

BOOK REVIEWS

LINKOVÁ, Marcela, ČERVINKOVÁ, Alice (Eds.). *Thinking Borders: Gender Examinations of Rationality, Objectivity and the Knowing Subject.* National Contact Centre – Women and Science / Institute of Sociology, Academy of Science CR, Praha 2005. ISBN 80-7330-050-8 English-Czech-Slovak edition, 123+122 pages.

The collection of papers *Thinking Borders: Gender Examinations of Rationality, Objectivity and the Knowing Subject*, published in 2005 by National Contact Centre – Women and Science at the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of Czech Republic, among others aims to contextualize the activities of the aforementioned center and position them into the field of feminist epistemologies and feminist critique of science. As the editors in their introductory essay *Negotiating Borders, Creating New Spaces* state, there has been increasing attention paid to the issue of “women and science” recently. Nevertheless, as the juxtaposition of “women” and “science” often tends to be reduced to the issues of women as professionals in science and their quantitative representation, other important aspects of the uneasy alliance can be overlooked. Again, *modus operandi* of traditional rationality, quantification as it is embodied in e.g. many gender mainstreaming policies, is taking over the framing of discursive and social practice of doing science. Both the five contributions and an editorial introduction in this volume attempt to disturb this reductive view of what a gendered analysis of science can provide us with. Papers included take up positions on major concepts and their elaboration in particular instances of feminist knowledge production, i.e. androcentrism (Mariana Szapuová), embodiment of cognition (Etela Farkašová), politics of location (Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer), feminist epistemologies (Jan Matonoha), and institutionalization and development of science (Jiřina Šmejkalová).

In *Women and Science: Feminist Epistemologies and Critiques of Scientific Discourse* Jan Matonoha in a rather condensed way discusses masculine attributes of science and alternatives sought in feminist epistemologies in a larger framework of dialogue of the two with critiques and reworkings of scientific discourse in male/mainstream philosophy (Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucault). In the conclusion author succinctly sums up the basic principles of feminist approach to science as follows: knowledge is situated, there can be no privileged meta-position, and researcher is to be self-reflective. All of them point toward recognition of relations of power in the science and knowledge production and reproduction and as such can importantly contribute, as Jan Matonoha proposes, to a “total transformation of the scientific paradigm”. It is precisely this claim of feminist critique of science on taking its intervention into the mainstream understanding of science seriously, or stepping into a dialogue with it, which should make feminist critique more relevant for consideration for broader audiences e.g. in Slovakia and Czech Republic.

Mariana Szapuová in her contribution *Women, Science and Feminism: Some Questions of Scientific Knowledge from the Point of View of Feminist Epistemology* develops an argument for a feminist empiricist position against the backdrop of an elaboration of androcentrism or “male bias” in science. Apart from identifying different approaches to androcentrism in feminist theories, in a very convincing way she digs into theories of John Stuart Mill and one of the founders of psychoanalysis, Karen Horney, to find there non-essentialist explanations of masculine coding of science. However, in author’s view the desired focus of feminist epistemology should concern the problem of evidence. Author does not elaborate it on larger scale, but stressing evidence as a problem of “key significance” for feminist epistemology promises her further scholarship in the future. Although evidence as a concept might seem outdated when viewed from various epistemological stances inspired by poststructuralism, elaborating on the issue may prove provoking for other feminist epistemological positions, which are present e.g. in other contributions in the volume.

In recent *Can Reason be "Emotional" and Objectivity "Perspectival"?: On the Question of Cognition in Feminist Philosophy* as well as in her previous scholarship, Etela Farkašová investigates into feminist standpoint theories in order to find correctives to the traditional philosophy of science and epistemology. Issues of the embodiment of reason and the limits of cognition play central importance for her elaboration of the concept of "perspectival objectivity". There she builds on tripartite definition of scientific objectivity by L. Daston who distinguishes metaphysical, methodological and moral aspects of objectivity while stressing their historical changes. Despite its oxymoronic character, "perspectival objectivity" elaborated in alliance with the notion of situatedness and positionality, in my opinion, would deserve a broader discussion of how situated knowledge based on particular subjectivity informs "perspectival objectivity" and why it is important for feminist epistemology to sustain the notion of objectivity as such.

Addressing the Politics of Location Strategies in Feminist Epistemology and Their Relevance to Research Undertaken from a Feminist Perspective by Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer traces down the genealogy of the politics of location and in comparison to e.g. previous contributions in the volume, the paper circumscribes the notions of situatedness, positionality, location in more detail. Lorenz-Meyer discriminates psychosocial and epistemological dimensions of the politics of location as an analytical concept, in order to argue for the necessary confrontation of the knowing subject with its psychosocial and epistemic investments. As to my knowledge this is a pioneering text looking closely at the problems connected to "traveling theories", "traveling researchers", and feminist scholarship in Czech and Slovak contexts. Since one of its inspirations comes from the absence of accounting for one's position in research in higher education environment, it should be widely read precisely there – (but not only) by gender studies students and their teachers. Although acknowledging one's situatedness/location/positionality may become a confession turned to ritual, its critical examination together with investigation into the claims on representation one makes when positioning herself, is certainly necessary.

In *Feminist Critique of Progress and Modern Science in the Work of Anna Pammrová*, Jiřina Šmejkalová, via focusing on intellectual biography of a Czech feminist living at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries, Anna Pammrová, questions the neatly and exclusively defined role of "scholarship" and "institutions" in the production of knowledge. To the extent Pammrová, author of numerous texts attempting to redefine women's subject, femininity, was not in any contact with activists of contemporary Czech feminist movement, the issue of the representation of women's political and intellectual subject, its making in the history, is studied in depth. Moreover, as Pammrová's thought on women's subjectivity resonates with what was named "French feminism", and Irigaray's reflections on language mostly, Šmejkalová sketches and rewrites the problematic relationship of Eastern European and Western European scholarship and activism.

The collection of papers introduced presents an important starting point of discussions in feminist epistemology and theory of science within Slovak and Czech feminist activist and scholar community. As other texts of the contributors were dispersed in separate philosophical, sociological, linguistic, and, not to forget feminist (e.g. feminist cultural journal *ASPEKT* 1/1998 – *Thinking of Women*, co-edited by Etela Farkašová, Mariana Szapuová, and Zuzana Kiczková), publications until now, their collection in *Thinking Borders* can form a basis for further cultivating "the commitment to dialogue and dialogic epistemologies" (Lorenz-Meyer, p. 89). Be it a project co-operation, or putting together another collection of critical interventions in epistemology and e.g. science studies, already now *Thinking Borders* proves the need for explication and articulation of theoretical positions one takes as commonly assumed, which but may significantly vary and therefore are in need of accountability.

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