense.

²⁵ Eagleton here puts forward an opposite thesis, according to which the tragic is alien neither to Christianity nor to Marxism, because human suffering and evil form a constant shadow which accompanies all enlightening projects, and democracy is no guarantee of happiness (*Sweet violence*, cit.). Sands takes into consideration Eagleton's counter-argument, but still believes that it is much less present than the predominating theodicy of elite theologians, according to which God, as absolute goodness, must be victorious over evil. Generally, the feminist criticism of tragedy is closer to Steiner's belief that, in advanced social systems, tragedy loses its *raison d'être*.

The Feminist Sublime

When it comes to the above-mentioned canon of historical tragedies of the 19th century, we have to conclude that, in them, patriarchal culture completely colonized the notion of the tragic. One result of such colonization was the tragic entangled with categorical interpretations of society and history, in both the national and the historicist mode. The romantic sublime developed in the climate of optimism of the Enlightenment and a general desublimation process, and it has remained the only refuge of the myth, expelled from scientific discourse. Within the individualist and heroic tragic vision, there developed a sublimity, which, in the 20th century, became affiliated with fascism and Nazism. The sublimity, which was used as a transversal expression of the irrational throughout the 20th century, for political mobilization of both the extreme left and the extreme right of the political spectrum, discriminated against women, its implication being that only male ‘reason’, and not female ‘nature’, can face the unspeakable greatness.

As discussed above, in the postmodern era, sublimity has gained some new shapes. What was described as the ‘tragic turn’ relates to the development of new circumstances, favourable to the pessimistic outlook and nihilism. The tragic is not repugnant any longer; it is even allowed in scientific discourse. It has abandoned its self-defence from the fortress of myth, and, with growing secularism; it has lost its aspiration for the transcendental and mystical. The postmodern sublime is not defined any longer by transcendence, that is, by the intimation of the existence on the other side of reality, but by immanence – facing the mere existence of material substance whose inertia reveals the sublime.²⁶ The moment of perception of the passive and senseless existence of the world can be an epiphany (this also represents the link between the postmodern sublime and existentialism). The postmodern sublime makes reference not to something that is beyond the reason or language, but to something that is unutterable within the world itself. It has already been said that completely banal particles of the Real can indicate the sublime; the Real can ironically demonstrate the limits of human perception, which brings it close to being ridiculous.

The great change in the postmodernist understanding of the sublime has not escaped the attention of feminist theorists, who saw in it their chance to review it from the feminist stance

²⁶ Shaw, *The Sublime*, cit., p. 3.

too, and an opportunity for women to consider seriously the possibility of taking it over, and its possible political usability.²⁷ For Yaeger the female sublime discards the oedipal, phallic fight to the death with the father, but expands towards others in its pre-oedipal longing, reaching an ecstasy which makes common empowerment possible. The open boundaries of identity are a characteristic of the postmodern sublime, which could already be 'female', just as the one before it, the sublime of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, was undoubtedly 'male'. The Croatian literary critic Oraić Tolić believes that the entirety of Modernism was male, and of Postmodernism female. If we concede to this illustrative binary (a)symmetrism – just for a moment, for the sake of this contemplative game, and fully aware that it simplifies social diversity and reflects the binarism that we are striving to reconstruct – we could say that the time has come for women to colonize the sublime, to snatch it from the male camp. Obviously, not to keep it jealously in their own camp, but to use it to continue their work on pulling down categorical interpretations and binary asymmetrisms, whether they regard societal goals, history, or individual identities. Thus the sublime, having been processed by feminist thought, will contribute to transforming categorical knowledge into non-violent "weak thought".²⁸

One can often hear discussions concerning the most important concept that feminist theory has contributed to postmodern science. To date, the concept of intersectionality has usually gained the most votes.²⁹ With no intention of discarding this useful notion – rather to the contrary, by emphasizing its importance for the new perception of identity of unstable boundaries, which is very relevant to the tragic – I would like to submit that the new feminist sublime has to find its place among the important contributions of feminism to the new knowledge. It is a sublime that sets out from pessimism, but teaches us about the joy of living and existence in community.

²⁷ See Patricia Yaeger "Toward a Female Sublime", in Linda Kaufman (ed.), *Gender and Theory. Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford – New York, 1989. pp. 191-212; Lee Edelman, "At risk in the Sublime: The Politics of Gender and Theory", in Kaufman (ed.), *Gender and Theory*, cit., pp. 213-224; Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime*, University of California Press, Berkley – Los Angeles – London, 1995.

²⁸ The Italian philosophical current of weak thought (*pensiero debole*), based on the postmodern perception of knowledge, power and subject, has dedicated detailed discussions to its relation with the tragic. Cf. Sergio Givone, "Debole e tragico", *aut aut*, 237-238, 1990, pp. 1-28.

²⁹ Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality", *Signs*, 30/3, 2005, pp. 1771-1800.

Ask Not What Tragedy Can Do for You; Ask What You Can Do for It

The intention of this text is not primarily theoretical, but pragmatic, strategic and methodological, and thus also political. On the other hand, as I have already said in the footnote on the postmodernist phenomena on the current Italian political scene, I am aware that the thesis on the ‘advantage of tragedy for life’ is at its best at the theoretical level. On the practical and political levels, it hides the dangers mentioned; the least pleasant among them being that the vacuum of resignation is filled by an authoritarian, sublimely comic leader. I will not go into the everyday colloquial sphere, in which the thesis on the advantage of tragedy for feminism can be understood to imply some kind of invitation to be resigned or sad. How can we avoid all these traps, and still convey the full incitement of the idea of a tragic feminism and female sublime in which I firmly believe – despite all odds? How can we – after the theoretical deduction – demonstrate their real worth and advantage in seeking answers to specific epistemological, methodological, artistic and political questions concerning the representation of reality?

The most logical solution seems to be to look for answers to these questions in contemporary tragedies – preferably those written by female authors. Here I will rely on the reading of contemporary tragedies done by Nataša Govedić.³⁰ Govedić is a Croatian theatrologist who is particularly engaged in issues of ethics, social justice and social agency. In her career as a critic, dramatist and director, she has dealt with the therapeutic effects of the theatre, which are equally important for individuals and for the community. She believes that the state, when it no longer protects us from international – and especially not from economic – violence, when it does not exercise justice, when it disintegrates our feeling of collectivity through a general ethical trauma and apathy, and functions only as an old-fashioned bureaucratic apparatus – that such a state is actually dead, and it needs to be replaced “by new political institutions of radical democracy”.³¹ As an engaged theatrologist, Govedić is of the opinion that drama, and in this context tragedy, functions as one such form, because instead of bearing false witness (only seeing the suffering of others,

³⁰ Nataša Govedić, “The trauma of apathy: two playwrights of post-Yugoslav nowhere land (Ivana Sajko and Biljana Srbljanović)”, *Revue des études slaves*, 77, 1-2, 2006, pp. 203-216.

³¹ Ivi, p. 214.

but assuming no responsibility for it), it bears true witness that “we have all reached the point of desperately needing to change the politics of indifference to politics of care”.³²

Setting out from such premises, which clearly correspond to what has been said above about the role of art in the postmodern condition and the link between tragedy and participatory democracy, Govedić read tragedies by two contemporary authors: the Croatian playwright Ivana Sajko and the Serbian playwright Biljana Srbljanović, and in both of them she found descriptions of the hopelessness of contemporary society and its ethical apathy, along with a total absence of any vision of a possible way out of indifference. Of course, there are differences between the two authors: as the only way out of an apathy caused by suppressed trauma, Sajko sees extreme revolt and terrorism, which makes her world view, based on a vengeful and romantically sublime ego, close to forms of terrorism. On the other hand, Biljana Srbljanović’s plays include a Marxist criticism of capitalism (with the family, in her play *Supermarket*, being portrayed as a hotbed of greed, violence and perversion), and they allow, albeit shyly, the role of the theatre as a place of mourning which restores the victim’s integrity, and the collective’s feeling of unity. None of the texts of the analysed authors indicates any path leading out of desperation, but that which is suicidal; all of them stop at the depiction of hopelessness.

Fig 1. From a performance *Woman Bomb* by Ivana Sajko, director Charlotte L. Brathwaite, Baryshnikov Art Center, NYC, 2012.



³² *Ibid.*

Does this mean that these tragedies fall short of our expectation of finding in them the female sublime, which in tragic human destinies finds a way of extending the boundaries of ego towards others, of re-establishing collective ties and the therapeutic effect of participation in the common life? Is it even correct to read (or watch) tragedies with such an expectation? All that has been mentioned above – as features of the tragic that are advantageous for feminism – should all of that really be ‘written’ in the tragic text? Does it not make us fall into the trap of cathartic misinterpretation of tragedy, the trap of consoling projection and feminist need to produce empowering texts – the same trap which has made feminism reject tragedy? Do we not reduce the recipe for ‘feminist tragedy’ to a simple solution of ‘tragedy with a happy ending’, some kind of a ‘divine comedy’, which is known in literary tradition as the culmination of a narrative about worldly suffering hung on a heavenly absolute?

It has been said above that facing hopelessness is the price we need to pay to enter the tragic view of the world. In Nietzsche’s words, catharsis is just a pathological vent, a trivial instant solution. The impact of tragedy on society is a deferred impact. The power of change that tragedy brings is not always written in its text, but rather in our, or the critic’s, response to it. The relentless facing the tragic, that is, the true witnessing of the suffering of others, opens up a possibility for us to act in society as people who are not indifferent. Thus Govedić, who was disappointed with the aggressive sublimity of Ivana Sajko, and to an extent also with post-war hopelessness in Biljana Srbljanović, reacted to those in her analysis with an invitation to counter indifference.

All of this simply suggests that tragic texts are not needed to provide answers to the world’s inexpressible misfortune, but we need them precisely because they refuse to provide such answers. Therefore, I would say that we should not expect tragedy to bring us change – tragedy expects that from us.

Translated from Croatian by Tamara Levak Potrebeca

Producing the Unknown, Preserving the Birthmark

Lada Čale Feldman and Ana Tomljenović

Let us start with one specific instance of the production of knowledge, the experience we went through, and the outcome it produced, when we were asked to write the Croatian version of the *Introduction to Feminist Literary Criticism*.¹ We had already expressed our concerns regarding that project a year and a half before, while the writing of the book was in process, at the feminist conference *Red-acting Feminisms* organized by the Center for Women's Studies in Zagreb.² In the meantime, the book went out of the press and we were asked to re-visit and eventually deepen or, at least, in a way exemplify that discussion on the present occasion, since the issues we were facing when we started our project, and which regarded both the global and the local status of arts and humanities, as well as the role of feminist criticism in the struggle against their extinction, all but exacerbated.

The story is widely known. A call for papers of the recently organized graduate seminar at Binghamton University, under the heading *Literature, Politics and Aesthetics: The Production of Knowledge and the Future of University*, summarizes the situation most succinctly, so that we hope you will not mind us for quoting its most disturbing paragraphs:

¹ Lada Čale Feldman and Ana Tomljenović, *Uvod u feminističku književnu kritiku*, Leykam international, Zagreb, 2012.

² Lada Čale Feldman, "Thrice exiled: how to write a three times queered *Introduction to Feminist Criticism*", in B. Kašić, J. Petrović, S. Prlenda, S. Slapšak (eds.), *Feminist Critical Interventions. Thinking Heritage, Decolonizing, Crossing*, Centre for Women's Studies, Zagreb, 2013, pp. 137-141.

Neoliberal policies have restructured the university, disciplinary knowledge, and the disciplines themselves. With the formation of the 'for-profit' university, profit-bearing disciplines are valorised, student loans increase drastically, and humanities departments are pressured to redefine themselves in the face of intrusive economic demands. But where does this leave the humanities? What is the status of knowledge production given economic deregulation and privatization shaping the present and future of the university? (...) What trends and approaches exist in literary criticism today? (...) For instance, how do feminist, postcolonial, queer, and other approaches to literature address questions concerning the production of knowledge? (...) Ultimately, is literary criticism still relevant to knowledge production within the university? How does the analysis of a specific literary movement, period, or narrative reflect these broader developments?³

These were exactly the questions that tormented us while writing the book, as they continue to torment us today. We could not have, of course, attended the mentioned conference, and the reason why is easily guessed, that is, not only because, neither of us being an academic star, we were not invited, but, more pertinently, because the reasons pertain to the very incentive of its organization, the lack of funds we, in the humanities, especially the humanities scholars in so-called transitional countries, suffer from. We did, however, read the conference's program after it ended, and realized that, if the titles of the presentations were to be trusted, there was hardly a general and principled discussion endeavouring to respond to the most challenging call, the one inciting the participants to reflect upon the role of feminist, postcolonial and queer readings of literature in revaluing the production of knowledge in the humanities under present precarious circumstances. For, even if the process we are witnessing affects some of the most powerful centres of academic production as well, it has truly devastating effects in minority cultures, to which both feminists and academic peripheries such as Croatian humanities still belong, the latter feeling it even more seriously after the logic of cuts and profits has prompted the imposition of standards of 'international visibility' to its scholarly production as the basis of its financing. The sense of inheritance of an undeservedly ignored and often wilfully bypassed intellectual tradition, that haunted us decades before the current enforcement

³ The call for papers for The Sixth Annual Comparative Literature Graduate Conference (SUNY, March 8th-9th, 2013) can be found at <<https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/48218>>.

of quotation indexes relying on predominantly commercially envisaged databases of scientific measurement, let alone those which systematically ignore the humanities, now turns into utter humiliation, a pressure to conform to new colonial imperatives, to abandon the cultural specificities that are the subject of local humanities, and to turn our topics into flashy titles that would somehow hush up the fact that most English-speaking Masters do not understand a word in the language of the Croatian literary production, or of Croatian translations of world literature for that matter, and therefore could not care less if our arguments are methodologically correct or not.

For a feminist critic, however, this is all too familiar. She can now bitterly smile and say to her colleagues in the field, welcome on boards, that is how women's studies have been ignored, despised and dismissed long before, while you were receiving honours and funds for serving various profitable national, ideological, or state interests. This is, of course, a miserable satisfaction, since she sinks together with the rest of the crew. The question remains, how can she be of help? How is her epistemological stance not only critical of, but also perhaps responsible for, the current devaluation of humanities as simply not corresponding to the actual state of (neoliberal) affairs, a state in which, for instance, languages and literature figure as obsolete vehicles for nation-building, in which anthropology is accused of having legitimized colonial conquests, while philosophy is dethroned as sheer fortification of ideologies, no longer needed now that marketing does it much better – although, as Gayatri Spivak recently demonstrated, all three of them, if re-designed, could still come useful in the so-called “area studies”, financed to support on-going but unpredictably shifting imperialist needs.⁴

Yes, you read well, we said ‘responsible for’ because, to a large extent, feminist literary criticism chanted in a chorus of voices that justifiably denounced ideological and institutional, which also means economic, stakes in any knowledge, therefore in the knowledge of literature and other arts. In so doing, it unfortunately encouraged their reduction to mere instruments of class, racial and gender privilege, devoid of any, if relatively autonomous, interest upon which one could productively rely in one's claim for the preservation of humanities. Neither will, however, do the complementary attitude, which evokes enlightenment's legacies or

⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Rethinking Comparativism”, *New Literary History*, 40/3, 2009, pp. 609-626.

Schillerian ideals of aesthetic education, such as the one recently embraced by Martha Nussbaum and Gayatri Spivak who both claim that humanities are to be preserved primarily because they are vital for democratic education and global justice.⁵ It will not do, since this attitude conceptualizes art again as an instrument of moral enlightenment, so desperately needed in the era of the challenges posed by global capital. It will not do because the humanities do not only deal with non-profitable, but also with downright purposeless surpluses of human creativity, in a deep conviction that exercising purposelessness is the crucial mark of humanity, indeed, its enigmatic 'birthmark', that should be preserved at all cost, even at the cost of the extinction of all our academic privileges.

With due respect for ideological underpinnings of institutional frameworks, historical and cultural contingencies, as well as restricted visibility plaguing women as authors and readers – to which Croatian culture, as well as the humanities that mediated, more than contributed to, its academic valorisation, and which we endeavoured to present, discuss and criticize in our book, freely mixing theoretical offerings coming from both renowned international feminist scholars and local feminist critics – our firm belief was, throughout our project, that the true ground for both feminist and local intervention into the field of literary criticism should remain the opposition towards any reduction of the materiality of individual literary texts to their referential impact – their historical background, cultural resonance, or ethical and political purpose.

Having said so, we do not imply that feminist, queer and postcolonial critics do not have a say in current struggles, precisely because of the already mentioned familiarity with the minority position, in which the entire field of the humanities is now placed with respect to other cultural and scientific discourses. It so happens that, while evoking the work of a theorist we find inspiring for the critical approach that is needed today, we profit of the occasion and honour the tenth anniversary of her death, for her name is Monique Wittig, writer, activist and radical lesbian who died on the 3rd of January 2003, leaving behind one tiny but telling collection of theoretical essays, *The Straight Mind*, issued in 1992.⁶ In this book, she adamantly pleaded against the politics

⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit, Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2010.

⁶ Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992, p. 46.

and the poetics of female specificity, epitomized in essentialist positions within feminist theory and in the very notion and name of women's writing. She insisted that feminists refuse the social contract of heterosexuality, and argued for a unique blend of Marxist analysis, a materialist reevaluation of subjectivity, and a materialist approach to language, the very site of the advent of subjectivity into consciousness.

Language is, for Wittig, our primary social contract, that binds us and subjugates us to the patriarchal rule of the dominant class, whenever it is used as a transparent medium of naturalized discourses ensuring our subjection, concealing the material conditions and the material effects of their production, and therefore of the production of knowledge. Just as lesbians, undefined by their relation to men, are purposeless for heterosexuality because they are of no value for extant modes of social reproduction – because they stand at the outposts of the human as runaways from the class of women, therefore being precisely in a position to “consider the potentiality and virtuality of humanness from an oblique point of view”⁷ – so is literature purposeless for the functioning of society, playing therefore “the Trojan horse” amidst its walls, at once “a gratuitous object whose only purpose is to be found in itself” and a “war-machine” whose “design and goal is to pulverize the old forms and formal conventions” and whose destiny is to be “always produced in hostile territory.”⁸

Wittig's first stance, the one regarding the position of lesbians, encountered many misunderstandings, among which, most notably, by Judith Butler in her influential *Gender Trouble*, in which she criticized Wittig's supposed legislation of lesbianism, the refusal of heterosexual option for some women, as well as a reliance on pre-linguistic ontology and metaphysics of presence –⁹ a curious accusation for anyone cognizant of Benveniste's theory to which Wittig's confidence in language owes all its incisiveness. In Butler's more recent intervention, entitled “Wittig's Materialist Practice: Universalising a Minority's Point of View”, the theorist however revised her previous position, pointing out that Wittig did not endorse a kind of standpoint epistemology, which would simply “oppose a dominant point of view that legislates itself

⁷ Ivi, p. 46.

⁸ Ivi, pp. 68-69.

⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990.

as universal with a minority one that does the same”, but rather promoted a “radical change of the framework that configures power relations themselves”.¹⁰ Furthermore, argues Butler, what Wittig has in mind is not the old Marxist claim that “each new class must represent its own class interest as the common interest” by “giving the form of universality to its thought”, since “‘representation’ here is not meant to be understood as democratic representation”; to represent here “is something other than registering the stated interests of others in loyal way”; it simply does not mean “to describe existing reality or to correspond to existing points of view or existing interests” but to “posit interests and positions that do not yet exist, setting them up, founding them, thus being ‘futural’, if not performative, in its aspirations and effects.”¹¹ Since we do not entirely adhere to the latter conclusion, which still relies on a certain promise of an endlessly postponed political future, let us pause for a moment, that is, return to the issue of representation, and insist that literature, in the aforementioned analogy between the political and the aesthetic position that we derived from Wittig’s argumentation, does not function as a representative of lesbian or any other gender – or class, or racial – identity, but as a site of an analogous and oblique point of view from which to consider the potentiality and the virtuality of language, and to consider it against the grain of its use within the aforementioned ‘hostile territory’. That is why we find, in Wittig, the most fruitful encounter between feminist politics and a currently needed defence of the humanities as a critical practice. It provides us with a conceptual framework for the preservation of the purposelessness of literature, for the defence of its material effects as something which is at variance with existing notions of democratic representation, existing political loyalties and scientific ideologies, let alone practices of profit-making.

Unfortunately, various interdisciplinary hybrids within the field of humanities that currently conflate with what Wittig conceived as heterogeneous social phenomena of history, art, ideology and politics, seem to have finally achieved pre-eminence over approaches cultivating what has all too easily been proclaimed to be nothing but the product of another ‘aesthetic ideology’, the interested accumulation of ‘symbolic capital’, and the like. In Wittig’s view, however, history, politics and ideology,

¹⁰ Judith Butler, “Wittig’s Materialist Practice: Universalising a Minority’s Point of View”, *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 13/4, 2007, pp. 519-533.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 521.

on one hand, and literature or, by extension, all other arts, on the other, are two different and incommensurable orders of discourse: the latter can take the former as its subject matter, the latter's institutional circulation can even be regarded as obeying the rules of the former, but the latter can never be reduced to either the economic or the linguistic logic of the former. In the light of Wittig's warning, imprudent crossing of these borders in the fields of ethnic studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies and gender studies of literature, is not so much a matter of disciplinary transgression that can lead to a reduction but, what is more, a matter of false promises of equity and justice. The irony is, to quote Masao Miyoshi, that this crossing "hardly constitutes a challenge to corporate domination", since "there is a large area of agreement between corporate needs (labour control, market expansion, denationalization, privatization, entrepreneurship, trans-nationalization) and such cross-border studies".¹² The problem is that Wittig never truly addressed the provenance of the aforementioned heterogeneity, although her political point of view, the one of the outcast lesbian, the one exposing the artificial imposition of heteronormativity and inciting a re-appropriation of the power to become an absolute subject through the exercise of language, could have suggested to her that the incommensurability between naturalized discourses and denaturalizing effects of literature could have something to do with the imbrications of sexuality and language.

In our view, her counter-claim that literature, while not being representative of minority identity, is still the privileged medium for making a minority point of view universal, could be justified precisely on these grounds, and thus connect feminist and postcolonial concerns to psychoanalytic insights (despite Wittig's pronounced reservations that largely stemmed from a conception of psychoanalysis as primarily a therapeutic practice of domination and control). Let us first tackle the thorny issue of postcolonial predicament. Together with the age-old, but presently most perniciously felt all-levelling power of money to define the exchange value of goods – production of knowledge included – we are, as we have already said, facing today an equally pernicious linguistic all-levelling, tacitly adopted by research policy makers, that tames the materiality of vernacular

¹² Masao Miyoshi, "'Globalization,' Culture, and the University", in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (eds.), *The Cultures of Globalization (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1998, p. 269.

languages and enforces the 'crystal clear' English standards of expression and argumentation, rendering all peripheral academic and cultural production incomprehensible and superfluous. That is why the preservation of arts and humanities, as purposeless sites of resistance to this process – sites in which one is concerned with the letter, the concrete, the visibility of language, with its material substance and effects, and not easily translatable abstract meanings – truly becomes a matter of life and death for minority cultures, as Gayatri Spivak warns in her re-appraisal of comparativist perspective and deep language learning.¹³ But literature as the mark of this 'life or death' dilemma, insofar as it epitomizes a knowledge that lies beyond the directly usable and the transparently knowable, cannot be extricated from the unconscious workings of sexual difference, as well as from the implications of this stumbling block of meaning in all the other, historically contingent and locally specific antagonisms, conflicts and asymmetries of our world. That is, in our view, the point in which feminist approach to literary criticism, psychoanalytic insights, and postcolonial concerns converge, while refusing, at the same time, as we repeat, to yield to any ready-made representational and/or institutional aims, as well as to any kind of pre-established ethics or politics. To borrow Alenka Zupančič's juggling with Lacanian concepts, just as sexual difference does not pertain either to the order of social and cultural constructions or to the performative ontology that is espoused by Butler, but rather to the order of the real, of the ontological void that paradoxically produces surpluses of enjoyment affecting the entire signifying production,¹⁴ so also the aesthetic sublime does not pertain to the order of morality, to the principle of reality and to the ethics of common good, but rather to the order of the mentioned surplus, being the shining and glowing image of a desire that points to the limits, and brings forth inconsistencies, of the symbolic field. The ethics of art lies elsewhere, in the aforementioned resistance to the co-option into the 'hostile territory' of 'common goods', from profit-making to democracy and global justice.¹⁵

To return to some of the questions from the mentioned Binghamton conference call for papers, concerning the relevance of literary criticism to knowledge production within the university,

¹³ Cf. Spivak, *Rethinking Comparativism*, cit.

¹⁴ Alenka Zupančič, "Ontology and sexual difference", 2012, <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/sexual-difference-and-ontology/>>.

¹⁵ Alenka Zupančič, *Esthétique du désir, éthique de la jouissance*, Champ social et Theetete, Paris, 2003.

and the musings regarding the possibility of an analysis of a specific literary movement, period, or narrative in order to reflect the broader processes we have described as the actual state of humanities' affairs, we shall now proceed with the reading of an exemplary and rather often studied short story, *The Birthmark* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.¹⁶ We chose it not only because of its availability in English original, enabling us to respect Spivak's advice to always read in original language, or because of its eloquent title, already alluded to in reference to the human in-born markings of propensity for purposeless surpluses, but because the analysis we are about to pursue exemplifies the methodology of feminist criticism we embraced in our book, often using literary texts as 'allegories of (feminist) reading' that point to the limits of the knowable, rather than as objects to be deciphered, classified, or instrumented to fulfil institutional needs or legitimize policies. Hawthorne's parable we chose for this occasion, unlike the texts we dialogue with in our book, explicitly deals with the issue of knowledge, involving its most ambitious scope, science, the kind of science that recently insinuated both in the study of human sexuality – in scholarship providing empirical 'evidence' of either conservative or progressive sexual agendas – and, in literary scholarship, in a growing body of work which, tired with the fuzziness and terminological buzz-words, fragmentation and proliferation of theoretical mysticism, promotes an all-embracing cognitive turn.¹⁷ This imposes the logic of progressive superseding of demonstrable findings rather than the one of productively clashing interpretations, as the most promising measure of the field.¹⁸

Now, to add to the mentioned list of reasons for our present choice of a literary example, Hawthorne's story lent itself to innumerable interpretations, among which feminist ones figure

¹⁶ A short story "Birthmark" by Nathaniel Hawthorne was first published in March 1843 edition of *The Pioneer*.
<<http://people.bu.edu/actaylor/The%20Birthmark.pdf>>.

¹⁷ Cf. Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002; Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen, *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003; Geerts Brome and Jeroen Vandaele (eds.), *Cognitive Poetics, Goals, Gains and Gaps*, Mouton, de Gruyter, 2009.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Bruce McConahie's conviction that cognitive approaches are "not just another framework in our bag of theoretical tricks", but something much more efficient, since they "undermined the major premises of Saussurean semiotics, Derridean deconstruction, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as productively modified most schools of phenomenology and materialism". B. McConahie, *Engaging Audiences. A Cognitive Approach to Spectating*, Palgrave, London, 2008, p. vii.

prominently, from harsh indictments of the violence done to the female character of Georgiana - the bearer of the birthmark that her husband Aylmer wants to remove, causing her death at the end - to various other interpretive suggestions regarding the gender politics of the story, and the motives impelling Aylmer to do the terrible deed of forcing his wife to drink his concoction: his stubborn endeavouring to make her beauty finally perfect, his unconscious wish to erase her female difference, as Barbara Johnson argues or as Nicholas Bromell suggests,¹⁹ Aylmer's determination to steal from her the jealously contemplated power to give birth, accorded to Georgiana by the generating power of Mother Nature itself, the very object of Aylmer's ambition to achieve "ultimate control" by excelling "in every branch of natural philosophy".

Many a scholar already pointed out that scientific *hybris* was the primary target of Hawthorne's attack, concerned as he was by "his contemporaries overbelief in science" to which he attributed discernible "religious overtones".²⁰ Joseph Yu complemented these readings by a suggestion that the progressive evocation of alchemy as the story unfolds, should be understood as Hawthorne's trope for "the genuine transformative power" of "the artist's imagination", which nevertheless fails because, in contrast to Hawthorne's own supposed reliance on romanticist ideas of art and imagination, Aylmer's ultimate concern was "the material or the physical, not the spiritual, or the heart"²¹ - as if Aylmer finally suffers a Schillerian punishment for his overinvestment in the sensuous at the expense of intellectual, emotional, and moral enlightenment. What was supposedly Hawthorne's secret intention seems, however, to be more valid for the critics themselves. While trying to penetrate into the meaning of the story, which indeed resonates with parabolic intention, a dense display of religious vocabulary - such as 'humanity', 'imperfection', 'flaw', 'guilt', 'sin', 'sorrow', 'decay', 'death', 'mortality', 'spirit', 'Nature' - critics were tireless in searching for its allegorical counterparts, as well as in quoting the most revealing fragments of the story. It would be quite unfair to say that they did not pay attention to the materiality of its

¹⁹ Cf. Barbara Johnson, *The Feminist Difference. Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race, and Gender*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1998; Nicholas K. Bromell, "'The Bloody Hand of Labor': Work, Class, and Gender in Three Stories by Hawthorne", *American Quarterly* 42/4, 1990, pp. 542-564.

²⁰ Joseph Yu, "Alchemy, Imagination, and Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark'", *Tamkang Review*, 40/2, 2010, p. 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*

language, but one thing is sure, they were all too often tempted to use the quotations to corroborate their own ideas about the sense of the story by the abstract meanings the quoted words seem to convey.

Although the story is short, we cannot engage in a demonstration of all the varieties of meaning each and every passage could evoke – thus constituting the very impetus for relentless questioning about its “more essential symbolization”.²² What we here propose is rather to turn your attention to the procedure by which the story, being blatantly explicit on the destructive effects of the man’s efforts and the woman’s compliance and suffering, works on maintaining its own opacity precisely by throwing among the two genders, as well as among the text and its readers, an unsolvable, traumatic riddle.

That is why we will concentrate on the central word-image, ‘the birthmark’, the title of the story and, therefore, in our view, the crowning proclamation of its own entitlement to impenetrability. The closest any criticism of Hawthorne’s tale came to what we conceive as being inspirational for the feminist approach we endorse, Elisabeth Bronfen’s analysis, saw, in this image, “the uncanny mark” of a “moment of excess in the woman’s physique”, a figure of “the aesthetic threat” to Aylmer’s “philosophic system”, a system, we repeat, characteristic of “natural philosophy”.²³ Contrary to the interpretation we have singled out, that wants to pull Hawthorne back into his historical context and his supposed inclination towards spiritual currents of the romanticist imagination which would doom Aylmer’s endeavours to failure due to their presumed obsession with materiality, Bronfen insists on the opposite, for, behind the protagonist’s forceful gaze at the tempting birthmark, a gaze mesmerized by this “earthly imperfection”, there lurks an understanding of the birthmark as something to be eradicated, being the one and only impediment to the couple’s spiritual harmony and “deeply impressive moral”. It is Aylmer, according to Bronfen, who “translates a body part into a trope”, a symbol which has to be deciphered, whose “heart” has to be penetrated at all costs, and whose “material, indexical meaning” causes him such trouble, urging the mad scientist to eliminate this “mark of materiality, maternity and mortality.”²⁴

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992, p. 126.

²⁴ *Ivi*, p. 128.

The mark does not trouble him only because it reminds him of his own and the woman's "liability to decay and sin", but, above all, at least for Bronfen, because "it marks a point of semantic indeterminacy", that is, its openness to interpretations which vacillate between admiration and horror, as the birthmark vacillates between "visibility and invisibility", "appearance and disappearance", or, in Hawthorne's words and in Aylmer's vision, "imperfect definition" on one hand, and "almost fearful distinctness" on the other. It thus becomes "the focus of a plurality of meanings", not only a threat to "his stability" but to the stability of meaning itself, since the hand whose shape it takes, seems to be risen as a "mark of semantic limit and difference from which binary oppositions emerge so that meaning can function."²⁵

Having suggested that the birthmark figures as the "aesthetic threat" Bronfen proceeds with the explanations of the workings of Aylmer's death drive, and of the Lacanian *aphanisis* that Georgiana's body undergoes in the process of her transformation into an undecipherable sign, which so stubbornly refuses to sever "the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with the mortal frame."²⁶ However, while Bronfen did not hesitate to repeat in her interpretation some of the various designations and descriptions Hawthorne used to put in relief the pivotal problem his tale seems trying to solve, she still did not point out to what extent these *markings of the birthmark* proliferate to ensure, by their opposing and contradictory connotations, the indeterminacy of its shape and meaning, provenance and explanations, permeating the text with such insistence we may safely say it manages to attain the same status the image to which it equivocally refers has within the possible world of the story. It appears and disappears; it is at the same time, a discernible entity on the verbal surface of the tale that could easily be removed from the textual body and its hidden, moving, vital force, indeed, its heart.

The mark starts as the title's "birthmark", and then mutates into a host of diverse, if not contrastive, signifying substitutes, into Georgiana's "charm" and "defect", "beauty" and "flaw", "a singular mark deeply interwoven with the texture and the substance of her face", "the terrible mark", a "crimson stain upon the snow", a "sole token of human imperfection", a "token of the magic endowments", a "frightful object causing trouble and horror", "this one disastrous topic", "a bas-relief of ruby on the

²⁵ Ivi, pp. 128-129.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 126.

whitest marble", a "useless deformity", a "stain going deep as life itself", "this hateful mark", "this horrible stigma", "the birthmark with the intense glow". Covered over with such a variety of lexical robes, its arbitrariness nevertheless turns from incomparable "useless deformity" into what Bronfen calls an "index of human materiality", since its "indistinct", "imperfectly defined" shape is first "similar to the human hand of the smallest pigmy size", only to become, by virtue of a sudden metalepsis, "the mysterious hand", "the crimson hand", "the bloody hand", "the odious hand", "the dreadful hand" itself, always prone, however, to unpredictably revert into "the pretty mimic hand, vaguely portrayed, now lost, now stealing forth again, glimmering to and fro", "the spectral hand that wrote mortality" – that is, an optical illusion, almost reaching the status of "the scenery and the figures of actual life" that Aylmer also produced as "optical phenomena" to enchant his wife, "with that bewitching, yet indescribable difference which always makes a picture, an image, or a shadow so much more attractive than the original".

For Aylmer has his own investments in the figure of the hand: not only is he fascinated by the technological possibilities of abstracting from the material, that is, of producing enchanting optical simulacra – "airy figures, absolutely bodiless ideas, and forms of unsubstantial beauty" that provide "perfect representations" – but he himself produced a most engrossing volume from "his own hand", indeed, "as melancholy a record as ever the mortal hand had penned", a record of "every experiment of his scientific career", all of them, however, failures. Rather than being jealous of Georgiana's generative force, Aylmer seems to be jealous of some successful artist's hand, a hand stamped as the birthmark on his wife's cheek, of which we hear that it "had once blazed forth with such disastrous brilliancy" that the scientist felt he simply had to remove this terrifying reminder of his own "failures, if compared with the ideal at which he aimed", a reminder of "the inestimable gems which lay hidden beyond his reach". Whose hand does he envy? Is it the hand of Mother Nature, or, as the story says, Georgiana's admirers liked to believe, of "some fairy" that had "laid her tiny hand upon the infant's cheek" at her "birth hour"? How come it "has clutched its grasp" in Georgiana's being "with strength of which" neither Aylmer nor we can have any "previous conception"? The mystery will never be resolved, since, just as the birthmark is interweaved in the texture of Georgiana's face, so also the materiality of the literary effect emerges out of the "interweaving" of "the texture"

of the story, which displays Georgiana's marked cheek as a self-reflexive figure, as a figure of its own belonging to the unknown, a figure inextricable from its figural ground, a mark sinking among the story's other marks.²⁷

How does this all accommodate with the issue of today's "trends and approaches in literary criticism", with the production of knowledge that the humanities are supposed to assure, and with its precarious position within the university? Can one promote and preserve the production of the unknown and of the unknowable as one's ultimate task? It is surely a risky, but precisely, therefore, an uncompromising, unconditional ethical and epistemological stance. In our book, we argued extensively why psychoanalysis could be our primary ally in the endeavour to make these figures of the unknowable, as Hawthorne says for the birthmark, "glow intensely" - not because psychoanalysis would be given the privilege to penetrate into the impenetrable, and discover the hidden, psychic truth behind the opacity of literary signifiers, but because it is the "science" that explicitly relinquished its scientific aspirations and openly professed its allegiance to poetic "slips of the tongue", to all the literary figures that, as Antigone does for Lacan, "glow intensely" both beyond and due to its optical illusions, that is, both beyond and due to their seeming "perfect representations", thus providing the tempting resistance of the enigmatic signifiers to adjust to any readily available signification.

Curiously enough, Hawthorne seems to have provided us with a chance to defend our position even in that respect. The only moment in his story in which one hears the word "truth" belongs to the part which, indeed, could lead us along the ideal path, the royal road of psychoanalytic insights, since in it we are informed of the after-taste produced by Aylmer's dream. Here is the passage in question:

When the dream had shaped itself perfectly in his memory, Aylmer sat in his wife's presence with a guilty feeling. Truth often finds its way to the mind close muffled in robes of sleep, and then speaks with uncompromising directness of matters in regard to which we practice unconscious self-deception during our waking moments. Until now he had not been aware of the tyrannizing influence acquired by one idea over his mind, and of the lengths which he might find in his heart to go for the sake of giving himself peace.²⁸

²⁷ Cf. Johnson, *The Feminist Difference*, cit., p. 17.

²⁸ Cf. Hawthorne, *Birthmark*, cit.

What was “the truth” of the dream, the one, as mark the words, that we “unconsciously” hide to ourselves during our waking moments? In his dream, the husband anticipated his “resolve to cut or wrench away” Georgiana’s heart together with “the hand” that inadvertently sank into it. The knowledge transmitted by the dream, however, did not prevent either the man to pursue his resolve, or Georgiana to submit to the procedure; indeed, their respective readings of the dream prompted both of them to persevere. Perhaps, what puzzled them was precisely “the uncompromising directness” of the dream, the “robes of sleep” that fitted too well to the “tyrannizing influence” of their respective ideas, so that they discarded these images in search of a deeper, hidden, “muffled” truth that each interpreted, just as the beholders of the birthmark, “according to the difference of” their respective “temperaments”? Aylmer becomes all the more convinced in “the perfect practicability of the removal” of the birthmark, while Georgiana reads in the dream a confirmation of “the horror and disgust” that her husband feels when faced with “this hateful mark”, revelling in advance in her heroic decision to run every “risk”, any “danger”. If the dream conveys any “truth” for us, its readers placed outside of “the mortal frame” of Hawthorne’s text, it is then the “shocking” intimation the same unpredictable interpretive destiny holds for the entire *Birthmark*, depending on changing operative positions and forces structuring gender antagonisms. Perhaps contemporary critics of the tale would be less inclined to ascribe their differences of opinion to their “temperaments”, and more willing to attribute them to their socially constructed gender, or race, or class identity; still, this would not account for the very fact that the tale enables such divergent interpretations.

Of course, one could easily object that we took as our example a widely read and consecrated, canonical American text, instead of choosing a piece of women’s, or at least Croatian writing, which would hypothetically serve our feminist and/or postcolonial allegiance much better. Or, likewise, that we, while paying attention to Georgiana and Aylmer, forgot to mention Aminadab, “the personification of matter and physical work, placed beside the sorcerer Alymer as Caliban is beside Prospero”, “the background role ... often played, in white Western literature, by non-white characters”, as Barbara Johnson first pointed out.²⁹ This character could nevertheless hardly suit our eventual postcolonial

²⁹ Cf. Johnson, *The Feminist Difference*, cit., pp. 35-36.

identifications, that is, represent the wholly unmanageable non-exotic white European South-Easterners to whom we belong, and who today mostly populate contemporary action films as corrupted barbarians supposedly profiting the most from the aforementioned “economic deregulation”. Let us leave this kind of historicizing and stereotyping to transparent texts that Monique Wittig urged us to refuse to subscribe to, opting rather for self-reflexive moves of literature, for its inherent capability to reflect upon its use of language as a material production of material effects. Let us therefore turn the last remnants of your magnanimous attention to the fact that it is precisely Aminadab, the coarse background worker enabling Aylmer’s spiritual endeavours, who remarks that, if Georgeana “were his wife, he would never part with that birthmark”, and who, upon her death, gets literally the last bitter laugh in the tale.

Scratches of Disobedience, Or How to Handle the (M)Other

Brigita Miloš

At the beginning of this paper I would like to describe a sculpture made by Croatian artist Sanja Iveković, a statue of a sea urchin, much bigger and heavier than the real creature, but equally thorny and potentially dangerous, with the simplicity and humility of a sea urchin. This creation is the reward the Erste Foundation assigns each year for achievements in the field of social integration, a prize (spiky award) that can only be given and/or received while wearing work gloves; the act of handing over and receiving the sculpture must be carried out carefully, so that neither the recipient nor the giver of the object is hurt.

In my belief, what counts as an affective dimension of the symbolic message of this reward is 'difficulty'. 'Difficulty' is the real affective viaticum of this sculpture, without expiring its sense either in the mere performative act of awarding or submitting this object, or in the symbolic valor of the possible danger the urchin can indicate. Indeed, difficulty can be spread within the field of 'social' issues, a realm much broader than the 'artistic' field, involving, among others, the ethical dimension of a bank-corporation award assigned for social sensitivity, or the cartographic (neo)colonial dimension of the problem; the prize is, in truth, given to citizens of South/Eastern Europe. Difficulty can also be found in themes of artistic and social engagement, as well as in the process of identifying issues and/or (artistic?) concepts of 'irony' and 'cynicism' as models of 'sustainability' in the objective arena, where systemic violence works as the unceasing circulation of constantly increasing capital. Here, difficulty may help re/thinking the modulations of 'ideological cynicism' understood as a form of (artistic) *servitude volontaire*.

I mention the sculpture, and some of the ‘difficulties’ that characterize its work, because there is a concept somehow similar to this artistic object, the notion of the ‘disobedient daughter’ as introduced by Rosi Braidotti in her book devoted to *Metamorphosis*:

In so far as feminism is a hermeneutics of suspicion, it functions as a factor of disengagement from the Masters ‘and Mistresses’ voice. Consequently, as a Deleuzian feminist, that is to say, an anti-Oedipal yet passionately undutiful daughter of one of the few philosophers who preached conceptual disobedience, I find myself, quite simply, in an ideal position.¹

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the claims of feminism as a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ or to reflect on the actual ‘disengagement from the voice of the Master/Mistress’. Yet, in my opinion, Braidotti’s quote interprets a modulation of the third-wave feminist episteme, the pleasure of epistemic (perhaps more theoretical) liberation or freedom. Declined in the plural, the notion of ‘Feminisms’ means and includes a theoretical, methodological or paradigmatic diversity, supported – not always favorably welcomed – by the link between ‘feminist theory’ and the ‘Deleuzian heritage’ (as if the joy of liberated thoughts were legitimized by the philosopher’s blessing). Ten years after her *Metamorphosis*, Braidotti’s theoretical autofigurational model turns into a nomenclatural appropriate outfit in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, the book edited by Henriette Gunkel, Chrisanthy Nigianni and Fanny Sodreback. In the Preface, Braidotti states that “One is not born, one becomes an undutiful daughter”, offering possible ways of ‘undutifulness’ or ‘sustainable betrayal(s)’.²

Iveković’s sculpture and Braidotti’s concept? I say: in ‘difficulty’. ‘Difficulty’ appears at different levels. On one level, it is difficult to accept without reserve the ‘disobedient daughter’ as a panacea of epistemic liberation. Specifically, ‘daughters’ involve, rather than an individual right or act of liberation, a shared commitment to disobedience. In this sense, the title, as well as the overall tone of Braidotti’s preface “The Society of Undutiful Daughters”, may recall the romantic idea of a deliberate action of a group acting in loosed obedience or discipline, thus

¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 68.

² Rosi Braidotti, “Preface. The Society of Undutiful Daughters” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, H. Gunkel, Ch. Nigianni, F. Söderbäck (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012, ix-xx, p. ix.

disseminating the version of 'a people-yet-to-come'. On another level, the choice of society recalls a relatively exclusive circle, an avant-garde feminist thought which, nolens-volens, stands out of proclaimed molecularity, deterritorializing into a molar category. Difficulty can also be seen in ad hoc coalitions, strange guerrilla or hectic connections, and gatherings of participants in disobedience (as if the partisan battle line were traversed). Difficulty may further arise if we do not accept the basic theory of Deleuzian 'dehumanization', that is, as long as we remain aware of the species-world of the humans – are we in a position to merely disobey Deleuze, or do we automatically participate in a wholly different paradigm? Would the question of who are those missing people and what they do be as impossible or paradoxical as, for example, forging 'extra-human life' in SF literature? Difficulty can also be found on the operational or adaptational level, for example, when we set virtual femininity in the account of disobedience, a claim that invokes the functionality of Spivak's strategic essentialism, plus the disputes this proposal brings along with it. How can we be sure that 'cooperation with disobedience' is not a version of 'docile cooperation'? Difficulty resounds along the borders, or the intensities, of disobedience; are we stating an 'event' of disobedience whenever someone refuses to create a sculpture for a banking corporation? Is it not, exactly, an ironic sculpture ironically made for a banking corporation, an example of disobedience? Does, for example, the production of (feminist) knowledge in indexed journals have an impact on an eventual inclusion into 'the society of disobedient daughters' of feminist thought? Do I enter this society if, when I produce disobedience, my production is framed within the scientific system, heavily loaded, *nota bene*, with scientometric postulates and the logic of overall financialization? Is the molar shape of knowledge economy or knowledge production what can dictate, or dictates, figurations of resistance and insubordination? Is it not that disobedience has always involved a conscious myopia towards the experiential situations of people? Are then these contingencies of lived experiences only reductions and simplifications produced by deterritorialized knowledge, or are they extremely visible points of disjunctive synthesis, where we are not capable of deducing differences anymore? Braidotti provides the answer(s) to some of these difficulties, in a vitalistic Deleuzian manner: "[Undutiful daughters, and invariant of a broader concept of nomadic selves, are the expression of irrepressible flows of relations and encounters, and hence also of affectivity and desire that they are not in charge

of.”³ In this quotation, the de-substantialization of agency – and of agents – seems strange, provoking more difficulties.⁴ In general, it is certain that the controversies over the ‘undutiful daughters’ or the ‘marriage’ of feminism and Deleuze does not stop here; my contribution to the discussion is, indeed, to draw attention to those aspects of “pleasure in liberation/freedom” as stressed by Elizabeth Grosz.⁵

Fig. 1: Sanja Iveković, *Spiky Award* (courtesy of the artist).



Given its ‘difficulties’, the concept of ‘disobedient daughter’ works in my paper as one possible nomadic line of escape from or through a variety of molar structures, identifiable by different names: the literary canon, (Croatian) national literature, literary theory and history, academic authority or epistemological distinctness. Here I opt for another name, in many ways bound to the concept of the ‘disobedient daughter’: the name (or molar structure?) of the ‘mother’. In particular, I introduce two ‘mother figurations’ I find in the work of the Croatian writer, Janko Polić Kamov. In Croatian national literary history and theory, Kamov is considered a fin-de-siècle modernist, proclaimed, almost without exception, as a revolutionary and emancipatory author. Literary

³ Braidotti, “Preface”, cit., p. xvi.

⁴ Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, Routledge, New York, 2004.

⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, “A Thousand Tiny Sexes”, in C. Boundash, D. Olkowski (eds.), *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, Routledge, London, New York, 1994, pp. 191-197.

critics, historians and theorists, working on the thematic layers of his oeuvre, often associate his writing to an anarchic rejection of discipline or of bourgeois/petite bourgeois morality, branding him as a 'bad boy' of Croatian literature. The label can serve as an additional incentive to focus on a sacred 'event' in society: the instance of the 'mother'.

The 'Mother' – a term and a concept emptied out and filled in with meanings mostly related to current social necessities – reaches its peak of discursive constitution in the space where the production of interpretation or the production of legitimized knowledge takes place: within (institutions of) science or higher education (even called *Alma MATER Studiorum*). If it is true that a simple and clear-cut game between the *potestas* of institutionalized and mainstream interpretation/knowledge and the *potentia* of the Other/other's interpretation/knowledge does not necessarily constitute an undutiful move on the map of nomadic (academic) episteme, I would point out two interpretative topological positions that correspond to mainstream academic perpetuated exploitations of the Other. My critical point is that both positions can be read as specific forms of mainstream 'use' and 'abuse' of the constitutive features of the (constitutive) Other.

In my opinion – and my first example should make it clear – in Kamov's poem *Pjesma nad pjesmama* (Song of Songs), the fact that 'being a mother' is completely ignored is strictly linked to the interpretative premise that can be described as the "glorification of free love", or the "celebration of new and liberated sexual or emotional relations between man and woman", or the "highlighting of natural female beauty."⁶ The eventuality that, in this poem, interpretations blur, hide, or do not connect with the issue of 'being a mother' can be read as the stripping off of the Other's otherness, the malicious cooperation with the Other without taking care of her integrity. The poem's initial verses illustrate this problematic:

Let us go, my Gypsy, my black love;
 your complexion is darker and your eyes are black;
 your legs are streaked and greasy is your hair;
 you're all black, you're all wild, oh my black love.
 I cherish the scream from your eyes and I cherish the scream from
 your breast;

⁶ Janko Polić Kamov, *Selected short stories and poems*, ed. by Mladen Urem, trans. by Damir Biličić, Centar društvene djelatnosti mladih Rijeka, NZMH, Rijeka and Zagreb, 1997.

it contains our love and in pain you love a woman and the pain
 bears the children
 Oh, my naked love.
 You are so huge in liberty and still greater is our love,
 our love's as dark woods and as bloody as a god;
 my woman is the first among women: dark as a night, mysterious
 as a cloud,
 wild as this kiss of mine and mutinous as these verses of mine.⁷

'Gypsy' is a marked lexeme that functions as the node of several flows springing from the character's ethnic/sexual/gender/class/female identity. Only if we are ready to accept the stereotypical and often unflattering denotation – or supposed 'degree zero' – of the lexeme 'gypsy woman', can the term perform its contradicting of the figure of the 'bourgeois wife' or the 'prostitute'. By turning the aesthetic codes upside down, as if form meant ethics, and thus constituted the premise of civil society, Kamov performs a poetic gesture of revolt; the portrayal of the woman certainly marks a creative novelty, if related to the dominant Croatian poetic of his time. Still, the question is in the 'subversive power' of its figuration, the relationship between the text and the poem, her body as a text of culture.

Female beauty has always constituted a privileged element of the male or masculine paradigm that assesses the criteria and desirable qualities, or otherwise identifiable female body features, as beautiful or not. Even if a different version of the 'eternal' quantum of female beauty is kept as a qualitative (vs. quantitative) new or innovative paradigm, there remains the relation between her 'proclaimed' freedom and her relationship with the poetic subject. The technique of the 'male gaze' refigures her body in exotic morphology; yet, it is impossible for this visual machine to loosen itself from the alleged 'natural' feminine connections to relatedness or to love. The active power of the Gypsy's 'freedom' functions only through the vehement subversive machines of the poetic subject and of his desires. She is as free as nature, *natura naturata* not *natura naturans*. The creative potential of freedom or the wilderness of her body is not exploited for any subversive purpose: she is, in truth, to bear a child. The poetic subject celebrates his wild, free or unbounded, relation to the Gypsy woman, but the assumption of procreative sexuality is never questioned. It is interesting to note that, if not for the fact that childbirth involves the woman's body, the relationship of the

⁷ Ivi, p. 181.

poetic subject to motherhood is of 'childcare'. He anticipates that the child will...

Wade the world hungry as our passion, damned as our song
and bloody as this love of ours;
And the curse shall be broken on him, and there'll be no place for him
among the people;
he'll be damning his father and mother and their love, taking the
curse from man to god;
misery and horror shall tremble under his foot and there will be no
crumbs of dried bread;
they will hunt him and chain him and crime shall be his food.⁸

The prophetic verses of the child's destiny – a damned, secluded, wild, unlawful, and cursed future – include a violent rhetoric, and a revolt that is meant to determine the poetic subject. The (new) name of the father cunningly smiles through the rows or the lines of the poet's revolutionary request. Paradoxically, the so-called 'new order' is not so different or no different at all from the hated status-quo of the nuclear family. The drive mechanism "daddy-mommy-baby" is a relative basis for a revolt against social hypocrisy. Kamov's Gypsy woman is far from representing a divined or celebrated "new femininity", far from incarnating liberated womanhood and free love, far even from figuring the elementary emancipatory request of being able to decide about her own life. She is costumed with modern masculine ideological robes, upholding all the patriarchic segments of femininity: motherhood, the family, love, plus the annex of the role of the 'helper' or 'comrade' in a new masculine and ideological struggle.

If it is true that interpretations of this poem do not normally take into account the Gypsy's motherhood – and mainstream interpretations do not give any account of this – it can be said that the Other of the poetic work, or the Other of the poetic subject, is stripped off of one of its constitutive elements, interpretatively deprived of an important feature, which is deliberately hidden and pushed aside because its highlighting might rightly expose the manipulative and repressionist 'partnership' between One and the Other.

My second example of the interpretative relation to the Other/m-other is different. If, in the previous instance, the point lies in the hiding of a layer that might disturb the 'new paradigm', the following example, in a way, signifies the opposite sense. It

⁸ Ivi, p. 182.

expands, augments, and collaborates with being a 'mother' in so intense a manner so as to lose any denotative privilege, even its name. In a different context, the story is similar to the philosophical example of the ship which changes, on a long sail, all its parts, so as to provoke the wonder: is it still the same ship?

The most complex and, probably, most controversial female figure of Kamov's work is Linda, the mother of *Mamino srce* (Mama's Heart). Mainstream interpretations of the tragic plot infer that the mother Linda incurs debts because of the "logic of the heart", which manifests itself in the fetching of luxury or unnecessary items for the children, and thus impoverishes the whole family. As a consequence, the family cannot take care even of the health of its members, and two daughters die of tuberculosis. In other words, the mother, because of her unreasonable heart, destroys the family. This 'cause/consequence' interpretative production locates Linda's character within the frame of a heroic character, whose tragic blindness is played out to its very end. This 'explication' is often supported by Linda's phrase: "If one of my daughters had been cured from the same disease that the other died of, I would have had pangs of conscience. It is better that way."⁹

The monologue where the motif appears is located at the end of Act III of the tragedy, which, according to the classic layout, should culminate the dramatic plot. The monologue's stage directions introduce a contrast between the signifier (the 'mother's pain') and the signified (determinants in the statements of sadness, such as: "Her voice is smiling, singing and flying"; "Her voice was crying with laughter"; or "(a large garrulity and naivety)" or "as if singing a lullaby"). Without entering into the acting values of its spoken language (modes, tones, voice modulation), the mother's monologue robs her children of adulthood's differentiated individualism ("My poor little big kid"), while objectifying them into "graves" ("The graves were laughing as if they were smiling children"). The move towards the de-individualization of children is repeated by the subtraction of the dead sisters and by emphasizing the "one heart" ("Yesterday, the graves were smiling as if in them one heart was beating"), by passing through the mental *mélange* of her daughters:

How could Olga go to Dubrovnik, when Mila did not go to Egypt?
And there were two sisters, two brides, similar like twins. I just

⁹ J. Polić Kamov, "Drame", in D. Tadijanović (ed.), *Sabrana djela Janka Polića Kamova*, ICR, Rijeka, 2000.

watched their hands and sheets, white, so white, as if asking for something, but not grasping which one is whiter ... How could Olga welcome spring and a wedding ring, when Mila could not? How could Olga look towards south and health, when Mila could not? How can one live when the other pulls her legs in sleep?¹⁰

Truly the reduction of differentiated individualities affects all the members of the family. If we consider what constitutes the basic controversy of this monologue, an atypical example of “*mater dolorosa*”, it seems that the augmentation or expansion of the ‘heart’ (in pain) over the less and less differentiated objects of pain is the main cause of its unease and discomfort. Trying to define the mother’s mental action, I would like to use the term ‘dedifferentiation’. The alleged female/maternal inability to distinguish the characteristic of human individuality; even more, her inability to distance herself from her ‘heart’ as a further version of a lack of self-discipline or reason, reinforces the supposed receptivity of women to ‘deficient’ (secondhand) images of differentiation, or dedifferentiated images orbiting within the area of culture, as accessible (ready/made for consumption) and (already) encoded within the epistemic paradigm of female figurations.

The set-up of the mechanism of desire towards the other in such way is a mode to create female desire as inauthentic in its (re)production of desire towards the other (which, in this process, is never able to ‘be’ the Other). “Mama’s heart” as such is filled in with the fabricated image of ‘others’, the selected spectacle of images visited, used and discarded, depending on the purpose of the very heart that ‘spends’ or ‘uses’ them. The others, like the alleged objects of desire orientation (materialized in care, in love) are reified images coded by the inability of authenticity. Copies without originals, objects produced in the world, they are interchangeable, compatible, expendable, removable: that is, a commodity. Actually, the only member of the family who fulfills her differentiated individuality is Linda. Her ‘Heart’ is, primarily, a unit measuring itself, at the expense of the reification of others, differentiating her as the sole entity in a sea of amorphous ‘secondhand’ shadows. Linda’s action of spending, so as to establish her own distinctiveness, changes the idea of women as ‘commodities’, the topos of our modernity – if we “view modernity from the standpoint of consumption rather than production”, it effects this “shift in perspective which causes taken-for-granted

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

phenomena” of women-as-commodity “to appear in a new light”.¹¹ This reversal of position allows us to refigure the other moment/sin of Linda, her consumerism. Her prodigality could be understood as a foreplay for Linda’s “confusion of the heart”. The realization of a supposed original (natural, female, motherly) desire to the other is a mere invariant of the impossible authenticity of the other, as well as the marking of the impossibility of female desire, in its lacking of an object, unthinkable and/or offensive, necessarily confusing the supposed pleasure of care with the pleasure of luxury, love with sentimental delicacy.

Those sentimentalized/romanticized desires inscribed in the figure of Linda transgress from the realm of sensitivity, uncoordinated to the dominant modernist realm of reason, into the key operative mechanism of modernity, consumerism. Often depicted as objects in the domain of heterosexual relations, woman, as it seems, might attain the status of an active subject only in relation to other objects:

Perhaps, once awakened, this kind of appetite would have disturbing and unforeseeable effects, reaching out to subvert the social fabric and to undermine patriarchal authority within the family. ... Depicted as the victim of modernity, she is also its privileged agent; epitomizing the subjection of women by the tyranny of capital, she simultaneously promotes the feminization of society through a burgeoning materialism and hedonistic excess. ... These ambiguous meanings clustered around the female consumer suggest that the interrelations between patriarchal and capitalist structures may be more complicated than feminist theorists have often recognized.¹²

If the mother-consumer empowers the image of objectified women, together with their weakened status, it becomes difficult to understand why the phenomenon is so vehemently attacked as a threat to traditional male authority over women. In contrast to the figuration of the ‘Gypsy mother’, the ‘consumer mother’ appears on the spectrum of visibility later, in an opposed interpretative action, that is, in the maximizing of the impact of the visible topos of the mother. From the undutiful exaggeration of the notion of ‘motherly heart’ follows the paradoxical situation in which this ‘motherly heart’ is re-shaped into neutralization, negation, or identity shift. In turn, the critical/ethical problem that appears

¹¹ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1995, p. 61.

¹² Ivi, pp. 61-65.

in the context of 'zapping' or 'blurring' the elements of gender identity, calls for a paradoxical new coil – the deterritorialization of confiscated elements, hopefully in a manner that can be described as a commitment towards the 're-thinking' of subjectivities and events meant as intensive, multiple and discontinuous processes of inter-relations. These processes would invite us to go beyond critique, attempting to bring about a community of historically located subjects who seek for their inter-connections in 'undutiful' manners.

Photographic Difference: the ‘Only Side of Life’

Silvana Carotenuto

All biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives
tell one story in place of another story.
(Hélène Cixous, *Rootprints*)

My contribution deals with photography. I do not intend to photograph the complexity of the theme (it might otherwise be a question of music, composition, counterpoint, chant, singing) offered by the Dubrovnik 2013 Seminar; I will rather take snapshots of the notion of ‘difference’ as envisioned by the female author who, for me, acts out as the most inspiring source of ‘knowledge production’ within the most powerful ‘critique’ of contemporary times: Hélène Cixous, and her writing-thinking-photographing praxis of Deconstruction.¹

Difference, in Deconstruction, is associated with life; it is the ‘eternal return’, a selective principle that celebrates the feminine affirmation of life, ‘a’ life, one’s life, in difference from all negativity and negation.² Hélène Cixous is the thinker,

¹ Gerhard Richter, “Between Translation and Invention. The Photograph in Deconstruction”, in Jacques Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature. A Conversation on Photography*, Stanford U. P., Stanford, 2010, explains, «Like photography, deconstruction is concerned, among other things, with questions of presentation, translation, *tekhne*, substitution, deferral, dissemination, repetition, iteration, memory, inscription, death, and mourning”, pp. xix-xx.

² Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, the Athlone Press, London, 1983, and Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other. Otobiography Transference Translation*, Schocken Books, New York, 1985. In the lapse of time since these publications, difference has been constantly under attack, also through female critique. The Neo-Hegelian Catherine Malabou, “The eternal return and the phantom of difference”,

the writer and the poet who nowadays interprets, in her work, this female/feminist/feminine affirmation. Jacques Derrida, the father of Deconstruction, assigns this role to his dear friend, in his extraordinary *H.C., c'est pour la vie*, a poem written in prose devoted to the celebration, the performance and the praxis of the 'only side of life':

The side... her side is indeed the side of life... this side, as the side of life, has the particularity of being the only side. There is not other side than this side, the side of life. There is only one side in her geography, her geophysics, and her geology. There is only one rib (*côte*) in the body, one shore on which to fix (*une côte où river*) the departing and arriving (*arrivée*) of what happens on earth/land, and it is life – life, whence everything derives and detaches itself and toward which everything comes and comes back. Life has no other, it has not other side; and all the sides, all the asides, all the sidesteppings leave their traces on the same side of the same vein.³

In what follows I will try to show Hélène Cixous's powerful re-vindication of life, her 'eternal return', her difference and the difference of her writing, in some texts where she reflects on/with through photography.⁴ This *tekhne* and art often appears

Parrhesia, n.10, 2010, p.28, recently asked: "What if the philosophical challenge of our epoch, prefigured by Nietzsche, was precisely to come to think without identity and without difference?". In response to Malabou's provocation, my conviction in 'difference' is in "'Go Wonder': Plasticity, Dis/semination and (the Mirage of) Revolution", in Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller (eds.), *Plastic Materialities. Legality, Politics and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*, Duke U.P., Durham, NC, 2015 (forthcoming).

³ Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, that is to Say*, Stanford U. P., Stanford, 2006, p. 39, elaborates on the infinite performativity of Cixous's creative *puisse* – 'might', verb, noun, desire, given grace.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, thinker of the 'eternal return', describes the 'riddle' of his life in the division between a 'dead father' and an 'always-surviving mother'. Since 2004, the date of Jacques Derrida's death, I have lived in autobiographical division, in-between a 'dead father', Jacques Derrida, and Hélène Cixous, an 'always-surviving mother', sharing their different experiences of the 'eternal return': J. D.: "... a taking side with life which I have never been able to share. I am not 'against' life, but neither am I 'for life'. This discord is at the heart of the book, and of life". H. C.: "You are against death and fiercely for life. But otherwise. Disquietedly." "From The Word to Life". A Dialogue between J. Derrida and H. Cixous", *New Literary History*, vol. 37, n.1, winter 2006, p. 7. 'The iterative encounter between J. D. and H. C. is a not theme approachable within the limit of time and space here allowed; I refer to the work by Ginette Michaud, *Battements du secret littéraire* and "Comme un rêve...". *Lire Jacques Derrida et Hélène Cixous*, vol.1-2, Hermann, Paris, 2010. In English, see also her "Derrida & Cixous: Between and Beyond, or What to the Letter Has Happened", *New Literary History*, vol.37, no.1, winter 2006.

in Cixous's *oeuvre*;⁵ I read here three works where her fictional/invented character, *la narratrice, l'autrice* always bearing traces of the author's 'auto-hetero-biography', seems to construct her life through photography, in the development of her vindication against, and the overcoming of, all negativity and negation.⁶ The essay "Albums and Legends" and the fictions *So Close* and *Index Cixous* (by the photographer Roni Horn, a collaboration interpreted by Cixous in "Portraits de Portraits. Le jour même de Roni Horn") trace some nodal moments in her reflection on writing. First, it is the narration of her childhood and youth, supported by the photographs of her family albums, and extended up to the 'adoption of a literary nationality', as she remarks in the conclusion of *Rootprints*. Second, it comes the exposition of this literary identity to the desire to create a 'masterpiece', the photograph of her mother at her birthday in the uncanny 'return' of a bathing suit, a 'reflection' that produce extraordinary effects – Cixous's 're/turn' to Algeria and her 'visit/ation' to her father's tomb, if, in photography, it is always and already a question of ghosts, phantasms, *phantasmata* – in the 'development' (to be intended in photographic sense) of her life and her writing. Finally, photography is the art to which Cixous exposes her 'Visage', in a singularity – her own face – simultaneously pluralised in the photos of her looks, different, secret and luminous (here photography writes with the graphy of *light*), indexed in her portrait 'taken' in the instant of the call of a portrait of the other...⁷

⁵ The *tekhne* and the art of photography might be capable of framing/capturing/seeing the deconstructive insurgence of life in its emergence's *quick*, in the *click* of the camera: "De-construction' is the gesture of thinking that permits the discovery of the quick of life under the immurements". Hélène Cixous, "We are already in the Jaws of the Book. Inter Views", in Hélène Cixous – Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints. Memory and life writing*, Routledge, New York, 1997, p. 83.

⁶ A possible 'order' of the reading that I am here offering, is given by the impossibility to distinguish H.C.'s poetics among *oeuvre, avant-oeuvre, hors-oeuvre, hors-la-loi de l'oeuvre*. See J. Derrida, *Genèses, généalogies, genre e le génie. Le secrets de l'archive*, Galilée, Paris, 2003, p. 20.

⁷ Hélène Cixous, "Albums And Legends", in Cixous – Calle-Gruber, cit.; *So Close*, Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K., 2009; "Portrait de portraits. Le jour même de Roni Horn", in Hélène Cixous, *Peintures*, Hermann, Paris, 2010. I read these texts as 'snapshots', "or paradoxical instants, (...) these impossible instants, as Kierkegaard would have said, whose decisive force interrupts but also makes possible the story and history." Jacques Derrida, "Aletheia", *Oxford Literary Review*, 32.2. 2010, p. 176, writing on the photographic work "Light of the Dark" by the Japanese artist Kishin Shinoyama, names 'Aletheia' both (the) 'truth' (of photography) and the photographic 'model' of the work, Shinobu Otake – "a virgin, a fiancée, a wife, a mother between day and night", p. 169.

In the literary construction of her life, Cixous approaches the specificity of the production of photographic knowledge, its persistence in space and time, its *tekhne* and art, all its (im)possible 'sides'. Initially, the photos are there for her to write their legends; then, photography becomes the enemy that works by 'cutting', in difference from the fluidity of writing, but which can, at the same time, represent, together with writing, an invaluable companion for the woman who, under the spell of a 'maternal' technology, looks for another Sight. Finally, and if a new Sight is destined to 'capture' a new Vision (*vie/vitesse/vision*), photography can invent its 'other' dispositif of (re)production, thus making itself able to envision, in the return of difference, the call for the other, while calling the other in...

Will this be 'a feminist critique of knowledge production'? It is the encounter of a 'poethics' (of writing, reflection, and invention; of problematization, elaboration, and transformation) that claims the difference of life in celebration and affirmation: the birth of its figures (singular, and in connection with humanity); the birth of the *oeuvre* (along the vertiginous paths of resistance, acceptance, and change); the birth of an image/imagination capable of becoming plural, addressing its own difference and the difference of the ones who receive it – through photography. The 'only side of life': in H. C., photography reflects (upon) life, exposing it to the infinity of sides (the pains of existence, the traumas of history, the binomy of life and death – to be traversed, perhaps, with the help of *tekhne*, art, and *Peintures*?)⁸ that belong to it, indexing its matrix – *le matricielle* – to be unconditionally hospitable of the lives of others.

Reflection / exposition / invention – these photographic traits might produce different images of 'a feminine / female / feminist critique of knowledge production', eternally returning, through their infinite emanations, to the affirmation, *anneau*, and alliance of life - with itself, its *oeuvre*, and its others: "I love what I am living and I desire what is coming. I recognize whatever comes my way to come to me, and to come back to me eternally... their is the necessity of this detour through the other in the form of the eternal return of that which is affirmed, of the wedding and the wedding ring, of the alliance."⁹

⁸ See Cixous, *Peintures*, cit.

⁹ Derrida, *Otobiography*, cit., p. 88.

Prints of ‘Strange Roots’

Omi traversed my whole life. She is a bit m,o,i,
(H. Cixous, “Albums and legends”)

H.C. turns to photography in order to ‘imagine’ – because it will be a series of ‘images’ to rhythm – the experience / fiction / invention of her ‘autobiography’.¹⁰ “Albums and Legends” offers the form of her ‘auto-hetero-biography’ in a memory made of silent traces, where the photos of her past (what is really past, if not when ‘passed through’?) stay there (*demeure*), and have always stayed there, for the writer to know, never looking at them, that they are there. In the essay, she re-visits (it is a story of ghosts and of their haunting ‘return’) her ‘strange roots’ in the *graphy* of light (*photography*) of the lives of others, the ancestors who have ‘watched over’ the development of her life, and the life of her writing.¹¹

The ‘tattered’ album of her family opens with the map of Europe and North Africa, the ‘Two Worlds’ of her grandparents’ shop in Oran, the place where H. C. exposes herself to a variety of languages, religions, and stories. Here, she listens to the legends of the nomadic Jews of Europe, recounting of their journeys, lives and deaths. One of them is her maternal grandfather, the soldier who only left a David Star on the cross (*crocevia* of passion, crossing of life and death) of his grave, a voice coming from the hole inscribed in history by his absent photo: “Why these tears? Because I am dead. I am so dead... the grass in disorder on my feet” (p. 186). It is the first connection of H.C.’s ‘strange roots’ to the photographic album: “Such is the strange heart of

¹⁰ Elsewhere, and usually, Cixous is interested into the textual weaving of ‘le phylum familial’. See Derrida, *Genèses*, cit., p. 31.

¹¹ Carola Hilfrich, “‘The Self Is a People’: Autoethnographic Poetics in Hélène Cixous’s Fictions?”, *New Literary History*, vol. 37, no. 1, *Hélène Cixous: When the Word is a Stage* (Winter 2006), p. 224 (the ‘quotation’ in the title of the essay, comes from the interview between Hélène Cixous and Aliette Armel, “Le moi est un peuple”, *Magazine littéraire* 409, 2002) speaks of ‘auto-ethnography’, remarking that, by restaging the authorial ‘I’ of delirious and sublime autobiography in terms that tear apart the convection of a single, self-authenticating subject, Cixous creates scenes of writing where “masses of distant relatives from Hungary, Russia, and the Maghreb, some ‘silenced’, others ‘cackling’... intervene directly in the set up of the ‘who-lives’ on the scene of writing. Refusing to be cast as figures to be ‘commemorated’ on that scene, they claim their right as ‘convives’ (table companions, more literally: convivors, the ones with whom we live)”, p.227. Derrida, *Genèses*, cit., speaks of a «dramaturgy of the family, of the origin, of the birth and of the filiation of the name”, p.16.

the family album. The implausible origin with a spike. It pierces my chest" (p. 187). Remaining "*at the heart* of the dark abyss from which it emanates",¹² this wound (scar or story) marks her womb or origin: "My life begins with graves. They go beyond the individual, the singularity... the echoes always come from the whole earth. From all the survivors" (p. 189). H. C. feels that the grave of her grandfather marks the commencement of her life on the edge of what is singular and what belongs to humanity. How can this wound counteract the series of wars, destructions and traumas marking history? An answer comes from her 'other', the grandmother Omi, the survivor who returns to Alsace, in Germany, after the death of her husband. When the country becomes French ("These small things, these ties, are very strong weavings", the writer remarks), the woman is allowed the 'right' to a passport of double nationality. Her daughter Eve meets the young doctor Cixous, and life begins in Oran.

There and then, even if it is surrounded by war (many wars!), life feels like 'Paradise' – full of dreams and acts of creation, music, drawing, words games, and books – which is soon to be translated into 'Hell' in the mad instant of the death of her father. Many images attach to him: the saint, the model, the hospitable, generous and fraternal person, the incarnation of the Tablets of the Law, the laugh, the playfulness, and (it had always been there, but secret), the sick man who, never holding his children in his arms, has created "uninterpretable effects of distance for us" (p.199).¹³ Two 'images' reflect this distance, announcing the future of Cixous's 'non-knowledge', "born, no doubt, of an indecision in which desire breathes... The distance will never be surmounted between us: it is that of the day itself, of the veil and its film. Infinite renunciation: in the promise itself".¹⁴ One image frames the instant when she does not recognize her father because he is dressed as a soldier; the other image tells of the last time she sees him, in the clinic, silent, holding on to his last breath ...

On the 'only side of life', it rests survival and... photography.¹⁵

¹² Derrida, "Aletheia", cit., p. 171.

¹³ Distance / division / sharing – the death of her father was due to tuberculosis, opening up the scene of literature to H.C's eyes: Kafka, Mann, Proust, Blanchot...

¹⁴ Derrida, "Aletheia", cit., p. 173; pp. 177-78, remarks that H.C.'s poetics of 'the secret', differently from any 'résignation obscurantiste', destines knowledge *otherwise*.

¹⁵ 'Survival' through 'generation': the tale of death is followed by a section, short but happy in its 'legend', entitled 'The Children'. This section writes of H. C. and her brother (young in Oran, sharing thier female and masculine possibilities, union and disunion, language and secrets: "I went through the stage of the development

In 1955, H. C is in France, exposed to the traces of extreme racism, nationalism and colonialism. In the delay of time, she remembers what her father did one day, on her return home: “Image: I am three years old. I have followed in the streets of Oran the Petain Youth parade. Dazzled, I go home singing ‘Maréchal here we are’. My father takes my brother (two years old) and me solemnly on his knees. He solemnly tears the photo of Maréchal Pétain that I brought back....” (p. 204). Years later, exposed to the exclusion, interdiction and deportation – and to the unacceptable misogyny attached to all this – that she experiences in France, H. C. is led to abandon these painful economies of violence, and to adopt her difference through the choice / chance of an image-imagination: “From 1955 I adopted an imaginary nationality which is literary nationality”. The adoption is marked by the optics of the “Photo by my friend D. L. Mohrar” (p. 205), the ‘self-portrait of H.C. as a writer’...

The Oeuvre of the Camera

This year I was thinking all the time of Albertine, I was fascinated by this fleeting, multiplying thing, I wondered why I went back sometimes to the prisoner, sometimes to the apparition sometimes to the vanished one, sometimes to the revenant, I was swinging like a monkey from her branches, I passed along her corridors that began to resemble my corridors, her closed doors my doors... *my albertinage*... With a ridiculous sinking feeling in my soul I realize that my passion for Albertine is because of her quasi-homonymy with Algeria, I thought I was distracting myself from Algeria with Albertine. One is ignorant of what one knows, that I know it doesn't prevent me from not knowing it. One story at the same time tells another story.
(Hélène Cixous, *So Close*)¹⁶

of a little boy. It was fortunate”, p. 202) and of Anne and Pierre Francois (H.C.'s children who teach her all the time, who keep on teaching her). These photos are commented as follows: “When we are together we are four children. We are a single group. Composed of four possibilities. Who associate and dissociate – also by sexual attraction, repulsion, identification”. Cixous, “Albums and Legends”, cit., p. 203.

¹⁶ Elissa Marder, “Dark Room Readings: Scene of Maternal Photography,” *The Oxford Literary Review*, 32.2 (2010), interprets the legacy of Proust in the recent writing by Cixous who, as she states, insists on considering photography as an ‘enemy’, “actively and violently opposed to the life given by writing”, p. 253. For Marder, Cixous's production is set in a reflective diatribe against photography – “too powerful, too grasping, too conscious” (p. 258) – a refusal or ‘psychic disavowal’ (p. 255), a desire to be expressed in a negative way, or, as in *So Close*, as ‘involuntary photography’ (p. 259).

The writer H. C. looks for her *oeuvre*, that elsewhere she calls ‘Littérature’, “*Toute-puissance-autre*”.¹⁷ In *So Close* (in French, *si près* sounds as ‘cypress’, evoking both the act of mourning and the natural element that celebrates life beyond the grave), she searches for the event of writing under the spell of the graphy of light. Her *fiction* starts with the ‘mental photograph’ of her mother at her 90th birthday, wearing a bathing suit which, strangely and unexpectedly, ‘returns’ that day onto the family scene. It is an imaginary photo that accompanies the arrival of the sentence/s:

“I would perhaps be going to Algiers” (p. 6);

“I want to go see Papa’s tomb” (p. 32)

These sentences are not ‘orders’, but instincts, hypotheses, and desires (“a frail and tiny small trembling of the heart, the ghost of desire more than a formulation of thought”, p. 32) that require time to ‘develop’. In delay or interval, they trace back the return of H. C. to the impossible letter she has been unable to write to her other, Zohra Drift.¹⁸ At the same time, in the development of the story, they bring back the original ‘wound’ from where all languages spring. Another sentence “I was born in Algeria” (p. 45) lets the writer be caressed by the ‘*genie de la langue*’, in the infinite return of the lexemes of ‘birth’, meaning, at the same time, a conception and a creation:

If I say to you *Né* (born), I say to the Telephone, what is it?

It seems to me we’ve already talked a lot about this, you say.

It can be all sorts of things, obviously. *Né* or *Née*, masculine or feminine? Or *Nez*, nose? Or *Nais*, first – or second-person present singular of the verb *naître*, to be born. Since it’s a monosyllable. The little words are the most pregnant with possibilities.

Is it a phoneme? I say– *A faune aime?* you say... *A faux nez*, a false nose I say. A nose is always a false nose.

How do you write it? *N-é* I say.

How do you write ‘*Né*’, I say to my mother...

I recognize that this word *Né* has haunted me for dozens of years.

That’s the way it is with phantom lexemes... (pp. 48-49)¹⁹

¹⁷ In *Genèses*, cit. p. 20 et passim, Derrida reads Cixous’s ‘*adieu et salut à la Littérature*’.

¹⁸ “Resorting to the letter, to the letter *of* and *in* literature in Cixous’s work, proves then not to be marginal at all: the letter bears, carries along and is carried by, the *puissance* of life, it gives to think this *puissance* in this wholly other relationship of *puissance-impuissance*”. Michaud, “Derrida & Cixous”, cit., p. 99.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Genèses*, cit., devotes his reading of Cixous’s *puisse* to (the ‘g’ of) genesis, genealogies, genres, and generosity.

The – responsible, unforeseeable, irruptive, heteronomic, transgressive, cutting – game of traces is born in the instant of birth: *né/née, naître, nez, Nè...*²⁰ The coincidence signs the involuntary return of/to photography, where *la narratrice* is suddenly exposed to an unbelievable gesture/*gestio*/gestation.²¹ She, who has never had a camera, never taken a picture, never desired to cut the fluidity of life and writing into ‘frames’, is now determined to reach out for – in truth, ‘come close’ to – the ‘masterpiece’, the ‘portrait of her mother’ through the filming / operation / opus, *tekhne* and magic, the *mise en oeuvre* of the camera:²²

I filmed. What did I film? My mother’s will. I thought: Mama’s will and testament. Back up a little, I say. I don’t know how to see my whole mother in the little screen. Come closer? Back up? Who? Back up, I say. Another step. Now. I see my mother, it is the first time: I see and I see that I see. I see my mother in painting. I see what I have as yet never seen what I will never see. I take the camera and I paint my mother with large brush strokes, I have never seen my mother I say to myself I have never seen her so close...

I see my mother in a two-piece. I paint the body from top to bottom, then from bottom to top. I invent my mother from all sides, turn around, there is a pale blue note below, the slippers I paint the slippers, tableau: *the pale blue slippers*, they have a life, a proper

²⁰ Elissa Marder, *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. Psychoanalysis, Photography, Deconstruction*, Fordham U.P., New York, 2012, p. 186, explains, “The narrator incessantly repeats the French phrase ‘*Je n’ai, jamais*’ (‘I have, never’). In the repetition of the auditory syllables: *je n’ai* (negation of the verb *avoir*, to have, one can hear the distant echo of an affirmation of birth (‘*je nais*’, ‘I am born’)... Now *So Close* plays constantly on the potential confusion between the various forms of the verb *naître* (to be born) and all the negative possibilities of the verb *être* (not ‘to be’)”.

²¹ The scene of the maternal affirmation is followed by a series of “instantaneous snapshots that are at the same time the movements and freeze frames of a film that turns around all the revolutions, beginning with that of day and night, of light and dark, of birth and death”. Derrida, “*Aletheia*”, cit., p. 176.

²² According to Eduardo Cavada and Paula Cortés-Rocca, “Notes on Love and Photography”, *OCTOBER* 116, Spring 2006, the word ‘film’ shows a singular connection: “This play between light and skin, between the photograph and emanations, can be registered in the French word for ‘film’: *pellicule*. From *pellis*, the skin, *pellicule* and ‘film’ originally have the same meaning: a small or thin skin, a kind of membrane...this etymological connection between film and skin ... suggests the relation between this ‘carnal medium’ and the photograph...” p. 26 (note 17). Derrida, “*Aletheia*”, cit., p. 174, wondering at the word ‘film’, says that “I no longer know if...I love this work, thus, in the series, linked or interrupted, of a film, that is, of a thin film (*pellicule*) without history, I love this work, thus, irreplaceable, but also this young woman, entirely other and singular – and yet just any one (every other (one), the wholly other, is every (bit) other (*tout autre*)”.

life and another life.... *my mother without the slippers*, the calmest feet I have ever known, render the calm of the feet, the firmness of the big toes, that's the secret, the strength in the big toes, I say "it's beautiful"...

... it's a masterpiece... the beauty of my mother's beauty in a bathing suit, the matchless work of my mother, the glory of the body stronger than time, a drawing whose depth surpasses the gullies of the epidermis, what is that called, when is made visible the invincible radiance of a body that has made the trip, with soul intact, without rust, without ruin, without crack, content? My mother describing herself, self-portrait of the artist with camera, I was only contemplating: "My mother as simple immortal", I say to myself. Or else "My mother in two piece in All Simplicity". She is on her own side (pp. 71-72)

In her simplicity, the matrix, the maternal, *le matricielle*, her mother, our mother, the mother of humanity, are on the side where "Eve takes photos. It's thought love. She loves flowers in photos. She plants in photos".²³ H. C. receives the gift from *la genitrice*, letting it germinate into the event-to-come: after the photographic portrait of her mother, she 'returns' to Algeria. The decision takes place under the blessing of her alterity (Zohra Drift appears, to be addressed in the sentence finally meant for her: "I am perhaps going to go to Algiers!", p. 82) and under the spell of the technical eye of photography, the gaze of the camera, its sleep, the dream of its pupil, and its poetic *nez*:

To Ruth Beckerman
I say:

²³ Hélène Cixous, *Osnabrück*, Des Femmes, Paris, 1999, p. 37. Derrida, *Genèses*, cit., interprets the filiation of *rêve*, *réveil*, *événement*, *revenir*, *revenant*, and *Ève*, the originary woman and H. Cixous's mother, in resonance with other languages. He refers to English (which Cixous knows only too well, through her precious readings of Joyce, Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, and, more recently, Samuel Beckett), for instance, in the possible sequence of 'eve', 'even', and 'evening' becoming *rêve*, *Ève*, *événement*, *éveil* and *réveil* - the 'awakening' (pp. 34-35). In *So Close*, the portrait of 'Eve' is followed by a complex composition of 'sides', which, in relevance to the 'only side of life', requires great mobility to be followed: "I have not simplicity... I am on the four sides" (p. 72); "How not to be on the side of the other... I am my mother on one side on the other I am Zohra in the maze where death and life relay each other to give life. I don't know in which life I dream" (p. 90); "On one side I am on the side of Zohra the other, on the other side, my other side of the other side, I noted in a suspense effort to reunite myself with myself, I am to the side, born to the side" (p. 93); "... for one must pass from one side to the other simultaneously at the same instant then cross back from the other side to the other side..." (p. 95). Derrida speaks of the "lexis, the logic and paradoxical topology" (p. 67) of 'la côte' and 'du côté' in the *oeuvre* of Cixous, also referring to 'untranslability' as the crucial question of the sexual difference of these 'sides'.

I didn't use your camera
 It followed me, it picked up scents, it was
 Drawn to cracks, the secrets of the sidewalks
 You will see in its story only us
 Four-footed beings, propelled as we are
 By the irreducible hope of a salvation,
 We rolled in the dust
 We turned round
 In the narrow vertical ramps
 While rubbing against the walls
 Hat you will see. The faults, the tilework that floats...
 ...
 I said to your camera, go, follow your inclination
 I let it lift its nose, pick up the wind
 Receive messages from below (pp. 123-124)²⁴

'From below' the camera frames transportation (mobility, movement, metaphor, transfer or transference): the airport in Paris, the airport in Algiers (stealing flight: *vol / voler*; the Rilkean 'angel's caress of air'). Under the camera's 'eye',²⁵ writing is exposed – "I am writing this to my friend J. D.", she repeats (p. 128; 129; 131) – until it reaches its final address: "I wrote this letter to J. D. and I mailed it from the Casbah..." (p. 137). The camera also films her encounter with Hassan Naso, the outlawed scribe to whom she dictates (to be dictated) a love poem, receiving back from the man, months later, a postcard whose stamp inscribes the image of a woman 'behind' philosophy ("The muses are never far away").²⁶ On the whole, the camera captures the spacing of the

²⁴ The poem or 'element' (in Latin, *elementa*, the letters or the literary 'atoms' of writing, and, together, the natural 'elements' of fire, water, earth and air) of Cixous's language, the more general genre of all the genres, the 'puissance génératrice de tous ses oeuvres' – as evoked by Derrida, *Genèses*, cit., p. 28 – is addressed to Ruth Beckerman, the friend who lends the camera to H. C., who has never possessed one, p. 70.

²⁵ In the narration of the 'return' to Algeria, Cixous's writing exposes/proposes the rhythm of its relation (without relation) to photography: "The camera is looking" (p. 100); "...the camera does not see the abuses. I fall" (p. 101); "...the camera was sleeping, I was with the notebook" (p. 117); "While I dream, the camera sleeps"; "What I give the camera to see... what the camera cannot see" (p. 119); "... your camera said no... the camera and me... your camera followed... we stayed side by side, the camera and me... it is too beautiful for me, said your camera... I will let the camera say what it saw according to its own glance" (pp. 124-125).

²⁶ Writing describes the image on the stamp: "In the foreground the writer is occupied with the quill in a schoolboy's notebook. Behind him the woman dictates the letter that the writer in truth dictates to her. He is wearing a navy blue shirt. I am wearing a yellow blouse", p. 144. It is a reference to Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard. From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987; in particular, to the 'Cover illustration: Plato and Socrates, the frontispiece Of *Prognostica Socratis basilei*, a fortune-telling book'.

trace that goes, grows and shows the writer approaching – close/ very close/so close/“so dangerously... so solemnly... so gently...”²⁷– the true ‘goal’ of her life. In the cemetery, she is looking for ‘Papa’s tomb’, without number or name, which, as the ghost of the event or the event of the ghost, produces its ancient voice from elsewhere, a ‘rare’ utterance transporting the writer onto the other side, where, *LA*, she signs the bond, the contract, and the task of the emergence of the ‘Sight’ of the ultimate celebration of life:

...where are you? – *So close... are you? ... “So close”!* how you sing, and to find once again the laughter, the freshness, the dew, that way you have of moistening words, of silvering them to make them shine, that accent of mockery... And you are there. At the cypress. (pp. 151-2)

Near the cypress I find myself, me who was at a loss for you, and I find you as if I was finally finding sight ... I see true and I see what I see... What happens to me: seeing at last your immortality, and it is so small. (p. 153)

I see That – but from the other side. I see everything from the other side, as in the beyond-life, beyond memory (p. 154)

I am writing a text which is completely traversed by you... (p. 156)

The traversal of experience (experience *is* traversal), the experimentation, and the knowledge of the other (double genitive): the journey ends by marking H. C.’s ‘return to life’. The impression (it will always be, and remain, a question of writing) that the camera has left out from the picture, the ‘salted milk’ of her tears at the embrace with her father, may be true.²⁸ In truth, what she now knows is that photographic love, in its finitude, in the finite click of its grace, in the instant of its happening, is a form of love that, like Algeria (“my humus. My hyper funerary stele”), survives both death and life: “So as to begin again” (p. 161). The affirmation of life, the Joycean ‘yes’ to life, lies in its infinite re-commencements, because ‘life is nothing else but living death, living it for oneself and for the other and for life’...

²⁷ Derrida, “Aletheia”, cit., p. 174.

²⁸ “Aletheia, the beloved photographed one, Aletheia ready to hide or veil her vision with tears.” *ibid.*, p. 176. In the ‘Forewarnings’ of *Dream I Tell You*, Columbia U.P., New York, 2006, p. 2, Cixous evokes ‘tears’ in relation to photography: “And then time passed. One day you can look the dead person’s photo in the face When one had just died my death, yours, jets of boiling tears kept me from seeing your face: The months of tears are past. Now I can gaze at the photo of your face without flaring up, pitiless dream.” In *Rootprints*, cit, p. 29, she had already expressed her desire to take a “Photo of a dream: Dream is capable of flashes of lightning - I would like to be able to take a photo of a dream”.

'Indexing' the Visage

My shemblable my freer...
(Hélène Cixous, "Portraits de Portraits. Le jour même de Roni Horn")

In 2007, the framed desire to 'start again' brings H.C. 'so close' to the loving focus of the camera of Roni Horn. In the photographic work *Index Cixous* (followed, in the title, by the inscription 'Cix Pax', as if it entitled 'peace', if there had ever been 'war', between the writer, the artist and the addresses),²⁹ Cixous's face is reproduced in eighty photographs (resembling the 'Oval Portrait' by E. A. Poe). Sometimes it is two faces on adjunct pages; sometimes her countenances appear in groups or (quasi-cinematic) sequences of images; sometimes a blank page is left/interrupting in-between one image and the next. Most are black and white, some are in colour. In these 'indexed' photos, resembling 'fossils' or 'ruins', H.C.'s face smiles or laughs, her eyes often looking outside the frame, suspended in thinking, listening, or reading...³⁰

The portrait ... Often, you see her looking, as we say, out the window, through a framed space, as on a screen.... That is the absolute secret of this book, published to cry out 'Here I am': everything will be possible on this day, this day of the night: birth, marriage, and death, promises made, promises broken. Everything remains possible, this album (the white of an album is always virginal) offer an immaculately matrix-like surface, like *khora*, like right of inspection, for all the stories that you would like to project there, for all imaginable intrigues, 'plots' and schemes'. She is the actress in them, and the subject immediately withdraws. This mortal woman has just seen herself give birth, even see herself see the day, she has just been born, she is a fiancée, a promised virgin, a mother, who will also give birth and will see herself enshrouded in her wedding flowers: all of this will happen without happening. This will happen to the future, without happening to her. In the future³¹

²⁹ Roni Horn, *Index Cixous: CIX PAX*, ger. Steidl Verlag, Gottingen, 2005. For a reading of Cixous's use of the syllable *si*, the phoneme use of the note in *si* and in 'six', and the number 600, see Derrida, *H. C. For Life*, cit., p. 34, p. 65 et passim.

³⁰ *Index Cixous* has been presented in various exhibitions (see <http://www.matthewmarks.com/new-york/exhibitions/2005-11-05_roni-horn>). Derrida "Aletheia", cit., p. 178, reflects relevantly on the word 'exposition': "...she prepares for the exhibition (*exposition*), as for ecstasy. The ex-position always comes to a standstill on the verge of ecstasy, like each of these stills. Apprehension, imminence, nothing has yet happened, nothing will ever happen, but she has already taken a step: We are in the past of this step (*pas*) toward what which is not yet and will never be – only the loneliness of photography, her loneliness, but which we can love up to ecstasy, on the verge of exhibition".

³¹ Derrida, "Aletheia", cit., p. 178.

Index Cixous gives no page indication, image number, or text.³² Still, it materialises/ incarnates the life, the survival and *l'à-venir* of the 'book' where H. C. – "while looking at it, thus while reading it" –³³ wonders at the poetics of her friend Roni Horn, countersigning her photographer celebration in "Portrait de Portraits. Le jour même de Roni Horn."³⁴ Here, Horn is evoked in the photos of her self-reflection, looking at herself in alterity, reflecting herself in the mirror of her other. In this 'pose', she exposes/ proposes her gaze to the 'Singular Plural' of the other's face, signing, as H. C. entitles, the *Autohétéroportrait de Roni Horn, en tant que Visage*. The signature marks the birth of the 'undecidable' (*indécis-né/indessiné*) placed in the anguish of the prenatal, wondering at the delayed time of the Messiah's arrival. The birth of her *oeuvre* is never intended to 'capture' the secret of the other's visage; perhaps, it only desires to illuminate, through photography, the 'pearl' of H.C.'s eyes whose luminescence and clear light always and already reflects (on) the waiting –"without horizon, this waiting that does not know what is coming to surprise her, but which she prepares herself to want, this is the imminence of the photographic act".³⁵ It is the benediction and the grace, the gift and the choreography of the response of the other:

Et après?

Elle s'attend toujours encore à un autre You absolument singulier,

³² In *Index Cixous*, you find the copyright page, "Thanks to Helene Cixous", and the sentence: "Photographs for the Index were taken in July & October 2003, Paris", plus a biographical note on Roni Horn. Eric Prenowitz, "Cracking the Book: Readings of Hélène Cixous" (Introduction), *New Literary History*, vol. 37, no 1, *Hélène Cixous: When the Word is a Stage* (Winter, 2006), remarks that "*Index Cixous* is in the first place a treatise on photography, interrogating the limits of photography as an art of the limit" (p.xxii), in that it is a work that problematizes the book form's 'number' (double unities, divided wholes, one-twos), 'intentionality or indexicality', the very action of 'writing/reading' H.C.'s 'double portraits' (the conscious and the unconscious, the waking vigilance and the freedom of the dream, poetry and philosophy). If this affects the traditional idea of the 'portrait genre', it is also relevant to the question of 'difference': "They think and sing at the same time, on the same page, with song and thought each leading the other. And thus the whole questing of *difference*, and in particular of the relations between textuality and orality, at first glance an unlikely topic for a photo album, is here addressed through the staging of differences between the image, the voice and the text, the seeable, the hearable, and the readable" (note 24, p. xxvi). Interestingly, the scholar emphasizes the dual reflection of the 'page-face': "Indeed the page here is clearly also a face, and reading takes the form of a face-to-face encounter: ... the book's 'gaze': the book looks at her as much as she looks at it" (p.xxiv).

³³ Derrida, "Aletheia", cit., p. 169.

³⁴ See note 7.

³⁵ Derrida, "Aletheia", cit., p. 175.

imprévisible, qui viendra répondre à son cri:
 Are you too many of one of my othermes?
 Come! you co-me!³⁶

Conclusions

'Vision' is central to the production of knowledge; *theoria* is the hierarchy of Sight, the eye in direct emanation of Reason. its episteme construction is crucial to a feminist critique determinate to subvert any order or discipline (any attempt to discipline the image and imagination). Photographic Studies; let's imagine a different *technique* of vision, a different graphy, a different light. Photography can produce another vision of the relation (without relation) between the – singular and unique – referent and reference, the *studium*, code, system of vision, history, knowledge. Would this be a image of opposition, externality and dialectics? It might differently focus on the 'Referential', on metonymy, on the Singular Plural it produces, the unique and singular referent, which is, together, writable and repeatable, the opening of/to *tekhne*, commonality and sharing. For a feminist, this means the necessity to 'sign' her critique, knowing that, in passion and responsibility, she is always and already guided, directed and entrusted by alterity: autobiography/auto-hetero-biography/auto-hetero-photography; both life and death, in haunting interconnection, crossing, and hybridity.

A photograph is always exposed/ive to/of Deconstruction. Its different frame is essential to disrupt the composition, the order, the genre, the gender, the dispositif of vision, its production and its knowledge. One photo/many clicks; number/calculation/grammar/rhetoric/erotic; you expose yourself to technical montage, and the game opens to invention: the disorder of the sequence, the suspension of genre, the trembling of gender. Dreams, desire, and love: what is precious is to make

³⁶ Implicit is the question of the 'return' of Hélène Cixous/Roni Horn to productive 'non-knowledge'. Derrida, "The Spatial Arts", cit., p. 21, refers to the performative event of 'come': "Addressing the other, I say the 'coming' to the other: I say 'come' but I mean an event that is not to be confused with the word 'come'... it is differential, that is to say, it is relayed thought the tome and the gradations or gaps of tonality. So these gaps, this tonal differential, is evidently there, and that is what interests me". The philosopher also explains that "It says 'come', but come where, I don't know. Where this call comes from, and from whom, I don't know... it is heterogeneous to knowledge. In order for that call to exist, the order of knowledge must be breached... the orders of determination and of knowledge must be exceeded. It is in relation to no knowledge that the call is made ... This non-knowledge is the necessary condition for something to happen, for responsibility to be taken, for a decision to be made, for an event to take place" (pp. 27-28).

oeuvre – of reflection, exposition, and invention. In the intervals, by calculating the photographic delayed time *otherwise*, it is necessary to produce *oeuvre*. A deconstructive feminist critique of knowledge production inscribes and produces events by taking a photo, many photos, 'other' photos. In the spacing between one photo and the other, it shows the secret (the unique, the absolute singular) and its light – *la lumerie*, the *pellicule*, and the film of its (re) production and sharing. Perhaps, this might create an 'emanation' whose performative *puissance* is capable to affect the retina of the eye – my eye, our eyes, the eyes of the future. Another her/story, a new 'graphy of light', other images claiming their difference as invention, the opening of the camera lens to the arrival of the other, maybe the gift of *a* different *savoir* of women...

The photo-to-come

It would have been a photograph - perhaps, a series of photos, repeating ad infinitum the desire for a click, many clicks - of me as 'a feminist critic with camera'. The composition of this 'portrait' would have signed my 'singular plural': me, just me, my blood, interiority and skin, in relation to the institutions of 'knowledge production' which sign my life, and the life of those with whom I relate when studying (inside me) and teaching (in front of, around me), researching and communicating without end... In its secret and miraculous way, this photo would have 'given to see' how I try, in my non-knowledge or in my production of 'another' knowledge, to find out what suspends the genre of the texts I study and teach, how I read, write and express the 'trembling' of the gender that deconstructs all authorities ... In its way, this photo could have been reflected (upon) the dis/order, installed in the intervals, the interstices ("The interstice will have been open, like a shutter, so that photography might attest to it")³⁷ and the inventories (I desire to include everything in my work - impossible synthesis! So hoped for, never reached or reachable, utopic and always failing, deconstructive in the awareness of its necessity and, together, of its threatening failure) of knowledge. Photography could have been able to de-monstrate my 'spacing', with its technical dispostif, maybe by framing or capturing life otherwise.

For example – exemplarity is a possible game of my photo-roman – by following all the 'sides' of my life? Might have this photo or series of photos been a photographic panopticon? In truth, it might have produced a 'anti-panopticon effect', a photographic dissemination of the eye, a pluralizing of the gaze,³⁸ framing all the sides of my life 'there' to celebrate the 'only side of life', singular and plural at the same time. It could have made itself other from itself, perhaps 'developing' its relation (without relation) to the writing (with which it shares, in light, its photo-graphy - invaginated metonymy, so wonderfully crystallised in the poetic reflections of H. Cixous on photography) of my 'strange roots', the infinity of others who have allowed and still allow my life, my human and literary legacies. It could have then taken me on this side, while I search for my oeuvre,³⁹ or when my work (miss)guides me to

³⁷ Derrida, "Aletheia", cit., p.172.

³⁸ Beatriz Preciado, "De-Titled: Gender and the Architecture of the Double Signature in Droit de Regards (Roman-Photo de Marie-Francoise Plissart suivi d'une Lecture de Jacques Derrida)", *Quadernos de Filologia. Estudis Literaris*, vol. ix (2004), p. 176.

³⁹ In the responsibility and task of creating a new academia, Jacques Derrida, "The University without Condition", in *Without Alibi*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002, urges for the necessary invention of 'oeuvres'.

the non-knowledge of what is impossible to know, and which, because of this, it seems to me/us more necessary to know. This 'guide' and this 'approach', imprinted in a writing capable of making itself 'in/time', 'so close' to difficulties, resistances, and traumas ("ecstatic opening as well as catastrophic shut down"),⁴⁰ gaps, decenterings, expulsions, experiences of exile, separations, and death(s), might have perhaps traced the sides of my life by 'indexing' – there could have been many photos, exposed in the 'magnifying' details of their difference – my face, keeping its secret but revealing (in/through the eyes? Luminous graphy, photography: Barthes was inconsolable for the loss of the 'clarity' and the 'justice' of his mother's eyes) my resistant waiting for the encounter, my instisting desire for many encounters...

I wonder what this photo would have been like, if it had produced the ideal/image/eidos of what it means, for a feminist involved in the production of a critique of knowledge, in her affirmative but often solitary, uncertain, trembling, and suspended life ("this woman, remains unique, singularly alone, absolutely solitary, absolute... she is alone with the invisible visibility, alone with a desire for light, alone with the love of photography"),⁴¹ to receive a reply to her waiting, the arrival of the other-s reflected in the photo, there, là, in its cadre and in its still, in a memory 'eternally returning' to the future-to-come? This im-possible photo would have shined (radiance/luminance) with love, femininity, and life...



The Dubrovnik Feminist Course, May 2013. Photograph by S. Carotenuto.

⁴⁰ See Avital Ronell, Forum "The Legacy of Jacques Derrida", *PMLA*, vol.120. No. 2 (March, 2005), p. 498.

⁴¹ Derrida, "*Aletheia*", cit., pp. 171-176.



**Archiving Other
Knowledges**

Queer Archival Activism

Tuula Juvonen

There is no political power without the control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.¹

That footnote above by Jacques Derrida is an often-quoted one. What is most often left out, however, is Derrida's following reference to the essential work of Sonia Combe on forbidden archives.² In her book Combe draws, as if in passing, our attention also to the male dominated patriarchal archive, which effectively denies women the control of the interpretation of archives. But if gender is crucial to the control of the archive, as Derrida, inspired by Combe, suggests, so must be sexuality, too. Hence democratization can be measured even more urgently with reference to the relationship of lesbians to the archives, since lesbians are both women and sexual dissidents. What can be said about their possibilities to establish their sexual citizenship through the control of archives? Whether lesbians have or not have access to archives – and likewise a legitimate place in their holdings – is also crucial to the national history writing. Without tangible lesbian presence in the archives and archiving it is hard to remember and acknowledge that not every citizen is, or has been in the past, by default heterosexual.

Archiving, as it is taking place in traditional archives, is hence invested in not only patriarchal but also heteronormative archival

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian impression* (orig. ed. 1995), University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1996, p. 4, fn. 1.

² Sonia Combe, *Archives interdites. Les peurs françaises face à l'histoire contemporaine*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1994, cited in Derrida, *Archive Fever*, cit., p. 4, fn. 1.

power. It is geared towards creating a picture of a nation built on heterofamilial genealogies. These most likely exclude and silence people who are, or have been, lesbian or gay, who live in bisexual relationships, or transition from one gender to another or fit in none of the given gender categories.³ While acknowledging the existence of this range of sexual and gendered differences, for the argument of this text I limit myself to examples that focus on queering the archives so that the lesbian existence can be made tangible.

Since the presence of lesbians in the archives is by no means a given fact, it is most often something one has to strive for by engaging in queer archival activism. Queer archival activism can be understood as a form of queer politics, which “seeks to focus on the invisibility and exclusion of non-normative sexualities within socio-political structures. The aim is to extend legitimacy to non-normative subjects by having their interests represented.”⁴ Thus queer archival activism could be defined as a form of activism engaged by those who are interested in queering the archiving as usual by interrogating, questioning, and deconstructing it from a perspective critical to heteronormativity.⁵ In any case queering the archives addresses the existing silence and absence about lesbians in the collections of official archives. Making that exclusion visible as a form of symbolic violence means that the normalizing power of archiving can be targeted as a problem in need of improvement. Creating such archival practices that are more inclusive is vital for making existing diversity visible in the archives and giving a voice to those otherwise silenced. Queering the archives themselves is not enough, though. Also interpreting the archives has to change so that the research based on archival materials can be more inclusive towards the diversity of sexualities and genders.

³ These groups, lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgendered or intersex people are often discussed together as LGBTI people.

⁴ María do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan, “Normative Dilemmas and the Hegemony of Counter-Hegemony”, in María do Mar Castro Varela, Nikita Dhawan and A. Engel (eds.), *Hegemony and Heteronormativity: Revisiting ‘The Political’ in Queer Politics*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2011, p. 115.

⁵ Mathias Danbolt, in his article about spatial and temporal analysis of queer activism, offers quite another definition for queer archival activism. For him it is about an action that produces connections to a queer activist past, those unforeseen effects that happen when embodied transmission of queer activist history takes place, e.g. when over 20 years old queer slogans get shouted during a protest march (Mathias Danbolt, “We’re Here! We’re Queer? Activist Archives and Archival Activism”, *lambda Nordica*, 3-4, 2010, pp. 90-118, see pp. 92, 104–105, 110).

Queering the Document and Creating Documents about Queer Existence

Deconstructing and reconstructing archives means that one has to return to very basic questions of archiving, such as what kind of documents get archived, and what is the kind of knowledge that archives are able to transmit through them? When it comes to LGBTI lives, collecting and preserving documents about kinship and financial transactions, such as marriage records, are not the most illustrative ones. We have to rethink and ask ourselves, what are the documents produced outside of marital arrangements that carry the possible evidence left by relationships based on emotions (such as fear and love) and intimate encounters (such as sexual experiences). Getting hold of such documents is also not easy, since emotions and intimacies are notoriously hard to evidence in the best of cases. For stigmatized queers they may even have been socially harmful to record, since those records could have in the worst case been easily used against them. Many valuable documents have therefore already been destroyed by the persons involved, or possibly never even been produced in the first place.

Displacing heterosexual marriage and family as those privileged sites to create loyal ties among people opens up the view also to other kind of bonds. We have to ask ourselves what are the documents that would allow us to recognize relationships that are based on same-sex friendship, or are illustrating important relationships between people who are bound together by their shared queerness. In traditional archives these documents may be reduced to a repressive archive only: to documents about prosecution, such as materials from the police interrogation and court proceedings,⁶ or documents of medicalization, such as documents about patients and the treatment they have received in order to cure them from their queerness.

But there might be another set of queer documents available created by lesbians for lesbians who organize themselves with other women. Those organizational forms may be loose, and be upheld for years without any official registration. Hence these groupings are not always to be found in a register of associations, nor are their documents necessarily neatly preserved. Nevertheless, any

⁶ Same-sex sexual deeds, also between women, have been illegal in Finland 1893–1971. For a queer reading of a repressive archive on female court cases of the 1950s Finland see Antu Sorainen, “The power of confession: The role of criminal law and court practices in the production of knowledge concerning sexuality between women: Finland in the 1950s”, *Journal of Homosexuality*, Special Double Issue 35, 3/4, 1998, pp. 117-138.

remaining documents about the meetings, actions, events and shows organized by lesbian/women's groups can be crucial for understanding the creation of vital bonds and communities beyond kinship.

Fig. 1: Participants of the first WILD (WISE Lesbian Division) ovular 20-27/8/1996 at the dinner table in Chausse & Lamas, Southern France. Photo by T. Juvonen.



Paying attention to documents from such activities means that we have to open the archives for unforeseen eclectic collections. The documents no longer include just official records or personal papers in traditional formats, such as letters and diaries. Archives that want to reach out into the future have to consider also accepting non-conventional materials, such as zines, artwork,

music and film, various digitally born materials such as blogs and websites, artefacts and oral histories. Harvesting such material is a herculean task, and can be accomplished only by those who are familiar with the sub-culture in question.

The knowledgeable ones who could pay attention to collecting and preserving such documents are often archival activists/scholars.⁷ Many times such a double role is not limited to collecting documents of subcultural events only, but can mean even creating documents from fleeting events. This can include making field notes, photographs or film footage from the events.

Creating Queer Archives and Queering the Archives

Private archives of activists, ‘the cardboard box under the bed’, are vitally important for preserving the documents of lesbian history. However, others hardly ever know about the existence of such private collections, nor are they accessible for general scholarly use. Scholarly use would require their donation to an accessible archive. Yet it is not self-evident that such eclectic materials will find their way to traditional archives. The traditional archives may refuse to accept the donation, or the donor might herself be suspicious of existing archives and their heteronormative archival power, politics and practices.

This widely shared suspicion has in the past called for undermining the heteronormative archival power altogether by creating own, alternative archives. Lesbians, gays and trans people have traditionally founded their own grass root archives in which such eclectic collections have been cherished and valued. In that respect one of the most legendary places is Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA), founded in 1974, and now located in Brooklyn, New York. LHA is a site, which is very much geared towards the community, and the local and (inter)national lesbian community keeps on sustaining the archives with volunteer workers and financial donations. LHA is intended to be a place where lesbians can feel connected to their collective history, and see that cherished and valued as relevant and important.⁸ Its collections are also made generously available for that community. That means that the communities themselves can build up and write their own histories without the interference of trained archivists

⁷ Judith Halberstam, “What’s That Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives”, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, September 2003, 6/3, pp. 313-333, see p. 318, 321–322.

⁸ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings. Trauma, sexuality and lesbian public culture*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002, pp. 240–244.

and historians who may be overtly bound to the heteronormative practices of their respective fields.

Fig. 2: Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1994. Photo by T. Juvonen.



However, over the years it has become clear that totally autonomous community archives are hard to maintain in the long run without secure funding and professionally trained archivists. Also the emphasis on emotional needs of community building by the means of historical documents is not always easy to combine with scholarly demands. This has led in many instances to building up collaborative efforts between grass roots organizations and more established, possibly publicly funded

professional memory organizations.⁹ While queering existing archives through incorporation of important queer collections may give a safe space for the records to be preserved, such a merger raises a new set of problems to be solved. Especially the question of access with regard to the archives' constitution and collection practices, deemed as a crucial criterion for democracy by Derrida, requires attention.

The archives fare a lot better if they are able learn from the good practices already developed in the grassroots archives.¹⁰ There are also already several tested ways in which traditional archives have attempted to take the new patrons into account. If the archive does not have a trained lesbian archivists who can take up the maintenance of the donated collections, lesbians may be part of the advisory board and make helpful suggestions from there. The archive can also target lesbians and invite them to join the group of volunteer workers at the archive, or the archives can establish other working ties with local LGBTI communities. This kind of cooperation is also vital in terms of building trust, raising awareness about the possibility and necessity of archiving, as well as in soliciting new donations of important historical documents to the collections.

Queering Archival Practices

Receiving new types of queer materials into traditional archives might result in transformations in the archives' current archival practices. Whereas the old school archivists often have understood their task consisting mostly of protecting the collections from the wear and tear of their use, the new patrons might want to put more weight and different stress on the questions of access. This can, for example, mean that old cataloguing systems have to be altered in a manner that explicitly name LGBTI collections and by so doing make them visible for potential users.

⁹ This is the route taken for example by the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archive in Los Angeles, which in 2009 joined forces with the UCLA Library, see <http://www.mazerlesbianarchives.org/affiliates/ucla-partnership/>. Likewise in Finland already in 2002 a national LGBT organization Seta started its collaboration with a publicly funded labour museum Werstas in Tampere and a labour archive in Helsinki (Tuula Juvonen, *Queering Archives and Museums – Raising consciousness about preserving LGBT History in Finland*. A paper presented at the LGBTI ALMS 2012 conference, Amsterdam, 1-3 August 2012, <<http://lgbtialms2012.blogspot.fi/2012/07/tuula-juvonen-queering-archives-and.html>>). See also Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, cit., pp. 244–251 on founding lesbian and gay archives.

¹⁰ Angela L. DiVeglia, "Accessibility, Accountability, and Activism", in Lyz Byl and Kelly Wooten (eds.), *Make Your Own History. Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century*, Litwin Books, Los Angeles, 2012.

Collaboration with grassroots organizations may also require other changes over the rule of access. In research archives it is common that only scholarly access is granted to the archived collections. However, if the materials are donated from a particular community, it might be relevant to ponder whether also some kind of extended access from these initial communities should be allowed, at least to a certain extent.

Yet at the same time as the demands for visibility and accessibility of lesbian collections is increasing, heightened attention is put to the questions of privacy. Even if a donation of personal documents has taken place, like in the case of the artist Raini Vallinharju, who in 2003 donated over 130 of her diaries to the labour museum Werstas in Tampere, it does not necessarily mean that the records are immediately available for scholarly use. In her case she agreed with Werstas that her diaries are to be sealed for 40 years, unless she herself grants permission for their use.¹¹ There might be also other cases in which the immediate revelation of someone's non-heterosexual sexual orientation or a possible gender reassignment, or other intimate details of her personal life could be considered inappropriate. Hence rules about a necessary respite should be negotiated, so that such details will not be made public during donor's own lifetime.

Queering archival practices – or practices of any other institution for that matter – may include also such mundane issues as the possibility for all the patrons to use restroom facilities, regardless how conform their gender identification is. Whether the archive has a gender-neutral toilet or not is indicative to the kind of patrons it is intending to allow to work with the archived documents. There is no reason to limit the possible range of interpretations of queer archives, since it is the quality interpretation that gives meaning to queer archiving.

¹¹ Raini Vallinharju, 1-130/130. A booklet accompanying an archival artwork delivered for the BA in environmental arts at the School of Art and Media, Tampere, 2003.

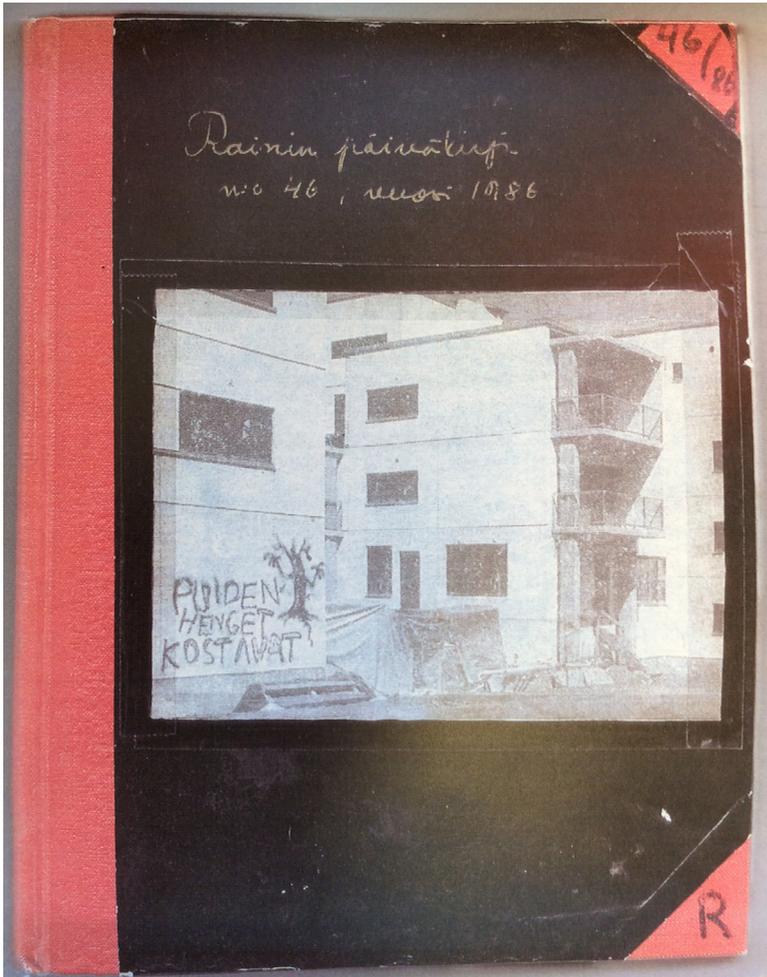


Fig. 3: *A Diary of Raini Vallinharju, 1986.* Collections of the Finnish Labour Museum Werstas. Photo by T. Juvonen.

Queer Interpretations of Archival Documents

Queering, as in queering the archives, can be understood as an interpretative cultural practice that informs the political activism that helps to transform the archives and their practices, as we know them. A queer interpretative frame allows us to see traditional archives and their current practices as a result of particular patriarchal and heteronormative powers, which result in problematic exclusions. Yet queer perspective can and must also extend to the content of the archives, to the interpretation of the documents. As Judith Jack Halberstam notes, “[t]he archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory and a complex record of queer

activity. In order for the archive to function, it requires users, interpreters, cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making."¹²

Maryanne Dever gives us a powerful example for a meticulous queer interpretation by theorizing cultural relevance of an archive that other scholars have deemed to be 'nothing', namely the part of the archives of Mercedes de Acosta that includes memorabilia about Greta Garbo.¹³ As the archive was opened in the year 2000, the disappointed audiences were told that, contrary to high expectations and persistent rumours, the letters stored in that archive contained no evidence of a romantic relationship between Garbo and de Acosta. However, in her methodologically careful reading of the entity of de Acosta's archive Dever comes to a different conclusion. She points out that first of all, Garbo was not known to be a person to write letters, and in any case she was extremely protective of her private sphere, and purely for that reason most likely would not have written any love letters for others to find in any case. Hence absence of love letters cannot be equated with absence of desire. Therefore she moves on to look at the materiality of the whole archive, and notes the traces of de Acosta's compulsive archival impulse to preserve any mundane card and note that Garbo might have touched, suggesting that such a compilation of material would not have been possible without the two of them having been in close contact. Dever also notes the on-going play of desire in the promises given and broken that was evident in the brief notes written by Garbo, again something that could be sustained only between people who are emotionally bound to each other.

The way Dever carefully teases layers of meanings out of 'nothing' is exemplary for the requirements put to a queer interpretation. First of all a scholar has to bring with her an openness to the possibility that queerness actually does exist. Secondly it is also most useful to bring along not only knowledge about queer lives and histories, but also queer competence in reading and interpreting sometimes the very thin traces that are to be found in the archives.

The aim in queer archival activism is to strengthen such queer traces in the archives. It means encouraging archives to accept and process queer documents, and encouraging queers to donate them.

¹² Halberstam, *What's That Smell?*, cit., p. 326.

¹³ Maryanne Dever, "Greta Garbo's foot, or, sex, socks and letters", *Australian Feminist Studies*, 25/64, 2010, pp. 163-172.

It also includes training people to interpret them with due respect, and with attention to the socio-political and cultural contexts in which that material has been produced. It is still too often a very rare and lucky case for a scholar to have access to an explicitly queer archive, which contains a set of rich records that tell openly about lives that are not entirely conforming the heteronormative rule. Yet having such queer archives at hand and including their interpretation into the academic business-as-usual remains vital, if we aim at truly understanding and doing justice to the national complexities of gendered and sexualized relations.

Reading German Women's Diaries from the Second World War: Methodological, Epistemological and Ethical Dilemmas

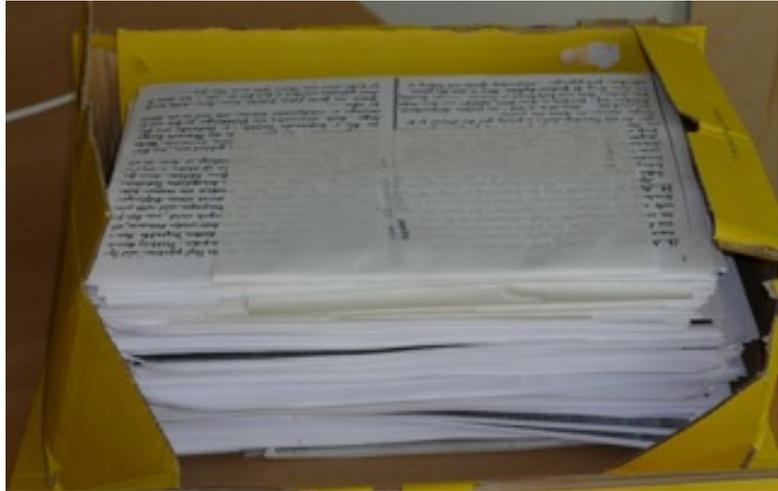
Sabine Grenz

Women's personal and private writings have recently drawn intensified interest from feminist researchers. My research is part of this increased interest, analysis of 18 diaries written by civilian German women at the end of the Second World War in Germany. They are stored in the archive of the German writer Walter Kempowski.¹ He collected them and other diaries, as well as other autobiographical materials, during the 1990s and 2000s for a collage of autobiographic memories he named *Echo sounder. A collective diary*.² It consists of four parts published between 1997 and 2007. His archive is now stored in the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. The individual bundles consist of diaries, pictures and letters, including between Kempowski and the senders of the diaries.

¹ Diary signatures (Kempowski Bio-Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin): 2128, 2910, 3700, 3715/2, 3715/1, 3780, 3924, 3943, 3981, 4383, 4309, 4709, 52/2, 5439, 5748, 5958, 5461, 5662.

² My translation. The German title is: "Das Echolot. Ein kollektives Tagebuch".

Fig.1: Diary copies from the Walter Kempowski-Archive at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin. Photo by S. Grenz (courtesy of the Archive).



I focused on diary passages written between November 1944 and July 1945. In this period, for the military it was already obvious that the war will be lost for Germany. Troops of ‘enemy’ armies were already on German ground and, next to the air raids of the allied armies, the German Wehrmacht also increasingly endangered the German civilian population through military actions.³

Even though gendered and gendering activities, attitudes etc. during National Socialism are not fully researched, there is a wealth of literature showing that the national socialist society was strongly sex segregated.⁴ This segregation was further enhanced during the war.⁵ Most men were soldiers and comparatively few women were part of the military service, even though this number

³ John Zimmermann, *Pflicht zum Untergang. Die deutsche Kriegführung im Westen des Reiches 1944/45*, Schöningh, Paderborn, 2006.

⁴ Cf. Ulrike Weckel, Kirsten Heinsohn and Barbara Vogel (eds.), *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung. Handlungsräume von Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, Campus, Frankfurt/Main, 1997; Susanne Lanwerd and Irene Stoehr, “Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung zum Nationalsozialismus seit den 1970er Jahren. Forschungsstand, Veränderungen, Perspektiven”, in Johanna Gehmacher and Gabriella Hauch (eds.), *Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte des Nationalsozialismus. Fragestellungen, Perspektive, neue Forschungen*, StudienVerlag, Innsbruck, 2007, pp. 22-68; Sybille Steinbacher (ed.), *Volksgenossinnen. Frauen in der NS-Volksgemeinschaft*, Wallstein, Göttingen, 2007.

⁵ Cf. Karen Hagemann, *Heimat – Front. Militär, Gewalt und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, in Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (eds.), *Heimat – Front. Militär, Gewalt und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, Campus, Frankfurt/Main, 2002, pp. 13-52; Ruth Seifert, *Identität, Militär und Geschlecht. Zur identitätspolitischen Bedeutung einer kulturellen Konstruktion*, in Hagemann and Schüler-Springorum, *Heimat – Front*, cit., pp. 53-66.

increased in the course of the war. All but one of the diarists were civilian women. However, that does not mean that they were not militarized.⁶ On the contrary, they made and repaired clothes for soldiers, worked in the war industry, wrote letters to the front in order to maintain relationships but also to hold up the morale of the soldiers, and kept everyday life going at home without the help of their male family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues.

In this paper, I would like to sketch some of the problematics in working with women's diaries. In the first part I will discuss issues related to the material such as the assumption of diaries being personal and private and the fact that they are shaped by discontinuity and spontaneity of thought as well as their diversity. In the second part, I will investigate epistemological questions related to the search of a 'true inner self' in diary texts as well as the circumstance that the material is historical. As a result, one has to consider subjectivities and femininities one detects in diaries as gendered and historical constructs. In the third part, I briefly discuss ethical dilemmas within the special German historical context (especially to victimisation discourses). I argue that diaries can only be analysed as constructed texts. They consist of different layers that are reconstructed throughout this paper.

Part 1: Methodological Problems

The research of diaries written by non-literary persons is a recently developed field. For this reason, I informed myself methodologically by reading studies on diaries by literary persons such as Sylvia Plath or Virginia Woolf, as well as by including methodological aspects from biographical social research such as the idea that a diary passage is as constructed as are biographical interviews.⁷ This means that diaries offer only a small perspective on the person because the diary text may focus on certain experiences, foreground particular thoughts and be written only spontaneously once a month or less. Consequently, taking them as *pars pro toto* leads to distortions. In the remainder of this part, I will sketch out some of the methodological tensions between seemingly comprehensive and authentic testimonials and their nevertheless fragmentary and constructed character.

⁶ Cynthia Enloe, *Manövers. The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000.

⁷ Cfr. Arno Dusini, *Das Tagebuch. Möglichkeiten einer Gattung*, Fink, München, 2005; and Nicole Seifert, *Tagebuchschreiben als Praxis*, in Renate Hof and Susanne Rohr (eds.), *Inszenierte Erfahrungen. Gender und Genre in Tagebuch, Autobiographie, Essay*, Stauffenberg, Tübingen, 2008, pp. 39-60.

Spontaneity and Discontinuity

Diaries are fragmentary. They move from one point to the other. As such they are mostly “reconstructions of memory from short temporal distances.”⁸ Diaries seldom contain longer stories going over several months or years like retrospectively composed autobiographies do.⁹ Instead the stories are spread over weeks and months and are not yet separated from each other. Thus a diary passage may be composed of three stories that are interrupted and continued in passages of the following days or weeks. This creates discontinuity.¹⁰ As a result, diaries may be structured through their chronological order. However, within one entry there are breaks and jumps of thought.

Furthermore, sometimes one story has different lines that can be pursued. For instance, Ingeborg,¹¹ a 16 to 17 year old girl in one passage writes about her voluntary work where she takes walks with soldiers who lost their sight. In the following weeks one can see two strands of this story. One, in which she writes about sending letters to unknown soldiers, could be called “morale support of soldiers”, whereas another, in which she talks about sexual harassment by a blind soldier could be called “disappointment of her commitment”. She seems to believe in her duty as a German girl to support soldiers but at the same time to be disgusted by some soldiers’ insinuating remarks.

Subsequently, breaks, jumps of thought, disruptions are also part of autobiographical texts or interviews. However, in interviews the target of stories is mostly their ending, their meaning for one’s life or other experiences. And if not, an interviewer has the chance to ask the interviewee what happened then. On the contrary, in diaries a story might just stop with no chance to ask the diarist what s/he meant or what the consequences were. As a result, what one sees is a series of parts more or less related to each other and not so much a story as in autobiographical retrospectives.

Biographical interviews offer the possibility to reconstruct the retrospective, the perspective of someone on his individual life during the interview.¹² In diaries, one can reconstruct the perspective of the

⁸ Susanne zur Nieden, *Alltag im Ausnahmezustand. Frauentagebücher im zerstörten Deutschland 1943-1945*, Orlanda, Berlin, 1993, p. 52. My translation, original German.

⁹ Cf. Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow, *Europäische Tagebücher. Eigenart, Formen, Entwicklung*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1990.

¹⁰ Philippe Lejeune, “How Do Diaries End?”, *Biography*, 24 (1), 2001, pp. 99-112.

¹¹ All diarists’ names are my invention. For researchers I included the archival signatures in the references.

¹² Cf. Gabriele Rosenthal, *Der Holocaust im Leben von drei Generationen. Familien von Überlebenden der Shoah und von Nazi-Tätern*, Psychosozial, Gießen, 1997.

life period in which the person made and reflected her experiences. Only sometimes they look back and reflect on earlier periods of their life. In my corpus of diaries this was the case after capitulation. Then, some diarists reflected on their (mostly) conformist behaviour during National Socialism, expressed shame about it and/or justified themselves. These expressions of self-justification or shame can be seen as re-interpretations of their subjectivity within a new social frame. I will come back to this point in part two of this paper.

Diversity

Diaries are a highly individualised and diversified material. To begin with, diarists write in very different lengths. Whereas some write only over a period of several weeks, others write over months and years. Moreover, whereas some scribble only a few notes, others write page long reflections. Also the writing style differs very much between diaries and within one diary. They may be written in a more report like style or an interesting story telling style or simply as abstract reflections. In sum, diaries follow the need of their composers.

Lejeune distinguishes two 'schools' of writing.¹³ To the first belong those diarists who discipline themselves to write on a daily basis. Some even follow a routine structure. For example, Martha, a diarist of my sample, used a calendar and filled one page each day. All entries are structured in the same way. She wrote the date, described the weather and briefly wrote about her activities in the morning, at noon and in the evening. She continued with noting from whom she had received letters and to whom she had written, and ended with stating that she would go to bed. There is only one interruption from this routine from 16 to 23 April 1945, when the British army moved into the children's camp where she was a teacher. During these days she wrote more but returned to her routine after the army had left.

The other 'school' consists of diarists who do not write regularly. They mostly write when they have extraordinary experiences to reflect.¹⁴ Diarists who write to get over a crisis also belong to this group.¹⁵ One example of sporadic writing is the diary of a woman I called Lilo. She spent only 43 handwritten pages on the entire National Socialist period. On the last day of 1941 she only writes one sentence: "We are still at war" and it is the first sentence after two years. Most diaries of my corpus, however, are mixed forms of both types.

¹³ Cf. Lejeune, *How Do Diaries End?*, cit.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Cf. Nieden, *Alltag im Ausnahmezustand*, cit.

Lejeune further distinguishes different motives of writing: to express oneself, to reflect, to freeze time and to take pleasure in writing. All motives can occur in one diary one after the other. Additionally, there can be more than these four motivations. For instance, diaries like the one of Martha who routinely wrote on a daily basis can serve the goal to hold everyday life together in a chaotic and repeatedly life threatening social and political situation like war. Furthermore, especially in war situations, diaries may be written in order to keep the memory for absent family members and to be able to report to them. This is different from freezing time because the person does not necessarily wish to preserve the moment, but to remember it in order to enhance the chance to overcome separation. In my sample, for instance, four diaries were written by women who lost contact with their husbands. They also wrote for them to know what had happened to the family when they were away, and both could catch up more easily. Furthermore, in their imagination they kept in touch and shared their lives with their partners, even though they were not there.

Subsequently, diaries are not only shaped by different motives but also shaped by writing conditions. Many people during the Second World War were not at all able to write because they could not get hold of any material, such as almost all inmates of concentration camps, but people who were in flight or who lost their home through bombs might also not have been able to write simply because of the lack of material or a quiet and private corner where they could withdraw from social life. These diarists often write autobiographical texts afterwards to keep the memory of that period of their life. In my diary sample I often find sentences such as Elfriede's "I am writing chaotically because of being permanently interrupted. There is no chance to avoid this in our household". However, other women wrote about having a lot of time for themselves despite the turbulent circumstances.

Authenticity

Diary entries are written with no obvious partner of communication. Unlike interviews they are not structured through the research subject and they also lack the already reduced communication in letters.¹⁶ As a result, diaries seem to express extensive privacy. However, this appearance is deceptive because the imaginary reader shapes a diary. To begin with, in

¹⁶ Cf. Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung 1939-1945*, Schöningh, Paderborn, 1998, p. 34.



Fig.2: Fragmented Diary Material. Photo by S. Grenz.

diaries written for someone else, like the diaries of those women whose husbands were missing soldiers, there was an imaginative reader who was a concrete person. Even though they were absent and would, therefore, not interfere with the thoughts of the diarist, they have an impact on the diary text. Furthermore, other diaries of my sample also had imaginary readers. For instance, one woman wrote about having read the diary of a friend. Even though she does not mention that someone will read hers as well, one can assume that there was a group or at least a couple of friends who exchanged diaries.

Depending on whom the diarist thought of – and possibly several different persons were imagined – the diaries took on different shapes. This is obvious in passages written after capitulation in which the diarists reflected upon their behaviour during National Socialism. A diarist who imagined a reader that was her partner and had a similar background of experiences used a different writing style than a diarist who imagined the reader to be her yet unborn grandchild. Whereas the first one can assume shared knowledge, the second one would feel much more obliged to explain why she and others had been so passive.

The question of authenticity is also important because diaries can never offer a complete picture of a person. The literary critic Seifert recognises that diaries of literary writers may entail writing exercises or only be used in a bad mood.¹⁷ As a result, even though

¹⁷ Seifert, *Tagebuchschreiben als Praxis*, cit.

one is easily seduced into understanding a diary as an authentic expression of a person, such interpretation leads to distortions. Thus, even if a diary passage could be a clear and unimpeded expression of a writer, this expression would be very limited and could not be taken as *pars pro toto*. The person might be completely different in other moments. Moreover, over time she will have changed. As a consequence, a diary after some time might be foreign to the diarist herself. For instance, in my sample there are diaries accompanied by letters to the literary writer Kempowski who collected them. The writers state that they experience their own diaries as foreign and embarrassing. At the time when they were sending the diaries they could not imagine to think and write like this anymore, and they had forgotten that once they did.

A last problematic occurs when diaries are no longer available as original handwriting but only transcribed. In these cases one can never find out whether some compromising passages were taken out or the person transcribing them simply made mistakes. For this reason, I preferred handwritten originals, however, it was not in all cases possible to read these. Nevertheless, the position a diarist inhabits does not depend on individual sentences but runs through the entire text. As a result, one can see in many passages how the writer positioned herself to the National Socialist system and the war. The diaries that express an affirmative position usually contain so many compromising passages that they are still relevant, even if some were omitted.

Part 2: Epistemological Questions

From an epistemological perspective authenticity poses the question whether diaries can point to an ‘inner truth’ or ‘true core’ of a diarist. To assume this is in line with a Western concept of biographical writing that is closely related to the unfolding of individuality and developed in the 18th century in Europe.¹⁸ Jancke and Hartmann criticise this concept; from their perspective, in diaries one cannot find persons in “their individual life, in their actions and passions, their happy as well as traumatized parts” (p. 35).¹⁹ Rather one finds an “autobiographical person” that is “made

¹⁸ Andreas Bähr, Peter Burschel and Gabriele Jancke (eds.), *Räume des Selbst. Selbstzeugnisforschung, transkulturell*, Böhlau, Köln, 2007, p. 5.

¹⁹ Elke Hartmann and Gabriele Jancke, *Roupens Erinnerungen eines armenischen Revolutionärs (1921/1951) im transepochalen Dialog. Konzepte und Kategorien der Selbstzeugnis-Forschung zwischen Universalität und Partikularität*, in Claudia Ulbrich, Hans Medick and Angelika Schaser (eds.), *Selbstzeugnis und Person. Transkulturelle Perspektiven*, Böhlau, Köln, 2012, pp. 31-71 (my translation from German).

of different material than a real and physic person, designed by language in different forms and genres" (p. 35). As a consequence "patterns of lived life is hardly reflected in autobiographical writings but patterns of practiced and familiar writings" (p. 35).

As a consequence, diarists follow models of writing such as professional literary writing or published autobiographies. In one of the diaries I investigated, Hildegard, the diarist, writes that she follows the model of the diary published by an actress who wrote it as a 'mirror of her soul'. At the very least, diarists may search for the right expression and aim to write in a 'good' style. In my sample I found several passages where diarists articulated this desire. For instance, they expressed feelings for the lack of words or wrote that what is written is only a small part of what they experienced. In other words, diarists are often well aware that language as well as their diary is a medium. They observe (or willingly create) ruptures, changes and distortions through the transformation from their thoughts and feelings to their expressions on paper.

So far two dimensions can be seen: firstly that familiar writings serve as orientation and second that they are never fully satisfactory. Hence, I will continue problematizing diary interpretations by including a social as well as historical perspective. I will first investigate the construction of textual selves, then of female selves and finally of historical female selves.

The Construction of Textual Selves

What resonates here is the cultural theory of memory developed first by Maurice Halbwachs.²⁰ He disagreed with a psychological perspective that memory belongs to an individual and investigated the social conditions of memory. From his point of view, memories are embedded in the social context of a time. This is already established through the circumstance that all memory is remembered only through language, and languages are always socially constructed. Thus, only those experiences can be remembered that can be framed socially. This is clearly mirrored in the circumstance that diarists find orientation in writing practices of their time and that they follow their reading habits. Besides, one has to consider social discourses reflected in the writing. A methodology like New Historicism used by Stephen Greenblatt, who acknowledged that literary texts are shaped by

²⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main, 1966.

discourses external to the text, might be helpful here.²¹ However, the dilemma is that one has to cope with an imperfect view on all texts because of the impossibility of knowing those discourses fully. It is thus only possible in interpretation to focus on certain aspects.

In any case, analysing diaries always means to investigate social knowledge, current discourses rather than the inner self of a writer. This knowledge is not always explicit but sometimes also implicitly expressed in a text. In biographical research a biography “is understood as social construct.”²² This social construct shows “patterns of an individual structure and working on experiences” that always point to “social rules, discourses and social conditions”.²³ Even though – as I have shown earlier in this paper – diaries differ from autobiographies generated in narrative interviews, diaries are a medium of self-narrated memories. That means that they also represent constructions of selves, and diarists draw in an individual way on a reservoir of discourses. This reservoir consists of cultural memory, and entails all social conditions as well as cultural memories. As all readers know everything related to gender is part of remembering and, hence, reproducing social practices.

The Textual Construction of Female Selves

Feminist researchers have convincingly shown that Western subjectivity developed from the 18th century onwards is a masculine concept. On the basis of supposedly scientific research sex differences were increasingly established throughout the 19th century and, as a result, women granted less rights. This history is still at work in terms of the development of subjectivity. Maihofer argues that subjectivity and masculinity are closely related to each other.²⁴ To establish a relationship to oneself as subject still means to develop a structure of masculinity. For women this means that it seems still to be impossible to develop a sense of female subjectivity. Instead, women establish a ‘masculine’ relation to their own subjectivity. As a result, women are on fragile and/or

²¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Schmutzige Riten. Betrachtungen zwischen Weltbildern*, Fischer, Frankfurt/Main, 1995.

²² Bettina Völter, Bettina Dausien, Helma Lutz and Gabriele Rosenthal (eds.), *Biographieforschung im Diskurs*, VS, Wiesbaden, 2005, p. 7. My translation from German.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Andrea Maihofer, *Geschlecht als Existenzweise. Macht, Moral, Recht und Geschlechterdifferenz*, Helmer, Frankfurt/Main, 1995.

broken terms to themselves. Furthermore, because of this, they are dependent on the recognition of other people.

This broken sense of subjectivity and the need for recognition is mirrored in women's writings. For instance, professional writers such as George Sand might have lived a more independent life. However, her female characters did not enjoy the same degree of freedom, rather followed conventional imaginations of womanhood.²⁵ In her talk "Professions of Women" Virginia Woolf reflected on the two major hurdles a woman writer faces.²⁶ The first one she called "the angel in the house", the imagination of a charming and conciliatory woman who would never confront men but rather lie in order to be successful. The second hurdle is the difficulty of describing experiences of a female body:

She had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of consciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over. Her imagination could work no longer. This I believe to be a very common experience with women writers – they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex. For though men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these respects, I doubt that they realize or can control the extreme severity with which they condemn such freedom in women.²⁷

Virginia Woolf as a professional writer reflected upon these difficulties. Even though the diaries of my sample were written in the 1940s, it is very likely that they, too, were consciously or unconsciously shaped by these hurdles. One diarist, Hildegard, wanted the diary to be a "mirror of her self". However, she never articulated such hurdles. Was she conscious of them? Moreover, the above described search for right expressions might also be related to the hurdles analysed by Woolf. Thus, the search for an 'inner truth' of a diarist in her text becomes even more problematic, if not impossible.

However, despite all hurdles it might well be that women writers also develop new forms of subjectivity that are des-

²⁵ Cf. Annelise Maugue, *Die neue Eva und der alte Adam. Geschlechteridentität in der Krise*, in George Duby and Michelle Perrot (eds.) *Geschichte der Frauen*, Vol. 4, 19. Jahrhundert, Fischer, Frankfurt/Main, 1997, pp. 576-596.

²⁶ Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women", in Michele Barrett (ed.), *Virginia Woolf. Women and Writing*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1979, pp. 57-63.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 61f.

identified with hegemonic masculinity, for instance, aspects of subjectivities that are related to nomadic subjectivity as conceptualized by Braidotti.²⁸ Nevertheless, also in these terms the perspective of a constructed textual self not being gender neutral is very helpful.

The Textual Construction of Historical Female Selves

Following Joan Scott, it is necessary to see that the very categories we use as analytical tools are also historical.²⁹ In terms of sex/gender this is true for both. Not only have our cultural attitudes and social conditions changed since the 1940s, but our bodies are also different today. For instance, the measurements of our bodies are different, contraception is fairly reliable, our health system as changed dramatically and households are highly mechanized, not to forget that our world has become much more mobile.

Subsequently, Maihofer reminds us that the distinction between sex and gender is itself related to the Western separation between nature and culture and as such historical.³⁰ This distinction has been questioned by feminist thinkers and can be questioned in the context of diary interpretation as well.³¹ The diaries I analysed were written during the war, thus in a period that was highly sex segregated. However, the different experiences men and women had then go far beyond differences made on the basis of bodily differences. On the contrary, the experiences themselves are differentiating gender also by their bodily impact.

These aspects are important to consider because diaries create closeness. One feels that one reads first hand experiences and is repeatedly drawn into them. One constantly has to remind oneself that these writers were located in a completely different period of time and, for this reason, remain foreign, despite the feeling of being a first hand witness. In order to capture the historical and social contextualization of self-narratives including a social constructivist perspective on the text, historians make use of Marcel Mauss' idea of "person concepts".³² It describes the

²⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011.

²⁹ Joan W. Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2011.

³⁰ Maihofer, *Geschlecht als Existenzweise*, cit.

³¹ Cf. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, cit.

³² Gabriele Jancke and Claudia Ulbrich, *Vom Individuum zur Person. Neue Konzepte im Spannungsfeld von Autobiographietheorie und Selbstzeugnisforschung*, in Id., *Vom Individuum zur Person. Neue Konzepte im Spannungsfeld von*

construction of a textual self in historical terms. This concept is still in development and, hence, still open. Furthermore, one has to be careful, since diarists do not necessarily work conceptually in order to create a textual construction. To me this concept articulates the need to contextualize the diaries in their historical discourses. Here, I follow Foucault and see discourses as going beyond textual expressions. In cultures based on writing, such as the European, writing has a materialising effect. Laws, regulations, contracts etc. are all written down and impose socially effective changes. They are reflected in self-narratives and have an impact on the particular person concept a writer creates.

These person concepts are necessarily different from ours. In the case of my diaries I found that most diarists identified with an imagined German collective, whereas today, maybe the pressure of individualisation would be more dominant for the textual constructed self. To give an example of collective thinking, the diarist I named Elfriede wrote: "We do not deserve any better than being reduced to servitude. Somehow we all are guilty, that we didn't protest loudly against all this."

Another important aspect is that in all diaries one finds comments on national politics and war reports. Wuthenow discovered this in diaries of writers like Bertolt Brecht or Thomas Mann who were in exile.³³ He interprets this more chronicle style as a new form of objectivity in diaries, he sees that these writers have a more objective perspective on their own self. They subordinate the self under the bigger political and social context. This is also the case in my diary sample. For instance, Emma, a 67 year old widow, in 1944 wrote about her wish to be buried next to her husband and adds "if today it is at all possible to choose one's grave". These comments, however, differ from diary to diary. They depend on the age of the diarist as well as her political attitude. As a result, one has to consider even different parallel existing 'person concepts'.

Part 3: Ethical Dilemmas

Before I close this discussion, I want to briefly touch on the issue of ethics and ethical dilemmas with the analysis of diaries. My considerations are related to the discussion whether and to what extent women were victimized or became perpetrators

Autobiographietheorie und Selbstzeugnisforschung, "Querelles Jahrbuch für Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung", Wallstein, Göttingen, 2005, pp. 7-27.

³³ Wuthenow, *Europäische Tagebücher*, cit.

(not only in a juridical sense) during National Socialism and the Second World War.³⁴ This issue was discussed during the 1980s and subsequently set to rest. However, while analysing self-narratives a researcher is still confronted with ethical dilemmas. For instance, one diarist was already a member of the NSDAP in 1932 and remained convinced even after capitulation. On the one hand she was victimized through the war by losing her partner and becoming a lone parent. On the other, she was part of the system as a disseminator and in her diary never articulated any wish for the war to end, even though her partner was missing. This contradiction creates a tension for a researcher that cannot and need not to be fully resolved.

The other dilemma is linked to the overall situation in Germany at the end of the Second World War as well as related to German memory cultures.³⁵ During the last year of the war, as many German soldiers and civilians died as during the first five war years.³⁶ In the diaries, therefore, are many passages of mourning for a relative or friend. Furthermore, many diarists were confronted with violence, threatened by air raids and existential angst on a daily basis. They also had to decide whether they should flee or stay where they were, experienced sexual violence or were at least afraid of it. Hence, the diaries contain narratives of victimisations that are created by the military gender order. As such, they are part of a patriarchal structure. Women were at home and were victimised because of their role as women, sexualised and unarmed. On the other hand, several diarists supported wounded soldiers as well as Germany's continuation of the war. This creates a similar tension as in the first example.

This tension is enhanced by the fact that these victimisations (e.g. air raids, flight from Eastern territories, sexual violence) became part of cultural memory as victimisation of the German people.³⁷ Hence, diaries of women cannot be interpreted simply as individual expressions. As with all nation building processes, in this case women also symbolically represent the nation.³⁸

³⁴ Cf. Lanwed and Stoehr, *Frauen und Geschlechterforschung*, cit.

³⁵ Cf. Zehfuss, M. 2007, *Wounds of Memory. The Politics of War in Germany*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

³⁶ Wolfram Wette, *Militärsgeschichte von unten. Die Perspektive des 'kleinen Mannes'*, in Id. (ed.), *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes. Eine Militärsgeschichte von unten*, Piper, München, 1992.

³⁷ Cf. Zehfuss, *Wounds of Memory*, cit.

³⁸ Cf. Nira Yuval-Davies, *Geschlecht und Nation*, die brotsuppe, Emmendingen, 1997.

Additionally, these victimisations are still lamented, even though only from extreme right-wing positions who tend to forget that Germany could have stopped the killing by giving up the war.

To sum up, as a researcher, one has to remember this; one also should not forget that anti-semitism and the war were supported by the German people, even though one does not exactly know to what extend. Last not least, it is necessary to recognise the hegemonic gender order and take the concrete victimisations that diarists describe seriously. These aspects need to be taken into account in addition to the discussion about the diversity of the material and the construction of textual historical female selves. Only then can we detect the complexity of a particular historical positioning as linked to our situation today.

Women's Memory of Socialism: 15 Years of International Research, Archiving and Public Promotion

Pavla Frýdlová

In my contribution I will outline one of the longest Oral History projects conducted in Europe, on its results, outcomes and finally on the issues related to the archiving of the interviews and their accessibility to the professional and general public.¹ The lifting of the Iron Curtain in 1989 was accompanied by high expectations, especially in the sphere of production and distribution of knowledge. Perhaps nowhere were these expectations so high as in the area of women and gender studies. At that time many Western feminists rushed to the so-called 'backward' region of Eastern Europe under the flag of global sisterhood. Most of them were equipped with more enthusiasm than linguistic competence and cultural understanding. They were trying to judge the position of women in the East on the basis of their own social and cultural experience. Some of them saw women in this Region as not emancipated enough, while others had idealized and unrealistic ideas about something called 'socialist woman'.

Already in 1990 several women mostly of an academic background and one man started to meet in the Prague flat of the prominent Czech human rights activist and professor of sociology at Charles University Jiřina Šiklová in order to discuss gender-related issues. Out of these meetings emerged the Gender Studies

¹ The shorter version of this paper was presented at the XVI International Oral History Conference 2010 IOHA Prague, within panel "Women's Memory of Socialism". It was also included into CD-ROM accompanying Conference material.

Center in Prague, which began to collect books on gender-related topics and organize public lectures and seminars.

Soon it became clear, however, that there was a need for a major project that could serve as a source for knowledge of gender issues not only in the Czech context, but in the entire Region of the former Soviet block. In 1996 the idea of the Women's Memory project emerged.² The aim of this project was to grasp the history of women under socialism, in all its complexity from international and interdisciplinary perspective. We wanted to challenge the established myths and clichés about 'socialist woman', often presented as some kind of heroic female tractor driver. We wanted to document the life experiences of women of three generations born between 1920 and 1960. We were interested above all in their life strategies and in their personal culture of survival.

The complexity of relations between socialism and gender issues can never be fully grasped from one discipline only. Therefore the national research teams included women from various disciplines, such as sociology, history, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, ethnography, anthropology and journalism. Nevertheless the aim of the project cannot be reduced to its cognitive aspects. It is unique in the sense that it goes far beyond the academic community and is oriented towards the wider public in the related countries.

Fig.1: Women planting trees in front of their new flats in the 1950s (courtesy of the Digital archive) (www.womensmemory.net).



More important was the question of methodology. Feminist developments of the social sciences have challenged the traditional

² The project and its results are documented at the web page www.womensmemory.net.

male dominated interpretation of the world. For instance, it has emphasized the importance of personal experience as a part of the research method. For this reason many feminist researchers are applying narrative and biographical approaches. According to these methods, history does not represent a set of events, but is a result of interaction between individuals. It is the meaning and significance attributed to the events by the individuals that retroactively shapes historical 'reality'. The choice of the method of oral history based on interviews for this project seemed to us quite logical. This method is rooted in the oral transmission of information and particularly in family narratives. We were interested in lived experience rather than so-called objective truth.

The elaboration and finalization of our method lasted over a year. While we initially drew on the experience of other related projects, our own method was shaped by the actual process of interviewing itself. The methodology has been further developed at five international workshops. At these workshops, while respecting the cultural, religious and historical differences between involved teams from different countries, we had to establish an agreed common ground which would enable us to compare the project results internationally.

What Form Does the Interview Take?

We understand an interview to be a process of interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. It is based on mutual trust, which is seen as an indispensable condition of communication. The absolutely equal position between those involved in the interview is a key ethical question in the project, since the purpose is not just to collect 'data', but also to lead women to reflect on their own identity. A basic scheme of the interview is prepared in advance, but this represents only a helpful outline, which we keep at the back of our minds. A majority of interviews could last for several hours and often it takes several meetings to complete the testimony. Without the deep commitment of the team members such a demanding task would be impossible.

Not everyone can conduct an interview. The testimony of the respondent often goes beyond words and this level of non-verbal communication is equally important. Not everyone knows how to silence tears or fears. It is a special art not to burden the respondent with misleading questions. The ideal aim is to achieve a situation in which the interviewed woman feels that she is the one who is controlling the main direction of the story she is sharing with us.

Fig.2: Interview with shock worker Jarmila Šnajderová from the 1952 cover of the most popular Czech women's magazine *Vlasta* was made 46 years later (courtesy of the Digital archive) (www.womensmemory.net).



How Have We Chosen the Women to Be Interviewed?

Careful selection of the women has been one of the main conditions for the success of our work since the very beginning. Each life story is important to us, but not every woman is able or

willing to tell it. There is a variety of ways of searching for the right women to be interviewed: 'Personal recommendation' is one way, and this is often crucial for the success of the interview. Otherwise it would be nearly impossible to ask about intimate issues such as sexual relations, childbirth, abortion, family planning, etc. Needless to say, the full anonymity of the respondent is guaranteed.

We also use the snow-ball method, asking the interviewed women to propose others known to them. The interviewed women have included a farm worker, a typesetter, a nurse, a librarian, a physician, a lawyer, a photographer and a pilot. Although since the very beginning we stated clearly that this was not meant to be a completely representative sample of the female population of the country concerned, we have attempted to maintain a relative balance among the social and age groups of the women chosen.

The most urgent task was to interview the oldest generation. It became obvious to us that this generation – then in their late 70s and early 80s – was not going to be with us for long. We cannot allow the circumstances which shaped their lives as women to be forgotten, or even worse, to be deformed by later second-hand interpretation. The task is even more important considering the fact that this is the first economically independent generation of women. There has never been at any time in history a generation like this one which, thanks to the socialist regime under which they have spent most of their lives, have known complete economic independence.

What Are the Results of the Project?

During the 10 years – of its existence marked by continual struggle for funding – over 500 biographical interviews were conducted and transcribed and most of the transcriptions form a basis of an archive currently located in the Gender Studies Center in Prague.³ Each of the national teams handled the research results in a different way, in some cases they lead to a production of documentary films, radio programmes, and books addressing larger public (Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Czech Republic), others, such as the Slovak team, focused on interpretations that were published in a form of academic monographs.⁴

³ CD Archive Women's Memory – key word database based on 180 interviews with three generations of women – is available in the Gender Studies library.

⁴ Zuzanna Kiczková, *Women's Memory. The Experience of Self-shaping in Biographical Interviews*, IRIS, Bratislava, 2006.

In Czech itself seven books based on the interviews were published till to date⁵, two serials of documentary programmes for public radio broadcasting, and a documentary film produced by jointly by the Czech Television and Gender Studies Centre entitled “War in Women’s Memory” was aired in 2005.⁶ In this paper we shall focus on a case study of the Czech archives and its public appropriation by the local professional community as well as by wider local audiences.

There is another dimension to the concept of ‘research output’. This can be defined as a process of consciousness-raising among the women interviewed in the project. This process begins already during the interviewing itself. Many interviewed women were genuinely surprised that we wanted to hear their life story at all. Others were for the first time trying to recapitulate about their own lives. The interview has enabled them to see themselves from a new perspective. The very fact that somebody else is interested in their life boosts their self-confidence.

There is a significant impact of the project on the researchers outside of the actual interview, such as its transcription, completion of the text, mutual reading of the interviews and their evaluation in workshops. Throughout the project we were learning what multiculturalism really means, while all the clichés about the grey uniformity of life in East Central Europe are rapidly being eroded.

What Was It like For Women Under Socialism?

Firstly, let me give just one example of the kind of narrative that has emerged from the interviews. The following life story reflects

⁵ Selected publications and productions based on the Women’s Memory Project interviews are (in Czech): *Všechny naše včerejšky* [All our Yesterdays], Gender Studies, Prague, 1998 – 12 interviews with women of three generations from the first phase of the project; *Všechny naše včerejšky II*, Gender Studies, Prague, 1998 – 12 interviews with women of three generations from the second phase of the project, accompanied by short reflections by the project participants; *Paměti romských žen: Kořeny I – Memories of Romany Women: The Roots*, Muzeum romské kultury, Brno, 2002 – five interviews with Romany women of different generations, in Czech and English; Pavla Frýdlová, *Ženská vydrží víc než člověk, XX. století v životních příbězích deseti žen* [A Woman endures more than a person: Twentieth Century in the life stories of ten women], Nakladatelství Lidové noviny a Gender Studies, Prague, 2006; Pavla Frýdlová, *Ženám patří půlka nebe*. [Women own half of the sky], Nakladatelství Lidové noviny a Gender Studies, Prague, 2007.

⁶ *Cyklus Českého rozhlasu 6 a Gender Studies, o.p.s. War through women’s eyes*. 10 x 30 min, Prague, 2005; *Cyklus Českého rozhlasu 6 a Gender Studies, o.p.s. They lived here with us*. 7 x 30 min, Prague, 2006; *Stories of German anti-fascist women in Czechoslovakia Válka v paměti žen* [War in Women’s Memory]. Film documentary. Gender Studies and Česká televize, 57 min, 2005.

most of the dramatic changes, which took place since the 1940s in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, this is both typical and at the same time a highly individual story.⁷

Katarina, or Katy as they call her, was born in 1930, the only child of a Jewish well-established architect and builder in an East Slovak city Košice. She was brought up in German and Hungarian but did not know Yiddish, as the family was not orthodox. Her happy childhood ended in 1944, when as a 14 years old girl she and her family were shipped along with one of the last transports to Auschwitz. She was the only one who survived.

After her return she could not face going back to school among all her fellow students who had spent the whole year living a more or less normal life. At the age of 16 she married a medical student, a man slightly older than her of a similar fate. He also had lost all his family in a concentration camp. The marriage collapsed after two years just after Katy gave birth to her first son. She could no longer stand living in a city where everything reminded her of her parents and decided to move to Prague with her one year old son. She did not know Czech, knew nobody in the city and yet started building up her new life. She put her son in a residential nursery, which meant that she saw him only on weekends. At that time facilities of this kind were highly recommended, as they were believed to provide much better 'professional' care than a family could. She started taking care of her son only when he was three years old and she had secured finally her own housing.

At the beginning of the 1950s she remarried and her daughter was born soon afterwards. At this time she also accepted a creative job in a newly established Center of Hungarian Culture in Prague. She was translating, interpreting, and promoting Hungarian culture and particularly film in Czechoslovakia. This way she achieved a very respected position in the Czech as well as Hungarian cultural and film circles.

In the early 1950s she became a member of the Communist Party. Like many young people at that time, she saw the idea of Communism as a guarantee of social justice as well as the only secure way of ensuring that the horrors of fascism would not return. Not even the bloody events in Hungary in 1956 challenged her convictions. Along with her third husband – a respected manager of animated film - she belonged to the leading

⁷ The interview was conducted by the author in April and May 1998, and was partly published in the book Kateřina Pošová, *Jsem, protože musím* [I am because I have to], ed. by Pavla Frýdlová, Prostor, Praha, 2003.

representatives of the Prague Spring liberation movement, which set out to create a socialism with a 'human face'. The Russian tanks in the streets of Prague in August 1968 brought a bitter awakening from the reformed socialist dream. Katy's husband lost his job in the film industry, her daughter was not admitted to higher education and later on in the 1980s ended up in exile in Australia. Only after several years when Katy had already retired, was she allowed to travel to Australia in order to visit her daughter and grandchildren.

Despite all this, Katy has been an enormously hard working woman, always busy doing several things at once: translating, doing film criticism for local media, organizing cultural events. For almost twenty years she was not allowed to travel anywhere except on business trips to Hungary and thus she devoted all her spare time to transforming a half ruined listed building into a summer house. It is hard to believe how, besides her demanding job, she could manage to run a large household full of children and regular guests who were attracted by her culinary skills. Her family shared a house with her mother-in-law, a situation for Katy, which was a blessing rather than a burden.

Nevertheless Katy always managed to do everything as if it was the most natural thing, whether it was her demanding job or her city and weekend households. Only recently after difficult surgery and the death of her husband she has slowed down. This overactive seventy-something woman, however, did not express much self-pride in the interview. She admitted that she had been a workaholic, but she kept emphasizing her failures, the things she did not manage rather than her achievements. Her major frustration has been a lack of formal education. She regretted that she did not force herself to study and therefore she remained a self-made-woman in everything she did. And yet, she is a highly professional and independent woman who at the same time impresses everyone with her graceful femininity.

Analyses of Findings

In analysing our narratives, we tried to proceed without any *a priori* suppositions. It may come as no surprise that women under socialism experienced a form of emancipation, one which we have to understand in terms of its essentially non-Western otherness.

While women in the West had to fight long and hard for many of their rights, the paternalistic socialist states ruled by Communist governments provided these rights from above. Women's rights were included in the first Communist Constitutions. Women's

rights were part of the whole package of social and economical change. True to the Marxist theory of women's emancipation as a part of the emancipation of the working class, women's issues became part of socialist revolutions. One of the leading questions of our project is how these mostly legal changes were applied in practice.

There are three major aspects of the otherness of this emancipation I would like to discuss here in the light of our findings so far. Firstly, economic independence; secondly, access and attitude to education and/or professional competence; last but not least, the question of the Independent social identity of women.

For this discussion I draw on a selection of interviews – 97 of them – with Czech women of various social and professional backgrounds, born before 1930, from urban areas as well as the countryside. These women not only survived the major social and political changes of the twentieth century – such as World War Two, the Communist coup, the Cold War, the Soviet occupation of 1968 and the velvet revolution of 1989 – but also actively participated in them. Not all of these women were purely of Czech origins – some were Jewish survivors of the Holocaust as well as women of Czech-German origins. And others, interviewed by colleagues in related projects, include Czech Gypsy women.

As in the rest of Europe and the United States, the turning point in the history of women's employment was World War Two. It was during this period that a significant portion of women of various social backgrounds participated in paid labor. But unlike the situation in the West, where women subsequently returned to the household, women in our Region continued to work even after the war. In addition, reorganization of national industry and agriculture gradually led to almost full employment among women. As a result, at the end of the socialist era there were up to 97% of Czech women 'fully' employed. Flexible working hours or part-time work almost did not exist. At some point in the 1950s the model of the 'double-income household' developed and gradually become the social norm as well as an economical necessity. Due to the above noted economical and social pressures, the concept of the 'housewife' almost entirely disappeared. Among all the women we interviewed we have not met a single woman who has spent her entire life just caring for her children and husband.

The massive economical independence of the female population resulted in 'a double burden' that does exist in most industrialized societies. The major negative consequence of economical

independence during the socialist regime, however, was an 'overburdening' of women. Women acquired their professional roles without any decrease in their domestic workload.

At the beginning of the 1950s the socialist regime assumed that it had discovered a solution to the conflict of women's double roles. This solution was seen in terms of communal service and collective lifestyle. One of the major areas of state intervention was childcare. For example, some nurseries were even introduced as week-long boarding facilities. There was a system of afternoon facilities attached to every elementary school. By the 1960s the communal child day-care was attended by 90% of children.

Some of the social service projects as they were designed and practiced in the early 1950s may sound almost incredible today. There was a chain shopping service: ordered food was delivered to the house every day for a minimal fee. Lunches were provided in factory canteens and school cafeterias for a symbolic price. Families were offered housing in communal state-owned houses for a small rent. All services related to laundry, washing, cleaning etc. were provided by a centralized, nation-wide state-run company symbolically called *The Liberated Household*. Leisure time was also taken care of. Each company or factory ran a variety of recreational facilities where families spent their holidays. All school children spent several weeks of the school year in the mountains and summer camps. Needless to say, all these facilities included a proper ideological and political training. All this was designed to minimize the traditional role of the family in society and consequently free a woman for her participation in collective production.

The awakening from 'the socialist dream' came sooner than expected. The dominating orientation of the Czech economy towards heavy industry led to the stagnation of the so-called 'non-productive' sector of services. The growing problems of the national economy at the beginning of the 1960s – especially in the services area – had the most dramatic impact particularly on the female population. Again it fell to women to cope.

Despite all this social and economical development, the issues of a new male and female role in society remained unaddressed. It was not until the late 1960s, in a period of relative political freedom – that these issues emerged in the public arena. Some surveys proved that an average 'socialist woman' had an extremely limited amount of free time compared to her partner. This resulted in decreasing the quality of women's lives and consequently led towards inequality between men and women. The turning point in

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most women's lives, a point on which depends her inequality, was usually the birth of her first child. In the 1960s the national birth rate dramatically decreased. One of the measures introduced by the state to counter this trend was a gradually extended maternity leave. By the end of the 1980s the state provided six months of fully paid maternity leave plus up to three years guaranteed job security along with state benefits. This arrangement is still in place today.

The reaction of most women to their over-burdening and the decreasing capacity of the state to help was to develop 'strategies' which would enable them to cope. One of them was a generally accepted lowering of their professional ambitions. That a woman worked was accepted as normal, but that she could occupy a position of influence at work was not. Women tried to take the longest maternity leave possible and have their children in close sequence in order to spend 3 to 9 years at home, some of it on full pay and without losing their jobs or benefits. A very important factor in this was, and still is, the institution of the larger family. The help of grandparents – particularly grandmothers – is still almost taken for granted.

While interviewing women born in 1920s and 1930s we expected that the issues of over-burdening would represent one of the leading themes of our interviews. To our great surprise, however, this did not happen. Only when explicitly asked, did they start talking about the difficulties of managing the conflicting dual roles of working women and mothers in more detail. The range of their life strategies for dealing with these conflicts turned out to be much wider than we expected. Considering the lack of part-time work this was truly astonishing. There was an even more surprising issue. Even though women emphasized hardship and difficulties, especially when their children were small, they never presented themselves as victims of the regime, let alone their partners or family. On the contrary, they highlighted their courage and invention. Rather than complaining, they were proud of themselves. They take their professional position for granted and the achievement of independence is for them a substantial and desired part of the quality of their life.

No matter what social background the interviewed women came from what they shared without exception was a desire for education. In addition, this generation suffered from limited access to higher education since the Nazis closed down all Czech Universities during World War Two. Many women had to catch up with their education in all kinds of intensive university courses after the war.

Some women obtained the education they wanted only in their later years when their children were already grown up. Most of the women, who have not achieved any education, even at secondary level, never stopped seeing this as the major failure of their lives! They regretted that during the decisive period of their lives when they might have obtained it, they were not insistent enough. Such women tended to be persistent in ensuring the education of their daughters and granddaughters.

There is one more aspect of our women's otherness we mentioned above. The women we interviewed never derived their own social status and identity from the identity of their partners, husbands, fathers or brothers. In their life stories the social or professional identity of their partners seemed to have played a rather marginal role. They talked about themselves as teachers, farmers or workers *but not as wives*.

Archive

The issue of preservation and public use of the data is closely related to the legislation on the protection of personal data, a legislation which in all the countries was just being constructed during the 1990s, indeed often under very different terms. It seemed to be needed but nearly impossible to create an internationally applicable indexing system, i.e. kind of 'a one-stop' source of information for further research which would have facilitated orientation in the indeed massive pool of transcripts. Although it could be argued that completion of such system for an international project of this size is too ambitious, in 2003 the list of 165 keywords was produced. It was just the Czech team that completed an electronic index allowing orientation in the archive and in its 180 interviews.

Everybody dealing with oral history projects is aware of the highly sensitive nature of the data and its accessibility. The very concept of 'data' here is highly misleading in this context, nonetheless. Our role in the interviewing process was not that one of a 'objective researcher' who collects 'data' but saw ourselves as partners in the communication process, as those who were being provided a particular life story by a particular individual. Therefore we always balanced in-between our own responsibility towards the narrators who trusted us, on the one hand, and towards the future users of the 'data' stored in the archive, on the other. This unwritten 'contract' of a mutual trust negotiated between the two subjects involved in the actual process of communication shall include a guarantee to the interviewee that her or his story will not be misinterpreted in the.

It cannot be more emphasized more how highly sensitive is the matter of further access to the oral-history databases, i.e. the process of sharing these texts with the wider public. It is further complicated by the fact that generally acceptable standards may not be a solution here, as it is the manager of the archives who must decide in each individual case which interviews (as long as they are not older than 30 years) are to be provided to the researchers. This a rule more or less observed by all archives that handle written documents.

The interest in the Women's Memory archives has been significantly increasing during the last decade, and such interest is not limited to professional scholars or students. The project began to attract printed media, radio and TV documentary producers. While some valuable work has been produced in this area too it has always been our aim to make the general public aware of the complexity of gendered experience during the centrally controlled political regimes. Given the commercialization and increasing tabloidization of contemporary media outlets, it would be naïve to expect that the journalists are able to and, indeed, willing to respect basic ethic commitments to our narrators. Lately, there have been numerous examples in the Czech public sphere of particularly younger researchers and journalists misusing historical data for particular political purposes and compiling simplified judgmental statements – from whichever political perspective – about the 'nature' of the 'Old Regime'.

Perhaps one of the key (and indeed often bitter) lessons that we have learnt during the 15 years of conducting the project of Women's Memory is, that the complex story of this project is not just about the question of what our narrators say and what their narratives do to people, but also about what people do with these narratives. The project began to live its own public life, a life which often goes beyond the control of those who conducted the interviews as well as those who provided their own, often highly personalised and intimate, life stories.

Translated from Czech by Jiřina Šmejkalová and Marko Djapić

A Fairy Tale of One's Own: Early 20th Century Croatian Children's Popular Literature and Theatre*

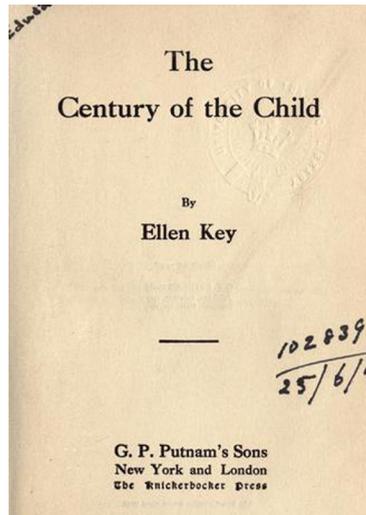
Marijana Hameršak

Twentieth century was already at its beginning proclaimed to be, to borrow the title of famous Ellen Key book, the century of the child. And indeed, children in that century came into the focus of endless number of various institutions, agendas and discourses. Numerous academic disciplines, old and new, also showed remarkable interest in children. But while, for example, youth were very often, especially in the framework of cultural studies, conceptualized as subversive, contra-cultural or at least active, children were often explicitly or implicitly approached as 'in becoming', with restricted agency or with agency in need of restriction. In the opposition to this tendency, some of the most prominent late twentieth century research in sociology and media studies directed their interest to the issues of children's agency and conceptualization of children as active subjects.¹

* The arguments presented in this article are in detail discussed in the Marijana Hameršak, "Imeti svojo pravljico. Vpliv otroka na produkcijo in recepcijo hrvaške pravljice v prvih desetletjih 20. stoletja", *Otrok in knjiga*, 83, 2012, pp. 169-178; and Marijana Hameršak "Antropologija, ekonomija i Dječje carstvo. Produkcija i recepcija bajku u međuraću", in Marina Protrka Štimec, Diana Zalar and Dubravka Zima (eds.), *Veliki Vidar. Stoljeće Grigora Viteza*, Centar za izdavačku djelatnost Učiteljskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zagreb, pp. 399-413.

¹ See, for example David Buckingham, *Children Talking Television. The Making of Television Literacy*, Falmer Press, London, 1993; William Corsaro, "Peer Culture in Preschool", *Theory into Practice*, 1, 1988, pp. 19-24; Alison James and Alan Prout (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood. Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Studies of Childhood*, Falmer Press, London, New York and Philadelphia, 1990.

Fig. 1: The front-page of the book *The Century of the Child* by Ellen Kay, 1909 (courtesy of Open Library). (www.openlibrary.org)



These programmatic discussions of children's agency mostly refer to ethnography and anthropology as their intellectual and methodological background and inspiration. Epistemological ancestors and frameworks of this, as it is sometimes called, "new paradigm" of children's culture research are, of course, more complex and diverse, and they encompass feminism as well.²

As it can be seen from Henry Jenkins *Children's Culture Reader*, several crucial studies of children as active subjects

came from the tradition of feminist analysis to slide "back and forth between psychological and sociological investigation, exploring the charged and unstable relations between mothers and daughters in order to rethink the social and psychic dynamics of patriarchal family."³ In this vein the work of Carolyn Steedman, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Carolyn Sargent and others clearly set feminism as the background or even foreground of the research dedicated to the research of children's agency and development of approaches dedicated to the conception of children as active subjects.⁴

Moreover, Jenkins in his plea for "progressive conception of children's culture" explicitly address feminism as inspiration, and gender studies as related and relevant field for finding:

² For the critical overview of newness of this "new" paradigm in social and human sciences of children and childhood see Patrick Ryan, "How New is the 'New' Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of Paradigm Shift", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 4, 2008, pp. 553-576.

³ Henry Jenkins, "Introduction. Childhood Innocence and Other Modern Myths", in Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Children's Culture Reader*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1998, p. 26.

⁴ For other pleas for the feminist engagement in the children's culture research, see for example Jane Helleiner, "Toward a Feminist Anthropology of Childhood". *Atlantis. A Women's Studies Journal*, 1, 1999, pp. 27-38; Beverly Lyon Clark, "Fairy Godmothers or Wicked Stepmothers? The Uneasy Relationship of Feminist Theory and Children's Criticism", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 4, 1993, pp. 171-176. For the overview of the feminist engagement in the field see: Erica Burman and Jackie Stacey, "The Child and Childhood in Feminist Theory", *Feminist Theory. An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3, 2010, pp. 227-240.

...the models that account for the complexity of the interactions between children and adults, the mutuality and the oppressions between their cultural agendas. Feminist analysis has taught us that politics works as much as through the micropractices of everyday life as through large-scale institutions and that our struggle to define our identities in relations to other members of our families often determines how we understand our place in the worlds.⁵

Interest in children's agency and the following interest in children as active subjects with the capacity to make a difference, rather than merely be constituted as different (from adult), in the new millennium extended to the fields such as children's literature studies and history of childhood.⁶ Term agency is today widely used in these fields, most often without referring to the long, rich and differentiated epistemological traditions of this term in social sciences.⁷ Because of introductory and primary historiographic bias of this article, it will also employ term agency in everyday use of that word i. e. for describing activity, acting or active subject, and without aspirations to resolve complex debates about the relationship of individual and collective, particular and structural, free will and determination. The aim of this article is merely to outline how concepts of children as active subjects emerged in Croatian context and in the relation to the introduction of new ways of presenting and producing of fairy tales.

Fairy Tales and Children's Agency

Fairy tales were not always part of children's literature. In Croatian context, for example, fairy tales entered the field of children's printed literature long after the first Croatian fictional children's books were published.⁸ Although fairy tales were published already in the second half of nineteenth century, they

⁵ Jenkins, "Introduction", cit., p. 30.

⁶ See for example Jo Mary Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood", *The Journal of the History and Youth*, 1, 2008, pp. 114-124; David Rudd, "How Children's Literature Exist?", in Peter Hunt (ed.), *Understanding Children's Literature, Key Essays from the second edition of International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005, pp. 15- 29; Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "Practicing for Print. The Hale Children's Manuscript Libraries", *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 2, 2008, pp. 188-209.

⁷ For the overview of the status and scopes of concept of agency in social sciences see for example detailed discussion of Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What is Agency?", *American Journal of Sociology*, 4, 1998, pp. 962-1023.

⁸ For the history of fairy tales in Croatian children's literature see Marijana Hameršak, *Pričalice. O povijesti djetinjstva i bajke*, Algoritam, Zagreb, 2011.

step into the center of Croatian children's literature production only between the First and the Second World Wars.

Fig. 2: The cover of the fairy tale book *Pričalice: Pepeljuga* (Storytellers: Cinderella), [1881], Zagreb, Croatia. Photo by M. Hameršak (courtesy of National and University Library [NSK], Zagreb, Croatia).



Between the First and the Second World Wars famous fairy tales, such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella*, *Puss in the Boots*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, were published as picture books in several versions and by different publishers.⁹

In the interwar period the production of collections of translated, as well as Croatian fairy tales continue to flourish and the production of serial penny fairy tales was introduced.¹⁰ Moreover, in these few decades fairy tales became not only the

⁹ For the bibliography of Croatian picture books published prior to 1945, see Štefka Batinić and Berislav Majhut, 2001, *Od slikovnjaka do Vragobe. Hrvatske slikovnice do 1945*, Hrvatski školski muzej, Zagreb, 2001, pp. 90-94.

¹⁰ For the overview of fairy tales collections of Croatian children's literature in interwar period, see relevant chapters in: Milan Crnković and Dubravka Težak, *Povijest hrvatske dječje književnosti. Od početaka do 1955. godine*. Znanje, Zagreb, 2002. For the penny literature see Berislav Majhut and Franić Dina, "Kuglijev nakladnički niz *Pripovijesti djeda Nike*", in Trpimir Macan (ed.), *Biobibliographica 3*, Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, Zagreb, 2009, pp. 129-162.

dominant genre of children's, in particular, popular literature and culture, but they also became the core issue of vigorous public debates about children and children's literature. Setting aside these debates, this article will focus on the conceptions of children's agency employed in then new forms of fairy tales production and distribution.¹¹

On the one hand, the focus will be on the conceptions of children as active subjects in the children's literature production, particularly in the penny literature for children that flourished in the Croatia during the period between two World Wars. On the other hand, focus will be redirected to the conceptions of children that were inherent to the multimedia (radio, theatre, gazette) project for children named *The children's kingdom* (*Dječje carstvo*) which was realized in the 1930s and in which children participated not only as consumers (readers, viewers, listeners, costumers etc.), but also as active participants (actors, dancers, musicians, writers etc.). At the end, the article will touch upon class biases and exclusiveness of *The children's kingdom*, as well as paradoxes of fairy tales expansion in that period. In this, the feminist critique of fairy tales production for children will be called together with the well known arguments proposed by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* will be adopted or, better to say, adapted.

Fairy Tales as Penny Literature and Children as Consumers

The beginning of the continuous production of penny literature in Croatia can be traced back to 1919 when publisher Vinko Vošicki from Koprivnica launched a penny book edition *Once upon a time* (*Tako vam je bilo nekoć*). Almost a decade later, other penny literature editions were introduced. At the end of 1920s Nakladni zavod "Neva" started its own penny edition *In the kingdom of children* (*U dječjem carstvu*) later named *All over the world* (*Širom svijeta*) and publisher Kugli initiated his own book edition named *The stories of grandfather Niko* (*Priče djeda Nike*). In 1929 Zabavne novine launched the edition *The kingdom of tales* (*Carstvo priča*), while next year Pučka nakladna knjižara started to publish *The stories for children* (*Pripovijesti za djecu*). All of these penny literature editions were published on regular (sometimes even weekly) basis for more than a year or, as in the case of *Once upon a time* and *The Stories of Grandfather Niko*, for a decade or more. Beside that, they all were published periodically and sold by the

¹¹ For the overview of this debates, see Hameršak, "Antropologija", cit., pp. 404-407 and Hameršak, "Imeti svojo prvljico", cit., pp. 172-174.

extremely low prices. The presumed audience of this small, tiny books printed on a cheap paper were low class urban readers.¹² In the 1931 one could buy one to eight booklets from this series for the price of one white bread.¹³

Penny editions such as *Once upon a time* and *The kingdom of tales* were oriented on fairy tales, as their titles rightly suggest. Fairy tales were dominant genre of the other interwar penny editions: *In the kingdom of children* and *Stories for children*. Berislav Majhut and Dina Franić in their detailed analysis of books edition *The stories of grandfather Niko* showed that fairy tales also prevailed in the first and last volumes of *The stories of grandfather Niko*.¹⁴ With the exception of several fairy tales published in *The stories of grandfather Niko*, Croatian penny literature fairy tales of the period were mostly translations.¹⁵

Fig. 3: First three books of the penny edition *Pripovijesti za djecu* (*Stories for children*), 1930. Photo by M. Hameršak (courtesy of NSK, Zagreb, Croatia).



¹² Sanja Lovrić, "Nagradne knjige kao oblik plasmana dječjih knjiga do sredine 20. st.", in Marija Turk et al., *Peti hrvatski slavistički kongres. Zbornik radova s Međunarodnoga znanstvenog skupa održanoga u Rijeci od 7. do 10. rujna 2010.*, Vol. 2, Filozofski fakultet, Rijeka, 2012, p. 166.

¹³ See table in Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, *Radni slojevi Zagreba od 1918. do 1931.* Institut za historiju radničkog pokreta Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1973, p. 291.

¹⁴ Majhut and Franić "Kuglijev nakladnički niz", cit., pp. 148-149.

¹⁵ Fairy tales were dominant, but not exclusive genre of Croatian penny books series from the period. Between 1926 and approximately 1933 novels were also popular genre of penny literature. For the history and poetics of these serial novels see Sanja Lovrić, "Poetika hrvatskih dječjih petparačkih romana u razdoblju između dva svjetska rada", in Ante Bežen and Berislav Majhut, *Redefiniranje tradicije: dječja književnost, suvremene komunikacije, jezik i dijete*, Učiteljski fakultet, Europski centar za napredna i sustavna istraživanja, Zagreb, 2011, pp. 165-179. In the years before First World War, Makso Bruck, publisher from Đakovo, started his penny literature edition of novels, focused on girls adolescents. More about this and other Croatian editions aimed to adolescent girls at the beginning of 20th century see: Berislav Majhut, "Nakladničke cjeline namijenjene djevojkama iz dvadesetih godina XX. stoljeća. Sastavnica rane hrvatske književnosti za mladež", in Marija Turk et al., *Peti hrvatski slavistički kongres. Zbornik radova s Međunarodnoga znanstvenog skupa održanoga u Rijeci od 7. do 10. rujna 2010.*, Vol. 2, Filozofski fakultet, Rijeka, 2012, p. 620.

For the discussion of issues of children's agency it is important to notice that these penny editions addressed directly children. As Berislav Majhut and Dina Franić point out: "Now for the first time there are no intermediaries between publishers booksellers and their children reader. For the equivalent of one third price of the daily newspaper (i.e. for the half of dinar) publishers such as 'Neva' or Pučka nakladna knjižara launch new book volume every week. The book became financially affordable to the child, and gained completely new customer".¹⁶ One of these customers was also Croatian folklorist Maja Bošković-Stulli, born 1922 in Osijek in the middle class family. According to her childhood recollections:

These were the books that were sold on the newsstands every week. They were very cheap booklets, and I am not sure if they are saved today. They were fairy tales ... My [parents] bought them for me. I am not sure, maybe I bought them. I don't remember, but I do remember that I consumed them very intensively every week. They were named *Once upon a time*.¹⁷

Penny literature editions form the interwar period introduced new form of publisher-reader communication in the field of Croatian children's literature. Prior to them, but for the most part after, distribution of Croatian children's books was based on the triangle: publishers – intermediaries (teachers, parents etc.) – children. Until 1880s the communications circuits of Croatian children's magazines and children's literature in general functioned primarily as expanded classroom circuits.¹⁸ In other words, as Milan Crnković argued some time ago, nineteenth-century Croatian children's books were predominantly produced (edited, written, translated, etc.) by teachers or catechists and they were distributed through schools, primarily as books for school libraries or as reward books for school children.¹⁹ Several illustrated children's fairy tales editions published around 1880s introduced parents as intermediaries between publishers and

¹⁶ Majhut and Franić, "Kuglijev nakladnički niz", cit., pp. 149-150 and Berislav Majhut, "Periodizacija hrvatske dječje književnosti i književnosti za mladež od 1919", *Kolo*, 3-4, 2008, pp. 184-185.

¹⁷ The interview with Maja Bošković-Stulli is available in Archive of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb, Croatia (IEF CD 807-808).

¹⁸ In this article the concept of communication circuit is defined as proposed in Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books?", *Daedalus*, 3, 1982, pp. 65-83.

¹⁹ Milan Crnković, *Hrvatska dječja književnost do kraja XIX stoljeća*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1978, p. 160. For the reward books as marketing model of Croatian children's literature publishing see Sanja Lovrić, "Nagradne knjige", cit., pp. 597-614.

children.²⁰ Although these relatively luxury designed books established fairy tales as relevant genre of Croatian children's literature and positioned children's books as toys, only with the post First World War penny fairy tales, fairy tales and children's books in general were for the first time offered directly to the children. Therefore it could be said that in Croatian context the interwar penny fairy tales introduced the concept of children as autonomous consumers or, from the perspective of the publisher, as relevant economical agents.

In order to minimize the risk of addressing directly children some of these penny editions addressed both children and teachers. As Majhut and Franić in their analysis of book series *The stories of grandfather Niko* point out, this and some other editions (*Once upon a time*) were expected to be purchased directly by the children.²¹ Books from these editions were also, in slightly adapted versions or not, aimed to school children and advertised as reward books for school children.

Fig. 4: Cover of the first book of the *Priče djeda Nike* (The stories of grandfather Niko), 1928. Photo by M. Hameršak (courtesy of NSK, Zagreb, Croatia).



²⁰ Marijana Hameršak, "How did Fairy Tales Become a Genre of Croatian Children's Literature? Book History without Books", *Primerjalna književnost*, 1, 2012, pp. 65-77.

²¹ Majhut and Franić, "Kuglijev nakladnički niz", cit., p. 149.

One marginal ethnographic fieldnote of Croatian folklorist Ljiljana Marks suggests that these two, newsstand and school, pathways of distribution were complementary in practice although they were, as Majhut and Franić point, contradictory in theory.²² In her manuscript collection of tales from Šaptinovci (Slavonia) Marks noted that her best informant (born in 1914), showed her among other his favorite books the booklet from the *Once upon a time* which he was given in primary school as a reward for his accomplishments.²³ School distribution thus functioned as a mechanism which brought penny books to those who other ways would be excluded from their reception. It enabled rural children to participate in their consumption although they, contrary to the urban children, generally did not have their pocket money which was a prerequisite for purchasing penny books.

Both school and newsstand distribution of penny book series suggest that the introduction of the concept of a child as an autonomous consumer was in the 'experimental phase' at the time. In other words, the simultaneous direct addressing of children and teachers suggest that the introduction of a new concept of a child was based on the integration into the existing system and that the concept of children as economically active was developed not as an alternative to the existing concepts, but as supplement to them.

Fairy Tales at Stage and Children as Artists

In 1930s fairy tales were deeply embodied in another project: children's organization *The children's kingdom*. The play *Little Red Riding Hood* (1938) was first theatre production of *The children's kingdom* with children as performers. In the following years other famous popular fairy tales for children (*Hansel and Gretel*, *Cinderella*, *Puss in the Boots*, *Snow White* etc.) were staged by children and within this children's organization. Moreover, fairy tales characters (princesses, kings, dwarfs, fairies etc.) and fairy tale poetics (magic) were more or less part of every theatre and public performance by, or for, the members of *The children's kingdom*.

The detailed notes about the activity of *The children's kingdom*,²⁴

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The manuscript of Ljiljana Marks is available in the Archive of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb, Croatia (IEF rkp. 930, p. 107).

²⁴ One of the leaders of *The children's kingdom*, Croatian play-writer and theatre director Mladen Širola, conduce detailed journal and press-clipping of all activities by *The children's kingdom*. The journal is held at the Archive of the Department for Literature and Theatre Studies by the Croatian Academy of Science and Art, HAZU, Zagreb, Croatia.

show that fairy tales were periodically preformed and/or discussed in the weekly radio show which functioned as integral part of the project. Fairy tales (for children and by children) were also published from time to time in the gazette of *The children's kingdom*, although it functioned primarily as an informative organ of this society. Finally, the very organization of *The children's kingdom* was structured as an imitation of a fairy tale world. It literary has had the king (Tito Strozzi), his great knight (Mladen Širola) and numerous devoted subjects (children).

Fairy tale world of *The children's kingdom* at first glance promoted the concept of children's as active subjects. According to the detail history of *The children's kingdom* by Croatian theatre studies scholar Antonija Bogner-Šaban,²⁵ the radio show *Sat cara pričala* (The king storyteller's show, 1935-1941) at first functioned as children's show by adults, but it gradually became almost fully oriented to the casting children's performances (recitations, discussions etc.).²⁶ After the gazette for children *Pričalo* (Storyteller, 1936-1941),

was launched and the children's society named *The children's kingdom* was officially founded in 1936, the most of this radio program was based on performances by children. Children's recitations, songs, plays and children's performances in general became the emblem of this radio show, while children's written contributions (letters, poems and tales) became the emblem of the gazette.

Fig. 5: Visualization of radio show. Excerpt from the journal of Mladen Širola. Photo by M. Hameršak (courtesy of Archive of the Department for Literature and Theatre Studies by HAZU, Zagreb, Croatia).



²⁵ Antonija Bogner Šaban, *Tragom lutke i Pričala. Povijest međuratnog lutkarstva u Splitu, Sušaku, Osijeku i Dječje carstvo*, AGM, Zagreb, 1994, pp. 117-187.

²⁶ *The king storyteller's show* was not the first radio show for children on Radio Zagreb. This radio station recognized children as relevant audience at its very beginnings. Grimms' and Andersen's tales, as well as excerpts of Bonsels's *Maja the Bee* were broadcasted already in the first days of Radio Zagreb (in May 1926). See Nikola Vončina, "Hrvatski književnici i Zagrebački radio (1926-1941)", *Republika*, 7-8, 1995, p. 57.

Parallel to the transformation of radio show for children into the radio show by children, the children's theatre and public performances, as well as numerous guest performances in nearby (Karlovac) and remote theaters (Split, Belgrade, Ljubljana etc.), *The children's kingdom* were introduced by the members of the society. For the discussion of children's agency it is of importance to note that these radio, theatre, music and dance performances of children for children were often casted as the final products of numerous sections and courses for children (theatre course, dance course, language courses, music courses etc.) organized within *The children's kingdom*.



Fig. 6: Children's plays *Crvenkapica* (Little red Riding Hood) and *Obuveni mačak* (Puss in the Boots) by *Dječje carstvo* (The children's kingdom) with children's as actors. Excerpt from the journal of Mladen Širola. Photo by M. Hameršak (courtesy of Archive of the Department for Literature and Theatre Studies by HAZU, Zagreb, Croatia).

According to the internal documents of *The children kingdom* the mission of this organization was to guide and prepare “children for the autonomous work in the community, to stimulate their creativity and to comprehend themselves as if they are adults”.²⁷ In other words *The children's kingdom* insisted on children's creative and artistic agency. On the other hand, quite similarly to the penny literature editions, the very existence of the project of *The children's kingdom* relied on the concept of children

²⁷ This description of the aims of *The children's kingdom* is quoted from the rules of this organization. This document is held at the Archive of the Department for Literature and Theatre Studies by the Croatian Academy of Science and Art, Zagreb, Croatia.

as consumers. *The children's kingdom* relied on the funding of its spectators and its members. With no intention to discredit the social bias of *The children's kingdom* represented for example in the regular staging charitable performances, its commercial foundation must be placed in the foreground. Namely, every member of the organization was obliged to pay annual membership fee which included subscription to the gazette and (free or discounted) ticket for the performances. These were the fees necessary for consumption of the production by *The children's kingdom*. Participation in the productions of *The children's kingdom* also was not free of charge. Members who participated in the performances were recruited among those who attended the paid courses. Although as press-clipping of *The children's kingdom* suggest,²⁸ this project was committed toward inclusion of children from different social backgrounds, commercial bias, as well as main medium (radio, theatre) of the project in 1930s restricted the participation of lower class children to the auditorium, far from the stage lights.²⁹ Few months before *The children's kingdom* will be disbanded in September 1941, the participation in the project was furthermore restricted on the anti-Semitic basis.³⁰ This restriction was conducted, among all, on the grounds of promptly after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia adopted law regulation which prohibited any participation of Jews in "the work, organizations and institutions of social, youth, sport and cultural life of Croatian nation in general, and especially in literature, journalism, art, music, urbanism, theatre and film."³¹

During the 1930s, for active participation in *The children's kingdom*, children needed more than a fairy tale of one's own, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.³² As

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ According to the study by Nikola Vončina ("Prilozi za povijest radija u Hrvatskoj", in *Zbornik trećeg programa*, Radio Zagreb, Zagreb, 1986, p. 183), in the eve of the Second World War the radio audience in Croatia was predominantly of middle class background. The radio receiver and the subscription to the radio program were out of the scope for working class audience, as it is illustrated by the statistic from 1940 reproduced by Vončina. According to this statistics, less than a 600 agricultural workers as opposed 30 000 of clerks, craftsmen and other middle class occupations were subscribed to the Radio Zagreb. Working class radio audience was so insignificant that it was not even registered in this statistic.

³⁰ Šaban, *Tragom lutke*, cit, p. 169.

³¹ *Zakonska odredba o zaštiti narodne i arijske kulture hrvatskog naroda*, Narodne novine, 43/4th June, 1941. Cf. <http://elmundosefarad.wikidot.com/zakonska-odredba-o-zastiti-narodne-i-arijske>.

³² Online edition: <<http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91r/index.html>>.

five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door were, according to Woolf, prerequisites for women's writing in 1920s, such a pocket money, radio receiver, leisure time and parents support – means that were unavailable for the most working class children at the time – were prerequisites for active participation in one of the most notable forms of children's cultural agency in the Croatian society of 1930s.

Although it is tempting to see *The children's kingdom* as emancipator project, Virginia Woolf's observations lead us in different directions. They orient our attention from achievements of *The children's kingdom* toward its constraints; from admiration of *The children's kingdom* dedication to children's cultural agency toward its economical and social framework; from exclusively age centered perspective to perspective which would explore the paradoxes or structural ambivalences between *The children's kingdom* conception of active children and passive heroines produced in the framework of 19th century children's literature editing policies, which spread on other media when *The children's kingdom* was at its peak.³³

At the moment, when feminists globally and locally reexamine the implications of post 1980s,³⁴ feminist orientation toward cultural representations, and call for the return of class in the center of feminist analysis, the social exclusiveness of *The children's kingdom* turns out to be more evident than ever. From this perspective the Croatian interwar fairy tale expansion in general furthermore appears, as it was detected by some of the contemporaries, as strand of commodification of childhood and children's culture throughout of provisory broadening of children's agency.³⁵

³³ See, for example, Ruth Bottigheimer, *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987 and Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion. The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, New York, Routledge, 1991, or the seminal article by Kay Stone, "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us", *The Journal of American Folklore*, 347, 1975, pp. 42-50.

³⁴ See, for example, Nancy Fraser, *Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History. An Introduction*, FMSH-WP-2012-17, august 2012; cf. Lilijana Burcar, "Post-feminizam v službi neoliberalnoga humanizma: obstranjenje kritične refleksije in delegitimizacija društveno-političkoga boja", *Pro femina*, winter/spring, pp. 27-45.

³⁵ See, for example, Stjepan Kranjčević, "Nova i stara omladinska književnost", *Književnik. Hrvatski književni mjesečnik*, 10, 1938, pp. 511-516, and Mato Lovrak, "Koje knjige vole naša djeca? Razgovor s književnikom Matom Lovrakom", *15 dana. Kronika naše kulture*, 11, 1933, pp. 161-162.

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This volume is the result of the close collaboration between the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and the scholars organizing and participating to the postgraduate course *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective* in Dubrovnik, Croatia. It features 15 essays that envision a feminist critique of the production of knowledge that contributes today, intentionally or not, to new forms of discrimination, hierarchy control, and exclusion.

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