

HUMANISTIEK

Journal of Cultural Studies

tijdschrift voor

THEMA Het avontuur van de diversiteit

Lianneke van Alenst-Verhulst Diversiteit in theorie en praktijk

Glenn Feldman Van monocultuur naar pluriculturaliteit

Kimberly A. Powell Het risico van verschil

Rosi Braidotti What's on (happened to) sexual difference?

Annemiek van Heest Zingen, Conventie, keuze, of wat anders?

Inhoud

- 2 **Redactioneel** *Janneke van Mens-Verhulst en Tonja van den Ende*
- 6 **Thema: Het avontuur van de diversiteit**
- 7 **Diversiteit in theorie en praktijk.** Een bericht uit de feministische hulpverlening
Janneke van Mens-Verhulst
- 18 **Culturele diversiteit in hulpverlening en onderzoek.** Kan wat moet, moet wat kan?
Annemiek Richters
- 26 **Van monocultuur naar caleidoscoop.** De noodzaak van diversiteit in het zorgcurriculum
Gloria Wekker
- 34 **Organisaties op weg naar diversiteit: een actueel kwaliteitsvraagstuk** *Febe Deug*
- Discussie: In levende lijven**
- 41 **Het risico van verschil** *Tonja van den Ende*
- 50 **Van stairmaster naar yoga** *Denise de Costa*
- 54 **De grenzen van de dialogische overdracht** *Annemie Halsema*
- 58 **De lijdende mens in de westerse cultuur** *Marion de Zanger*
- 63 **Whatever happened to sexual difference?** *Rosi Braidotti*
- Socrateslezing**
- 70 **Zorgen: conventie, keuze, of wat anders? Zeventiende Socrateslezing** *Annelies van Heijst*
- 84 **Strijd om en over zorg.** Kort commentaar op de Socrateslezing van Annelies van Heijst
Marian Verkerk
- 88 **Een reflectie** *Anton Westerlaken*
- 90 **Recensie**
Tineke Abma over *Documents of Life 2. An Invitation to a Critical Humanism*
(Ken Plummer)
- 93 **Signalementen**
André Hielkema

het ook verbindt met maatschappelijke verhoudingen.

¹⁰ Tonja van den Ende, *ibid.*, bijvoorbeeld p. 80, p. 99, p. 104, p. 158, p. 162.

Literatuur

Tonja van den Ende, *In levende lijven: Identiteit, lichamelijkheid en verschil in het werk van Luce Irigaray*, Damon, 1999

Frank Kortmann, 'Bij zinnen; Kunstenaarschap en geestesziekten' in: *Maandblad Geestelijke volksgezondheid*, vol. 55, afl. 6, 2000, pp. 556-564

Sylvia Patterson, in *The Face*, nr. 43, augustus 2000
Agnès Vincenot, 'Afscheid van de verstrooiing: Ethiek en esthetiek bij Luce Irigaray', in: *Lover*, jaargang 20, 93/1

Rudolf en Margot Wittkower, *Born under Saturn: the character and conduct of artists/a documented history from antiquity to the French Revolution*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1963

Whatever happened to sexual difference?

Rosi Braidotti

Although as a supervisor of Tonja van den Ende's dissertation I feel closely involved in it, it is a pleasure to be able to address again some of the issues raised in this book.

I can say with absolute conviction that I am pleased that the dissertation has been published and that I consider it a very important and relevant event in academic feminism. This is due not only to the rigorous scholarly quality of this work, as well as to the tone of dialogue and respect in which it is written. It also has to do with the particular historical context in which this book has appeared and with the peculiar status of difference and embodiment in the present context. Let me explore this further.

Feminist philosophies of difference, as Tonja van den Ende has argued, engage critically with the crisis of classical notions of the subject. This includes a critique of philosophy as a discipline; of Europe and Eurocentrism and other related issues. This crisis and the feminist interventions on it coincide historically with emerging claims to subjectivity by many 'others', those who had historically been constructed and treated pejoratively as 'others'. This simultaneous yet dissymetrical relationship to the crisis of the subject is constitutive of feminist philosophy.

The feminist philosophies of difference have pointed out that this notion has historically functioned as the site for systematic dis-empowerment and humiliation of the female and of other subjects. One of the aims of feminist practice, therefore, is to overthrow the pejorative, oppressive connotations that are built not only into the notion of difference, but also into the dialectics of Self and other. This transmutation of values could lead to re-asserting the positivity of difference by enabling a collective re-appraisal of the singularity of each subject in his/her complexity. In other words, the subject of feminism is not Woman as the complementary and specular other of man, but rather a complex and multi-layered embodied subject that has taken her distance from the institution of femininity. 'She' no longer coincides with the disempowered reflection of a dominant subject who casts his masculinity in a universalistic posture. She, in fact, may no longer be a she, but the subject of quite another story: a subject-in-process; a mutant; the other of the Other; a post-Woman embodied subject cast in a female morphology, who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis.

Approached from this angle, feminist philosophies of the subject also raise the question of both the epistemic status and representation of differences as a mark

of pejoration. This monstrous, pathological, abject way of representing the other as a threatening presence is built into the conceptual and iconographic repertoire of 'difference as negation'. In other words, the task of recoding difference positively needs to go through the painful deconstructive process of confronting the pejorative sign which has historically been granted to different others. This is one of the points of intersection between feminism and post-structuralism.

Feminist philosophy is about multiple locations and multiple differences among and also within women. I define locations as geo-political but also temporal zones, related to memory, consciousness and self-narrative. Feminism is not about restoring another dominant memory, but rather about installing a counter-memory, that is to say, to paraphrase Foucault, a critical genealogy. Accordingly, I see feminist theory as the activity aimed at articulating the questions of individual gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity, the production of knowledge, representation, desire and epistemological legitimization.

I think that the challenge for feminism and philosophy alike is how to think about and account adequately for changes and changing conditions: not the staticity of formulated truths, but figurations that express the living processes of transformation. In other words, I think that feminism shares with poststructuralist philosophies not only the sense of a crisis of the Logos, but also the need for renewed conceptual creativity and for politically informed cartographies of the present.

The subject of feminism is thus the nomadic female feminist subject; s/he is motivated by the political consciousness of inequalities and is committed to asserting diversity and difference as a positive and alternative value. The feminist subject of knowledge is an intensive, multiple subject, functioning in a net of inter-connections. I would add that it is rhizomatic (that is to say non-unitary, non-linear, web-like), embodied and perfectly artificial; as an artifact it is machinic, complex, endowed with multiple capacities for inter-connectedness in the impersonal mode. It is

same goes for Lacanian psychoanalysis. As Tina Chanter (1995) brilliantly argues, the ideas of Irigaray and of sexual difference have received quite a superficial reception in the USA; the opposition to it generally coalesced around the concept of 'gender', which was constructed in direct opposition to Continental theories of sexual difference.

I find that the charges made against sexual difference (Felski 1997) are very similar to the general critiques that are made of post-structuralism across the big Trans-Atlantic divide. They rest on three crucial points: essentialism (sexual difference is allegedly ahistorical and deterministic and thus leaves no room for social change); universalism (it makes over-general claims and disregards cultural diversity) and heterosexism (it down-plays the creative subversive force of homosexual desire). It is important to stop and ponder about the nature of the opposition to sexual difference. I am no longer satisfied with putting it down to 'misreadings' and basic lack of familiarity with Continental philosophy. I think we need to go further now.

Some contextual considerations come to mind. The North American reception of sexual difference in philosophy - as opposed to literary and cultural theories - was indeed reductive and often ill informed.

"The likes of Hegel, Heidegger, and Derrida were regarded at best with mild suspicion, at worst as charlatans who had little to say about the real world - little more than a series of self-indulgent esoteric musings. The result was that Kristeva and Irigaray were judged in terms of the liberal discourse of equal rights and the ideal of sameness that, however inexplicit, tended to accompany it. Not surprisingly, French feminists were found wanting by these standards." (Chanter 1995: 35)

Moreover, the historical context for the philosophical reception of these theories in the USA was far from ideal. Whereas the 1980's in Europe was a period of expansion of social democracy that saw the collapse of the Berlin wall, in the USA it was the era of Reagan and star wars: a period of generalized back-lash which was hardly favorable to critical thought. While on the Continent feminism went into experi-

mentation with writing, eroticism, and the exploration of ways and means of making difference into an effective tool for social policy and legislation, in the USA the 1980's was the era of the feminist 'sex-wars'. Documented by scholars like Hester Eisenstein (1983), Carol Vance (1984) and Ann Snitow (1983), the American feminist discussion on sexuality took a very negative turn. Monopolized by the quarrel over pornography and prostitution, sexuality came to be identified with issues of violence and domination, that is to say negatively. This was the case of anti-pornography campaigners, as well as in the polemical and often parodic reappraisal of sexual transgression by the lesbian sado-masochists and eloquently expressed by Patricia Califia (1988) and other sexual radicals. The mainstream 'liberal feminist' organizations like N.O.W. (National Organization of Women) increasingly skirted the issue, focusing instead on the socio-political and economic agenda. Exit sex.

This left all issues related to bodies, pleasures, eroticism and the specific ways of knowing of the human flesh sort of hanging nowhere. Jane Gallop (1997), in one of the most remarkable cartographies of the era of the sex-wars, denounces the situation. She criticizes the extent of the sexophobic approach to the body, which led some of the anti-pornography feminist campaigners to strike an alliance with the right-wing Moral Majority in order to ban pornography and criminalise prostitution. Gallop also points out that this wave of aggression could not fail to affect the women's movement within. She defends a position that I partly share, namely that in the USA in the 1990's sexual harassment has replaced pornography as the key feminist issue. Both have produced what strikes me as a dogmatic and primitive type of feminist practice, which stigmatizes sexuality. I share with Gallop the belief that this comes down to yet another form of repressing women's desires.

The other significant point Gallop makes - though she pushes it to conclusions that I do not share entirely - is that the feminist pursuit of knowledge mobilizes the whole of the woman's self - body as well as mind. There is a fundamental aspiration towards non-dualistic thinking in feminist theory, a rejection of binaries on theoretical as well as political grounds. Feminist

consciousness reunites that which has been disconnected under patriarchy; knowledge and/as pleasure therefore become all one. I learnt that desire, even desire unacted upon, can make you feel very powerful. And the place where I learned desire - where it filled me with energy and drive - I call feminism.' (Gallop 1997)

Gallop then emphasizes what an aberration it is to target feminist knowledge practices and the sexual experimentation, which they entail for sexual harassment law-suits. After all, such legal action was intended as a stop to abuses of power and disadvantage, not as an end to sexuality and pleasure. Sexual harassment cases are all the more violent when they take place among women, especially feminist women.

A European feminist reading Gallop's account of a sexual harassment law-suit by lesbian students against their bisexual professor, does feel like she has landed on a different planet. As a matter of fact, throughout the 90's it appears that sexuality in the USA lost grounds in the political arena, but it scored highly in the courts of law. Racialisation was built into this script, witness the escalation of sexual harassment law-suits from Mike Tyson to O.J. Simpson, to culminate in the strings of White House scandals up to the Lewinsky case.

If I were to attempt a translation of this in the language of feminist theory, I would say that 'the body' in USA feminism cannot be positively associated with sexuality in either the critical or the public discourse. Sexuality, which is the fundamental paradigm in the critical discourses of psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, simply has no place to be in American political discourse: it got side-lined, erased or strangulated. In such a context it is not surprising that Europe-based theories of sexuality, psychoanalysis and sexual difference struck at best a marginal, 'radical chic' note. What chance, then, did Irigaray have?

In American feminist discourse, the sex/gender dichotomy swung towards the pole of gender with a vengeance, embracing it under the joint cover of liberal individual 'rights' and social constructivist 'change'. It was left to the gay and lesbian and queer campaigners to try and re-write sexuality into the feminist agenda. In this framework, sexuality is almost always synonymous with transgression. For instance, T. de

Lauretis returns to issues of psychoanalytic desire in order to provide a foundational theory for lesbian desire as something specific in its 'perverse' and non-creative or non-maternalist logic. Judith Butler also makes an important intervention, pointing out that the distinction sex/gender is, in fact, untenable. If anything, argues Butler, it is the always-already sexualized matter that constructs the possibility of this dichotomy in the first place.

I think that a proper, scholarly, comparative analysis of the Trans-Atlantic dis-connection about sexuality in the 80's and 90's and of the ways in which it fueled the opposition between 'gender' and 'sexual difference' would deserve more time and care than I can give it here. In any case, by the dawn of the new millennium, it is accepted that gender has become too polyvalent as a concept to be really universally helpful (Hawkesworth, 1997). It is in this context that I want to praise Tonja van den Ende's work as a timely and necessary intervention in an international debate which somewhat lost its focus and its impetus. In this respect, the scholarly qualities of Tonja's work are such as to constitute a true source of inspiration and consequently a new beginning for this debate. I am particularly impressed by the Van den Ende style which consists of a mixture of close readings and accurate commentary of the texts on the one hand, and original thinking and creative innovation on the other. I think this mixture of loyalty and independence of thought is the best guarantee not only of Tonja's own intellectual quality, but also of the enduring importance of the questions she is asking.

(Deze tekst is gebaseerd op een hoofdstuk uit het boek *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, dat dit jaar zal verschijnen bij Polity Press)

Rosi Braidotti is hoogleraar vrouwenstudies aan de UU en visiting professor op het Gender Institute van de London School of Economics. Van haar hand verschenen vele publicaties over feministische theorievorming en Franse filosofie, waaronder *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994).

Literatuur

- Butler, Judith (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* New York: Routledge
- Califa, Pat (1988) *Macho Sluts* Boston: Alyson Publications
- Chanter, Tina (1995) *Ethics of Eros. Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* New York and London: Routledge
- Eisenstein, H. (1983) *Contemporary Feminist Thought* Boston: G.K. Hall & Co
- Ende, Tonja van den (1999) *In levende lijven. Identiteit, lichamelijkheid en verschil in het werk van Luce Irigaray* Leende: Damon
- Felski, Rita (1997) 'The Doxa of Difference' in *Signs* vol. 23 nr. 1, 1-22
- Foucault, Michel (1975) *Les Mots et les choses* Paris: Gallimard
- Foucault, Michel (1977) *Surveiller et punir* Paris: Gallimard
- Gallop, Jane (1997) *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hawkesworth, Mary (1997) 'Confounding gender' in *Signs* vol. 22, no. 3, Spring 1997, 649-686
- Lauretis, Teresa de (1994) *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Snitow, Ann, C. Stansell, S. Thompson (eds) (1983) *Powers of Desire. The Politics of Sexuality* New York: Monthly Review Press
- Stanton, Domna C. (1980) 'Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Disconnection' in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (eds) *The Future of Difference* Boston: G.K. Hall & Co
- Vance, Carol (1984) *Pleasure and Danger. Exploring Female Sexuality* Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul