

Excerpts from

Teaching Subjects In Between:

Feminist Politics, Disciplines, Generations

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Pages 7-8:

This booklet is the result of a collaborative process between five feminist academics who live and work in various parts of Europe. We first came together in Helsinki in 2004 as one subgroup of the Teaching Travelling Concepts in European Women's Studies group within ATHENA 2. Our work is an attempt to tackle the topics 'Politics', 'Disciplines' and 'Generations' as they relate to feminist pedagogy, and we use discussion, the comparison of notes and more in-depth reflection to do so. The booklet is divided into two parts. The first section is an account of our roundtable discussion which began at a meeting in London during September 2004, an exchange of ideas which was enriched by subsequent comments and conversations both online and face-to-face. The second section positions each of the five members of the group within their respective teaching locations and relates the pedagogical praxis discussed in the first part to specific contexts.

The form that has been chosen for the booklet is a multi-layered one: the reader will find the various stages of the collaborative process reflected in the different strata of the texts and parts of the booklet. Alongside our discussion of pedagogical issues, we hope to demonstrate the efficacy, potential and challenges of our method. This booklet shows that collaborative work, such as a group session or roundtable in which chosen topics are reflected upon, can be a good way of opening up issues and laying bare tensions about some boundaries.¹

The key topics we tackle in the booklet have emerged from our reflections on concepts such as location, positionality, institutional situation, subjectivity and the group's concerns about what inter/disciplinarity and inter/generationality signify within Women's and Gender Studies. Starting from a wide (and at times unclear) range of ideas we narrowed our focus to the core concepts of politics, disciplines and generations represented. From these we derived specific cases of differentiation, namely: national contexts, institutional settings (inside/outside universities; departments/administrative centres...), our

respective inter/disciplinary locations and the generational and career stages of the participants. Although our initial positions within the *Travelling Concepts* group touched on issues of East/West, South/North, transitional/war, postcolonial/cultural hegemony², in the course of our discussions over two years we found ourselves prioritising other aspects relating to our teaching positions. Making explicit the position from which each of us is speaking was at first intended as a preparatory step but subsequently became a very central issue. We have become convinced that this is more than just an exercise in self-indulgence; rather we think that other teachers or students of Women's and Gender Studies can learn something from both our conversation and our further reflections and that they themselves may have gone through similar experiences.

¹ Please note that we write *some* boundaries. We are very well aware that the number or nature of boundaries that are paid attention to depends on how inclusive the group is. Black and lesbian feminism as well as intersectional theory are sites where this is theorised and, in fact, it is issues around 'race'/ethnicity and sexuality that are largely absent from this booklet. For a recent discussion about multiple boundaries see e.g. Feminist Challenges: Crossing Boundaries Special Issue of *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5 (3) May 2004.

² The position papers that represented our admission tickets to the subgroup of ATHENA 2 Teaching Travelling Concepts in European Women's Studies in the first place can be found at the subgroup's website, www.travellingconcepts.net

Pages 14-16:

This part of the booklet is based on the transcription of a roundtable discussion, complemented by discussions and ideas developed during the following months. It highlights what can happen when teaching subjects strike up a conversation. Teachers in European Women's and Gender Studies are divided in many respects: by national borders, institutional differences, inter/

disciplinary locations, and generational differences, to mention just a few. The way we are positioned along these lines influences the way we reflect upon both our individual situation (we are teaching subjects) and more general or 'distinct' but intrinsically connected topics (such as feminist pedagogy). The politics of location is one of the epistemological foundations of the field of Women's and Gender Studies, one that is constantly under review. Do we really find ourselves confined in a certain positionality? And does such a location have strict co-ordinates?¹

The transcription is accompanied by the voice of a narrator – composed of all our voices – that will lead the reader to those papers in the booklet's second part that connect to sections of the conversation as well as to the most important points in our group discussion. Thus the text is organised into three levels, distinguishable by their format, the statements in the first two being assignable to individual authors: (1) The main text, giving an account of the discussion, (2) the footnotes, with complementary thoughts and references to relevant literature added after the actual conversation, and (3) *the collective narrator's voice (italicised)*.

*The following text reflects (mostly) the chronology of our group's round-table discussion in London in September 2004. In order to make it more easily accessible, it has been edited and divided into smaller sections, each with a certain thematic focus or function. The section called **Getting Under Way** comprises the search for a starting point. From the beginning, we find some of the participants articulating their favourite (if you will) issues. The next part named **Who/What are the Teaching Subjects** reflects the group's thinking about the central term, and articulates doubts about the content and adequacy of 'subjects'. In the conclusion of this section we each introduce ourselves, and describe the institutional setting in which we teach Women's and Gender Studies. In **Contextualising I and II** the Spanish and Croatian participants do exactly this. **Freedom and Acknowledgement** is a discussion that*

*springs from the particular situation of Women's and Gender Studies in Croatia, which has the least degree of academic institutionalisation of the countries represented in the group. **Contextualising III and IV** sketch the conditions of Women's and Gender Studies in the Netherlands and Austria, respectively. The next section is called **Resistance and Teaching** and tackles the question of how far teaching Women's and Gender Studies can or cannot be an act of resistance. Talking about the practice of teaching leads to the next sections **Generational Issues, Positioning oneself/Power of Naming and Inter/disciplinarity in Practice**. The last part, called **Activism and Bodily Issues**, is, among other things, a reminder of things that have not been raised in the discussion.*

Getting Under Way

Silvia Caporale Bizzini (SCB): I realise that we all work in between, in between ideas, in between disciplines, which is our *strength* and our problem at the same time; it is a very complex approach to pedagogy and to the critical reading of society. So we can work this way: we can carry on a conversation, and then transcribe the conversation, a dialogue with multiple voices, the voice of *who* we are and *where* we stand. Each of us can work on one of the ideas we want to stress, in relation to our pedagogy, maybe to a class situation, to the necessity of teaching something, *how* to teach in relation to feminist pedagogy...

Therese Garstenauer (TG): It sounds like a very good idea, but how will we do it? We are from different disciplines; we have different ways to work, like you (*talking to Josefina*) are working on literature, mostly about these French authors...

¹ Karen Barad (2001) 'Re(con)figuring Space, Time, and Matter' in Marianne DeKoven (ed) *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey: 75-109.