

Sexuality and Agency

During the last years of discussions within models of feminist theory on the cultural coding of gender constructions and body perceptions the fields of sexuality and the structuring of desire and pleasure have sometimes been neglected. However, the gender standards of a culture, a society or a group always concern rules and rituals of desire, the choice of a preferred sexual partner, too. Normative rules e.g. in most cases relate to heterosexually oriented gender constructions; hierarchies of availability manifest themselves in symbolic and manifest violence.

The argumentative differentiation between "sex" and "gender" that apparently facilitated the analytic foundation of the cultural coding of gender sometimes re-introduced the "naturalization" of "sex" through the back door. The conception of sex as an apparently "biological gender" that is being contrasted to a cultural gender may evoke sexuality as "natural", too. Feminist analysis has to consider such problematic associations especially.

At the beginning of the 21st century the question of sexuality and women's agencies is in its complexity more disputed than ever. It cannot be answered but in the context of differing states and cultures that are confronted in different ways with shifts of power caused by globalization and neo-colonialism. On an economic level hierarchical circumstances of power relations also show themselves e.g. in the conditions for access to medication against infectious diseases like AIDS that threaten men and women alike on a global basis.

For example within the frame of mass migration women as well as men are engaged as sexworkers worldwide. At the same time the mass tourism of well-earning upper classes of western societies brings about a purchasing power that crosses borders and cultures concerning "sexual services" that often include practices legally prohibited "at home". That also applies to financially independent white women who are able to pay for sex with people from other cultures.¹ – The imaginations within the context of sex tourism are tied to exoti-

1 In this context refer to the foreword of this volume regarding the conflict about Birgit Hein's film "Baby, I Will Make You Sweat"

cisms: in a long western-colonial tradition "the other" is fantasized about as alien, wild, forbidden, idyllic or just more uncomplicated – as testified by the advertising language used by the tourist industry.

The sexual practices and gender models in those countries that also profit from tourism economically are confronted not only by tourism but also by, for example, the new media with its western models and hierarchizations in which again specific structures of power manifest themselves for example in form of normative essentialized heterosexuality.

At the same time debates around lesbianism and queer theory make sexual identities and practices which are not just available for a conscious formation appear more unstable than ever.

Since the 70s of last century it can be observed at least in the West that women increasingly tend to use the word or the camera, that women filmmakers and artists focus on sexual imaginations and structures, for example by focusing on and subverting the desiring gaze and the desired body in its respective gendering. That does not only include formulations of their "own" sexual fantasies or testing different figures of representation but also the examination of the aesthetics of traditional sexual representations and their structures of dominance. Many examples for artistic production by colored women can be found that at the same time focus on gender relations as well as on colonial circumstances and draw attention to shifts and superimpositions of racism and sexism.

In this respect we think it necessary to develop further theoretical concepts which would contribute to possible experiences of sexuality in its heterogeneity and to give a chance for differentiating options of creating a – always also withdrawing – sexuality.

The essay "Bodies, Choices, Globalizing Neo-colonial Enchantments: African Matriarchs and Mammy Water" by Ifi Amadiume is about the struggle for women's bodies and ultimately the gendering of knowledge and cultures. In the context of colonialism, post-colonialism and now globalization, there is a new feminist thinking in body culture and power in which elite women and girls increasingly act individually. In this tension images and cultures of older traditional matriarchs who traditionally have been at the center of cultural invention and innovation, and the rituals of culturing girls are being subverted by new desires and elusive enchantments of capitalism, symbolized by the enchanting Goddess, Mammy Water. New questions are raised about tensions between women's individual choices and women's collective interest.

In her argument about "Normalizing Heterosexuality in the 1996 House of Commons Debate on Bill C-33" Angela de Silva concludes that within the discussions on introducing a law in Canada to exclude sexual orientation from discrimination discursive strategies have been pursued by this law's opponents that have normalized and naturalized heterosexuality yet again. By analyzing the opponents' arguments the author proves how they construct and depreciate homosexuality in a

specific way. Their discursive politics consists in associating lesbian and gay orientation with a socially little acceptable behavior and in reproducing unexpressedly the hegemony of heterosexuality as well as sexual binarity as a norm.

The subject of representation of lesbian desire is one in which also the following authors are engaged. What does one recognize a lesbian? Which stagings of lesbian bodies fall into the field of *vision* of lesbian/queer analyses, and which ones are excluded and why? The contribution "Lesbian Representation and the Limits of 'Visibility'" by Sabine Fuchs is based on the thesis that the (political) notion of "visibility" is used as an (unconscious) metonymy for "recognizability". This exclusive application contributes to maintain a representational system that privileges *visual* representation and ignores and marginalizes embodiments that do not deliver visual evidence for their gender/sexual deviance. Sabine Fuchs examines the costs and implications of such a model and raises the question for alternative possibilities of representation.

The contribution "The Lesbian Body – A Monstrous or a Transcendental Signifier? Lesbian Representation and Cultural Construction" by Julika Funk deals with the question in which way the unstable field of lesbian representation is connected to the cultural construction of sex and gender. A new critical lesbian aesthetics focuses especially on processes of metaphorization, figuration and performativity which relate to the hybrid representation of the "lesbian body". Based on two well known literary texts, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien*, it is discussed in which way the figures of the "invert" and of the "third gender" refer to a hierarchical and naturalized gender opposition but reveal this opposition to be an unstable construction.

Finally, the contribution "Pornotopic Techniques of the Observer – The Origin of the World (1866) by Gustave Courbet and the Pleasure of Scopic Penetration" by Linda Hentschel deals with gender-specific positionings that are transferred to spatial perception. She asks how and why vision models largely lead to the perception of space as a female body and which conceptions of masculinity are related to it. The central interest is interrogating the part of visual apparatuses – here, especially linear perspective – in the feminization of space. By introducing the notion of *pornotopic techniques of the observer* this study contributes to rethink practices of drawing borderlines between a so-called obscene pornographic voyeuristic pleasure in body holes and the supposedly noble artistic representation of femally connotated space.

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