Fact and Fiction: Gender-Art-Science (Nijmegen, 14 Oct 05)

Claudia Krops

Conference

Fact and Fiction:
Gender in the Interplay of Art and Science

Institute for Gender Studies
Radboud University Nijmegen, NL

Friday October 14, 2005

In 2005, the Institute for Gender Studies at the Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, will
celebrate its 20th anniversary. A number of festive activities, taking place on the University
Campus from October 10 to 14, will serve to mark this event. The celebrations will culminate in a
one-day interdisciplinary conference, focusing on 'Gender in the Interplay of Art and Science'.

About the Conference

At the end of the 19th century, the French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot gained great notoriety
through his research on hysteria, an affliction that was largely attributed to women. The
Salpêtrière amphitheatre formed the stage on which Charcot exhibited his knowledge, enlivening his
lectures with live experiments on hypnotized "hysterical" women. Tout Paris was present while he
offered a splendid show; science was spectacle, exhibition, performance. The lecture hall was filled
to the brim with writers, journalists, actors, and students, among whom, Sigmund Freud and André
Breton. Charcot’s performance becomes the place of birth for both

psychoanalysis and modern art.

Charcot’s amphitheatre can be seen to prefigure the relations between art and science as they
continued to develop in the course of the 20th century. Science is art and art is "displaced"
science. Gender comes to fulfil the need for differentiation: the one who looks and the one who is
being looked at, the one who investigates and the one who is being investigated, the subject and the
object of the artistic as well as the scientific gaze are gendered, defined in terms of masculinity
and femininity respectively.

The interrelations between art and science are varied, multiple, and complex. Their respective
domains overlap, intersect, and diverge; there are points of contact, crossover, and differences.
Art may be regarded as a form of scientific practice, as a laboratory for testing ideas, as a
privileged site for investigating aspects of existence, while science can be considered a form of
art, a specific mode of representation and imagination, installation or exhibition, with distinct
aesthetic qualities and emotional effects.

To celebrate its 20th Anniversary, the Institute for Gender Studies at the Radboud University
Nijmegen proposes to interrogate the interrelations, contact zones, divergences, and intersections
between art and science. In the knowledge that the Institute for Gender Studies has, since its
foundation, served as a theatre for interdisciplinary research, Nijmegen will, a week long,
function, as a stage for the study and performance of the multiple relations between art and science.

Keynote address:
Professor Bracha L. Ettinger
AHRB Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory & History, School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural
Studies, University of Leeds.
BEZALEL Academy of Art, Jerusalem
Senior Clinical Psychologist, Tel Aviv Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis

PROGRAMME:

Workshops:

-1- Materialised Meanings and Artistic Representations of Mary I & II
-2- Gender & Performance I & II
-3- Posthumanist Science/Fiction I & II
-4- 'Boundary-Making, Boundary-Breaking': The Gender Politics of Boundary-Work in Science,
Technology, and Arts
-5- First Things First: Facts and Fictions about Sexuality
-6- plenary - Roundtable on Art, Theory, and Criticism

-1-
Materialised Meanings and Artistic Representations of Mary I & II

This workshop is organised by the genderstudies research group on The power of Pilgrimage. A
Comparative Study, a research programme funded by NWO's The Future of the Religious Past.

Coordinators: Prof. dr. Willy Jansen (RU), dr. Grietje Dresen (RU) and dr. Catrien Notermans (RU)
Panelists Session I: dr. Catrien Notermans, drs. Janine Klungel (RU), Prof. dr. Willy Jansen
Panelists Session II: Prof. dr. Colleen McDannell (University of Utah, USA), dr. Grietje Dresen (RU),
Intermezzo: Choir Divae Mariae: Songs of Mary o.l.v. Herma Timmer

Though biblical texts do not elaborately explain the person and life of Mary, there is probably no
woman who is more often represented in art and popular culture than she is. At the beginning of the
21st century, regardless of secularist trends, Mary has become a trendy icon also outside sacred and
museal places. The modern Lady virtually appears at the Internet where she reaches millions of
visitors through websites and chat boxes, and sets the fashion in many shopping areas. She is
represented on consumables such as clothes, handbags, jewellery, notebooks, cookery books and flower
pots to make them more charming and stylish. Moreover, commercial representations of the Holy
Mother, whether taken in boutiques or in pilgrimage places, easily become powerful objects of
religious devotion.

Theologians and theorists of religion have frequently discussed and thus created theoretical

dichotomies between the sacred and the profane, piety and commerce, art and kitsch, and the
spiritual and the material. The materialist aspects of religion and whether they belong to ‘real’
religion is often contested, both within and between churches. If one looks at what Christians do
rather than at what they think, the continual scrambling of the sacred and the profane has to be
noticed. Religious artefacts constitute a vital aspect of people’s religious lives and it is the
continual interaction with objects and images that makes people religious. This workshop wants to
contribute to the study of these material, artistic and commercial aspects of religion. It does so
from a multidisciplinary perspective through presenting both theological and anthropological
reflections on Mary’s material representations.

I
11.30-12.00 Catrien Notermans Moving Objects.Materialised Meanings of Mary in a Pilgrimage to Lourdes
12.00-12.30 Janine Klungel, Mary Crushing the Serpent. Protective Icon of Women in Guadeloupe
12.30-13.00 Willy Jansen Making Images of Mary on the Internet

II
14.15-15.00 Colleen MacDannell, God Called a Girl. Mary, Protestants, and American Culture
15.00-15.15 Intermezzo: Choir Divae Mariae: Songs of Mary, o.l.v. Herma Timmer
15.15-15.45 Grietje Dresen, Elizabeth revisited, or: The Maternal Body of Mary in Doctrine and
Devotional Art
15.45-16.00 Intermezzo: Choir Divae Mariae: Songs of Mary, o.l.v. Herma Timmer

-2-

Gender & Performance I & II

Coordinator: dr. Liedeke Plate (RU), drs. Louis van den Hengel (RU) and drs. Martijn Stevens (RU)
Panelists:
I. Music: dr. Hannah Bosma (Researcher, NL), drs. Louis van den Hengel, Geertje Bijma
II Movement: Soheila Najand (Artist, InterArt, NL), dr. Liedeke Plate, Stefanie Seibold (Museum of
Modern Art, Vienna / Art University, Linz, Austria), drs. Martijn Stevens,
among others.

It is fifteen years ago that Judith Butler wrote Gender Trouble, arguing gender to be a kind of performance; an act, a corporeal style, indeed a stylized repetition of acts. Since then, the notion of gender as a performative act has been taken up, transformed and challenged by many scholars in a variety of fields, not least Butler herself, who revisited it most recently in her own Undoing Gender. Taking its point of departure in the performativity of gender, this workshop explores performance as a site at once productive of and produced by gender. Focusing on bodies in performance -- the artist, the musician, the dancer, the urban walker -- this workshop examines how movement, gestures and the production of sound and space inform the construction of (sociosexual) subjectivities.

-3-

Posthumanist Science/Fiction I & II

Coordinators: dr. Manuela Rossini (University of Amsterdam, NL,/ Universität Basel, Switzerland) and dr. Veronica Vasterling (RU)
Panelists Session I & II: dr. Cor van der Weele (Wageningen University and Research Centre, NL), dr. Amade Mcharek (University of Amsterdam, NL), dr. Miriam van Rijsingen (University of Amsterdam, NL), dr. Manuela Rossini, Prof. Dr. Sabine Schülting (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany), Dr. Veronica Vasterling (RU).

At the beginning of the third millennium, the social, cultural and technological context of Western societies is definitely posthumanist, insofar as human and nonhuman life forms are in unprecedented ways sites of in(ter)vention by digital and biomedical technologies. Under the impact of the increased technologization of nature, including human nature, the immutability of the boundaries between human self and nonhuman other, natural and artificial, body and mind, is seriously called into question. This ontological and epistemological crisis of what it means to be human finds its most visible expression in representations of posthuman bodies in the

discourses and practices of
Western techno-science (such as the Human Genome Project and the Visible Human Project), in popular
culture (especially in science fiction novels and movies), and in so-called
bio-art.

In our workshop, we refer to posthumanist (con)figurations produced in these various domains as
“science/fiction” not only to signal that a further boundary, namely between science and fiction, is
collapsing and to emphasise the interactions and intersections between what are often supposed to be
separate fields, but primarily in order to cast a critical eye on the narratives about gender, race
and sexuality that inform these material-semiotic constructions of the human body and the world at
large in contemporary science, literature and the arts. Do we see the emergence of a radically
democratic future and a “post-gender world”, as Donna Haraway hopes, or, on the contrary, the
reinforcement of dichotomous structures as the ground of discrimination and oppression? Have we gone
beyond the gendered body/mind dualism, as a critical posthumanism promotes, or do we, rather, head
towards the final mastery of (masculine) mind over (feminine) matter, as dreamt of in some popular
forms of posthumanism? More specifically, the participants of this workshop will be concerned with
an interrogation of posthumanist science/fictions as poised ambivalently between biopolitical forms
of control and conscious self-fashionings by “free” individuals.
Naar boven

-4-

'Boundary-Making, Boundary-Breaking': The Gender Politics of Boundary-Work in Science, Technology,
and Arts

Coordinator: dr. Els Rommes (RU)
Panelists: to be invited: FD Ulf Mellström (Linköpings University, Sweden), Dr. Wendy Faulkner
(University of Edinburgh, UK), dr. ir. Ellen van Oost (Universiteit Twente,
NL), dr. Els Rommes, dr.
Ben Schouten (artist/computer scientist, NL)

Computer science is a fairly new but highly gendered discipline. Although the

first programmers were
women and in several non-western countries its students are predominantly
female, in modern western
society it is considered a typically masculine discipline, of which the already
low percentage of
female students is even dropping again in the last five years. In this
workshop, the ‘double
boundary work’ (as Susan Harding called this process in science) in computer
science will be
studied: in what ways is whatever counts as computer science been moved toward
the masculine, and
whatever counts as feminine moved away from computer science? Gieryn identified
four types of
boundary work in science, namely monopolization, expansion, expulsion, and
protection (p.424). The
construction of boundaries between computer science/not computer science has
serious implications
for who is in- or excluded and what a specific field looks like. Or, as Gieryn
formulated it:
'Examination of how and why people do boundary-work (...) could be the first
step toward a cultural
interpretation of historically changing allocations of power, authority,
control, credibility,
expertise, prestige, and material resources among groups and occupations.'
(p.440) In this session,
the role of the insiders, computer science engineers, managers, will be
regarded: how, with what
rhetorical means and by what concrete practices do they contribute to the
building or breaking of
boundaries around computer science as a consistently male territory? And how
(if) do they make their
voices heard in the wider society?

-5-

First Things First: Facts and Fictions about Sexuality

Coordinator: dr. renée c. hoogland (RU)
Panelists: Prof. dr. Jackie Stacey (Lancaster University, UK), Stefan Dudink
(RU), Bastienne Kramer
(Artist, NL).

With regard to such complex human phenomena as desire and sexuality, the
expressive potential of art
and literature has traditionally prevailed over the explanatory power of modern
scientific

discourses. Whereas the 19th-century sexologists were convinced that their classificatory systems
and sexual typologies constituted no more and no less than scientifically valid representations of
previously existing, hence “natural” forms of the human species, the contradictions in their
discourses made abundantly clear that so-called objective, value free knowledge about gender and
sexuality invariably had its foundations in subjective modes of knowing, among which, prominently,
art and literature. Subsequent versions of the scientific discourse on sexuality reconfirmed that
the founding contradictions in the science of sex sprang from the clashing narratives about erotic
desire and sexual morality that were in circulation at the time, and that can be seen to underlie
whatever the sexologists felt they “knew.”

Attempting to shed further light on processes of psychosexual development, Freud in his turn
acknowledged the boundaries of the scientific domain by more than once taking recourse to (classic)
myths and narratives to ground his discoveries, e.g., his appropriation of the tragedy of Oedipus to
map out the Oedipus complex.
This workshop seeks to explore the interrelations among so-called objective and subjective truth
discourses about sexuality and desire—past and present—and, within a comparative framework,
critically to examine the validity of their respective claims to truth.

-6-

plenary - Roundtable on Art, Theory, and Criticism

Coordinator: dr. renée hoogland (RU)
Participants: Prof. Bracha L. Ettinger (University of Leeds; Bezalel Academy of Art, Jerusalem; Tel
Aviv Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis), prof. Robert Zwijnenberg (UM, RUL) and
representatives of the various fields (selected participants workshops)

To close off the events of the day, a roundtable discussion among theorists, critics, and artists
will serve to explore the interaction between the practice and the theory of art. Central question
to be addressed is to what extent art critics and theorists maintain genuinely

dialogic relations
with practicing artists.

A remarkable number of public events and media debates focusing on the interrelations between the
arts and sciences would appear to point up a shifting of the boundaries between the two fields in
recent years. Growing numbers of artists, it seems, are eagerly exploiting new technological
developments, while scientists are increasingly concerned with both the ethical and the aesthetic
aspects of their work and its effects. The lines dividing the two domains are being redrawn;
according to some, it would not even be a question of mutual influence anymore, but rather one of
profound permeation.

In some fields of contemporary artistic practice, one might indeed discern a certain degree of
“technologization,” primarily in the form of new media and digital art. Still, technology and
science are not the same things, and the question remains whether the exchange of technological
tools and possibilities does, in fact, imply that artists and scientists are penetrating, or even
appropriating, each other’s respective conceptual universes as well. In other words, does the
suggested permeation of the two domains equally mean that artists and scientists are (once again)
speaking each other’s language?

A second question that presents itself in this context involves the role of art critics and
theorists in the interplay between art and science. In current debates about the putative alliance
between artists and scientists, the role of scholars -cultural analysts, critical theorists, art
historians- tends to remain obscured. One would expect that their ostensibly shared interest and
preoccupations would at least lead to a lively dialogue between scholars and artists. But whereas
cultural theorists in recent years appear to have reached a discursive stage at which the term
postmodernism sounds decidedly outdated, the discourse at art academies has only just begun to break
away from an essentially modernist vision on art and artists. Even explicitly

romantic concepts such
as individual self-expression, personal fascination, and the autonomous work of art, continue to
operate as the guiding principles in many branches of (higher) art education. Exceptions
notwithstanding, this discrepancy appears to extend itself in the practices of (established)
artists. Despite strenuous attempts on the part of art critics writing for the cultural sections of
newspapers and magazines, as well as professional journals, to bring theory and practice more
closely together, it appears that so far, where critical theory and artistic practice are concerned,
we are dealing with no more than discourses brushing against each other, rather than a genuine
dialogue between the producers and critical observers of art.

This debate seeks to explore why and how the respective discourses of critical theory and artistic
practice have ended up in such a time warp, and why this discrepancy continues to maintain itself.
Have art critics, urged on by the so-called the theoretical turn, simply lost sight of the practice
that once was their primary object of concern? Are artists mainly trailing behind the latest trends
in critical theorizing? Or are theory and practice, the celebratory stories about their mutual
permeation notwithstanding, in the final instance simply disparate domains, with different methods
of approach, different aims, and different foundations? Would a genuine dialogue lead to a
productive process of cross-fertilization, so that the language of production and the language of
analysis would become mutually informing discourses instead of parallel tracks? And what respective
roles should and could museums, curators, critics, scholars, and artists themselves play in such an
undertaking?

These are some of the questions to be discussed by representative of various segments within the
larger cultural domain.

For further details see
http://www.ru.nl/genderstudies/congressen_2005/conference_fact_and/

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