

# **Who cares : Ethnical and sexual difference**

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# Introduction

The relatedness of sexual difference and ethical interaction goes back a long way. In Western culture it can be traced as far back as to the myth of creation in the Old Testament. Although there are two creation myths in the Old Testament, it is the Creation myth in Gen. 2,5-41, which is generally known and referred to. An uncommon reading of this myth will introduce the running themes of this investigation: sameness - difference; knowledge - sexuality; production - reproduction (private - public).

## Sameness - Difference

The first creature is not identified sexually. The text does not authorise us to say that Adam is the first *man*. Not until God operates on the first creature, to produce a companion, are the creatures given identities new to the story: *ish* and *isha*, man and woman. No ambiguity clouds these editions of the species human being. Created simultaneously, no one is superior to the other. Adam speaks thus of unity, mutuality and equality, saying: "Now it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man, *Isha* from *Ish*" (Gen. 2.23-24).

The word *Isha* demonstrates that the issue is not the naming of the female but the recognition that two sexes are originated in the one and same flesh of humanity. *Isha* is not created to be a helping maid (help meet), but to be an equal partner (Trible, 1978: 98).

2.7. And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. 2.8. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 2.9. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

2.15. And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. 2.16. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every three of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 2.17. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. 2.18. And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. 2.19. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. 2.20. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. 2.21. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 2.22. And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he into a woman, and brought her unto the man. 2.23. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 2.24. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. 2.25. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

## Knowledge - Sexuality

The temptation to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree is to get to know good and evil like God. In Hebrew 'good and evil' is a synonym for all knowledge. First when *ish* and *isha* have eaten of the forbidden fruit they realise the meaning of their nakedness

Thus, knowledge is what makes it possible to recognise that they are different although equal. The punishment seems to be decided accordingly. From now on the desire of *isha* has to be directed towards *ish*, and he has to be her master.

The verb *jada* indicates an intriguing conflation of knowledge and sexuality. *Jada* is used in 3.6 and in 3.22 where it means 'to know good and evil', and in 4.1, where it means 'sexual intercourse' leading to pregnancy and the birth of Kain.

Not only *Isha's* knowledge but also her sexuality is defined by Adam. Where there once was mutuality, there is now a hierarchy of division.

3.1. Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? 3.2. And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3.3. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 3.4. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 3.5. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be gods, knowing good and evil. 3.6. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. 3.7. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. 3.8. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. 3.9. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? 3.10. And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. 3.11. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? 3.12. And the man said, The woman thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. 3.13. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. 3.14. And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: 3.15. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. 3.16. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shalt be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. 3.17. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; 3.18. Thorns also and thisles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; 3.19. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.



## Reproduction - Production

A result of the changed situation is that Adam gives *isha* a name which consigns her to the reproductive function. Eve means mother of all life. Since her desire is towards Adam and he is to rule over her, it is as master Adam 'jada' i. e. knows Eve in 4, 1.

Sexuality in its master/slave pattern is installed and made normative, at least in heterosexual relationships. Hereby Adam come to be the embodied norm of knowledge.

Eve's existence is from now on focussed on reproduction and care. Adam is to be the producing part, fighting nature for food and survival. Their areas of living are differentiated and their relation has become asymmetrical; an asymmetry is developed and reproduced in this their primary sexual contact.

The punishment is thereby fulfilled. It is no longer possible to be different and at the same time to maintain equality. Oneness, which before the Fall is poetically described: "and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2.24), can after the Fall barely be said or heard without wondering whether this oneness can be obtained only by means of one flesh dominating the other.

3.20. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was mother of all living. 3.21. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

3.22. And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever:

3.23. Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

3.24. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

4.1. And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD (*Genesis Networks*, King James Version by Henry M. Morris, <http://www.genesis.net.au/reference/bible/04.05.98>).

## Sexual Difference and Ethical Interaction

The main question in this thesis concerns how to understand, teach and practise ethics so that the dignity of the parts involved in the relation and interaction of care is addressed, and if necessary, redressed. I shall argue that a presupposition of ethical interaction in the public sphere as well as in the private sphere is to recognise equally the different embodiment of the 'other' sex, how *she* lives, works, thinks, loves, relates and generates knowledge. Such recognition will produce a redefinition of subjectivity compelling both sexes to value and position equally the difference of other 'others', irrespective of sex, race, sexual preference, age, class.

The reason that I introduce my investigation by means of a myth is that it bears witness to the complexity involved in the concept *sexual difference*. Central in this myth of Creation is the existential question 'how come' it is so painful to be human beings and 'how come' there is such a great positional difference between the two sexes, privately and publicly. Characteristic of a myth is that what it tells cannot be told as well in any other way. It is not telling what in fact happened and it does not depict something already existing. Rather, it is narratively constitutive (Sløk, 1996). There can be no doubt that this myth is composed in a patriarchal culture to state that the blame for the inequality between the human beings and their hard life lies not with God, but with Eve and Adam. Its repetition in Church and school has for years and years in a both literal and il-literal sense justified the positional difference between the two sexes, in relation to each other and in society<sup>1</sup>.

As I hope to have demonstrated above, the myth allows for another reading. According to my reading the myth proposes an original sameness and equality of the sexes. This equality is not destroyed by eating of the tree of knowledge. It is worth noticing that to know good from evil, the most common definition of ethics, does not alter relation and position of the two first interacting creatures in 'history'. Rather, obtaining knowledge makes *ish* and *isha* able to identify their difference in sex. They are equal and of sameness although sexually different. The punishment is what distorts their relation and

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<sup>1</sup> According to Daphne Hampton, the repetition of stories from The New and The Old Testament is devastating: the negative view of women are conveyed at an almost unconscious level, which makes the biblical stories profoundly damaging to human relations even now. It seems that "patriarchal presuppositions are woven into the writing in such a way that they cannot be extricated" (Hampton, 1990: 87).

interaction by positioning *ish* as *the* human being and by making his sex, sexuality and knowledge normative for *isha*. It distorts their interactions in private and public spheres and thus the individual being. Thereby both sexes are punished. Hence the myth, at the same time as it indicates the mutual interest and responsibility of both sexes in finding another and more equal way of living and loving, demonstrates 'how come' this is so difficult.

This dissymmetry of the sexes and the distortion of their lives and love, recorded in the Creation myth in Genesis, are supposedly restored once the word of God became flesh in Christ. Thus it reads in Gal. 3.28: "From now on there is to be no difference between Greek and Hebrew, master and slave, man and women; all are we alike in the body of the Lord". To my conception the incarnation of Christ implies an ethical demand to accord all creatures equal value and treatment. This is an understanding of the Gospel of Jesus according to which each person's relation to God is determined in his/her relation to his/her neighbour, irrespective of age, handicap, sexual orientation, colour or religion. Accordingly this indicates that the other person's existence is so totally at stake that to fail him/her is to do him/her irreparable damage. In this thesis the core issue of ethics is this existential condition. The challenge built into life is how to relate so that differences, whether stemming from age, handicap, sexual orientation, colour or religion, are evaluated and positioned equally.

My reading of the myth has informed me that the question of sexual difference has to be phrased in a specific way if fixed categories and stereotypes are to be avoided. The question is not *what* is the difference, but rather *how* do we understand the difference? *How* do we create or constitute this meaning in our practises? To obtain such shift in focus from things and entities to activities, questions have to be formulated as *how* and not as *what*. In order to make this shift from *what* to *how* and to situate it in our time, this thesis will focus on how meanings of sexual difference are produced and reproduced in practises of public care. By seeing care as an existential condition of all human beings throughout life, this investigation claims to have relevance for ethical understanding in general.

Meanings of sexual difference are deeply intertwined with - and affected by - the broader political and societal context. To recognise sexual difference therefore requires a critical consciousness of the multitudes of processes and layers, and how we ourselves in our thinking and actions

contribute to uphold unequal and dissymmetrical systems and institutions, private as well as public.

Investigating along the above mentioned themes: sameness - difference, knowledge - sexuality, production - reproduction I shall demonstrate how ethics most often is based on the way knowledge is defined and embodied in *the* human being. This comes to distort ethical interaction, privately and publicly. In this thesis I shall demonstrate that ethical interaction is not possible on this premise and suggest another understanding of ethics.

## My Point of Departure

My investigation has developed from a concrete professional challenge. In my first assignment in Norway 1993 I was asked to administer a training programme imported from Denmark along with its two main teachers. The training programme was authorised by Norwegian Public Memorandum (NOU) 1991:20's proposal of 'a right to a sexual life' as for everybody else, so also for mentally and physically handicapped individuals. The group attending the programme consisted of 15 participants from a wide range of disciplines: psychologists, nurses, and social educators. The aim was that through training and education they should become able consultants for staff working with mentally and physically handicapped in matters related to sexuality.

The task of teaching ethics in the context of care and sexuality became an intriguing challenge. Investigating the many questions that a right to a sexual life poses, I became more and more conscious of the complexity of this issue. What is in fact sexuality – what is the basis for its definition? How does it affect our thinking and acting? What is 'useful' ethics? Not only the traditional training in ethical theories but also my own fairly untraditional training in ethics, seemed unable to grasp the concrete situational and relational reality. Again and again I experience how students 'buy' ethical theories only to act otherwise when role-playing and rehearsing practise. To understand the missing link between theory and practise it became urgent to get information about the recurring ethical themes and dilemmas in the practical field of care.

The opportunity to get access to such information came when a group of five social educators finished their exams and began working in different fields of care. They had in their last group assignment focused on how to translate the theoretical ethical competence they had acquired into practical

interaction. This resulted in a supervision project that supplied important material for my investigation. The group is all female. This fact has, although it was not intentional, both advantages and disadvantages which I shall return to in the analysis of our project.

Chapter 1 consists of an analysis of the letters from the above mentioned informants. The chapter is supplied with an introduction of its own. In chapter 2 various theoretical perspectives are presented in order to understand - 'the sexually different embodiment' - Woman. Chapter 3 analyses the above mentioned axiome: "All human beings, also the ones with physical and mental handicap, have a right to a sexual life" (NOU 1991:20, part III: 46). Chapter 4 focuses on care theory. The question posed is how to get woman respected as an embodied female. Since care theory tends to celebrate woman's difference, defining it as caring femininity, chapter 5 presents an approach that recognises sexual difference and at the same time redefines ethics as well as care. Chapter 6 demonstrates how a recognition of sexual difference introduces a redefinition not only of the female subject, but of subjectivity in general. This allows for intersubjectivity and ethical interaction.

In the process of investigating I reluctantly had to recognise a complex interrelation of sex, sexuality and sexual difference. Based on an analysis at the level of practise and an analysis at the level of theory, the thesis accordingly discusses the epistemological and philosophical premises of a practical ethical approach, that recognises this interrelation.

## Trends in Public Discourse of Equality in Western Europe

At the end of the century and the beginning of the new the discourse is increasingly preoccupied with the question of gender equality. The equality principle is, however, controversial. Arguments that women still do not have a fair share, whether in academia, in politics, in boardrooms or in regard to scholarships intending to forward equality and change segregation, are often met with protests. Men as well as women hold that women do not really want these positions. They do not want to turn masculine; they want to stay feminine. Women of today have other values and want to lead another life. This is underlined in several recent inquiries and investigations. They 'establish' that women and men *are* different, whether it is due to physiology

i.e. their brains are different, or biology i.e. the different role in reproduction, or to their origin in different spheres, like Venus and Mars.

In Norway equality between the sexes has been formally established long ago. At the same time it has - and seems to reproduce - one of the most segregated labour markets in Northern Europe. This segregation means that a majority of working women are employed in areas related to teaching, servicing and caring. Moreover, it has recently been demonstrated that the closer the work is to the body - and to the fluids of this materiality - the lower the wage and the respect, and the higher the percentage of women (Lise Widding Isaksen, 1995). According to the Parliamentary Equality Commissioner Anne Lise Ryel the percentage of girls choosing male dominated education has decreased considerably in the last decade. Only 2-5 percent of girls chose the basic courses in construction-, electro- and mechanical disciplines in high school. Within health and social disciplines on this level the percentage of girls is 92. Having realised that Norway in spite of having a solid legislation of equality still has substantial gender inequality in various parts of society the Ministry of Education will in the year 2000 introduce to all schools a manual in equality (Aftenposten 20/7 1999).

Since Norway seems to follow the United States with increasingly shorter delay, the prognosis made by the American philosopher Will Kymlicka seems scaring. In the United States and Canada, the extent of job segregation in the lowest-paying occupations is increasing to the degree that, if this goes on, almost all of the people below the poverty line in America in the year 2005 will be women and children. According to Kymlicka, the progressive efforts of liberal states to give women equal access to education, employment and political office, has not brought about sexual equality (Kymlicka 1990: 239).

In an article on equality policy in the European Union the British researcher Simon Duncan maintains that rules and regulations seem to be unable to establish equality between the sexes. Having stated that the European Union, far from being the superstate of feminism the many directives want us to believe, Simon Duncan tries to locate the social causes of gender inequality. With reference to Walby, 1990, who identified six elements in patriarchal social systems sustaining inequality: 1. paid work, 2. the household 3. the state. 4. male violence 5. sexuality. 6. culture, Duncan says:

“Each element allows men to exploit and dominate women. For instance, the well-known processes of vertical and horizontal segregation in the labour

market mean that women are more likely to end up in lower paid work, less secure and less rewarding jobs; similarly their assumption of the prime domestic role means women do most unpaid work, these patriarchal relations in paid work and the household combine to place women in positions of dependence on male breadwinners/heads of households, patriarchal state policy supports these gender divisions of labour, while the fear of pervasive male violence strengthens this dependence further - paradoxically making women all the more vulnerable to such violence - and so on” (Duncan, 1996: 148-149).

One of the fundamental causes of gender inequality is, according to Duncan, the idea of gender contract, a rough social consensus on what women and men do, think and are. These contracts are unequal. Although they change, or are disrupted, as a whole they are longlasting. This is due to their deep roots in social expectations and assumptions of how girls and boys *are* or have to be. From these roots the institutional structures develop. ”State policies reflect expectations and assumptions about what men and women are. In turn, alternatives become marginalized” (Duncan, 1996: 415).

According to Duncan, the remarkably better status of women in Northern Europe made women in these countries oppose membership of the European Union, and still they fear the influence of the Union in this respect. However, as a Danish citizen, having worked and lived most of my life in Denmark, then for three years in Sweden, and now for seven years in Norway, I oppose this kind of comparison for two reasons. First of all, the inequality is still present in these countries. As in other European countries, it seems to be deeply rooted in social expectations and assumptions about how boys and girls are to behave and, later, work. It is for this reason that the labour market to a great extent is segregated in Northern Europe. Women do most of the work in the field of caring, and, as stated above, the percentage increases the closer the work done gets to the material and concrete work with bodies. Secondly, even if Duncan realises that there is still inequality in these countries (ibid: 415), the comparison tends to underline the illusion of how far women have come towards equality in these countries<sup>2</sup>. Although Norway is outside the European Union, Duncan’s analysis is relevant and worth discussing.

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<sup>2</sup> Two Danish journalists of the younger generation argue in a full-page newspaper article in the Spring of 2000 that Danish women apparently are happily suppressed. Martin Krasnikj and

The discussion preceding the major wages settlement in Norway in 2000 concerned whether the areas in which the majority of women work are to be evaluated - and paid - equally to those of men, or whether they are once again to be set aside as less important. Recently the leader of the Norwegian Trade Union Congress stated that industrial workers do not want any raise in salary, as this would weaken the national competitiveness in the European market. Since industrial workers will not allow any other group or area to lead in matters of salary, the areas in which the majority of women work cannot have any raise. The argumentation is convincing only if the premise that some, i.e. men, *must* lead, is agreed upon. However, women have not demanded to lead but to have their work valued equally.

At the time of writing this, women in Norway are protesting on a broad scale about having to work for low wages and prestige. And not only protesting verbally; at the moment there are in Norway approximately 3800 vacant jobs in nursing. Instead of discussing how and why, an import of nurses from outside is planned and already in process. This gives the message that women are replaceable and that their needs, in this case an increase in salary, are inferior to the needs of the embodiment of the human being.

For change to develop we need thorough investigations as well as temperamental reactions. I find encouraging examples of both in recent publications. In 1998 a Swedish journalist, Nina Bjørk, wrote The Pink Cover, where she, like Susan Faludi in Backlash, 1991, documents a backlash in Sweden. They describe with countless references to American and Swedish media, to movies, books and public events convincingly how every time women seem to achieve equality they are driven back, once again. Recently there has been a flow in books concerning gender inequality: Cuntsteam (Sweden, 1999), Raw Texts (Norway, 1999) and Enough is Enough (Denmark 2000). Most critics of the women contributing to these books have been harsh. The narratives they tell are naive, unreflected, individual and unpolitical. In my view the descriptions are a colourful mixture of small and big issues. The contribution of these young women, most of them between 20 and 30, bear evidence of the variety of the theme. To my reading these experiences tell a tale of young women who grew up believing that equality had been established by their mothers or grandmothers. Suddenly or slowly they realise that this is

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Noa Redington list that women get approximately 30-40 percent lower wages than men, that the percentage of leaders is decreasing, that only 32 out of 536 professors are female etc.



not the case. They may in some ways be better off than their mothers, but equality is still far from established, whether in public labour market or in private relationships. The debate concerning gender equality has in the past (hundred and) thirty years tended to stigmatize the partakers as feminists. A label with connotations to radicality, lesbianism, frustrated or hysterical women, man-haters, etc. However, these books render important material and, hopefully, a new vitality to the present discussion.

## The Invisible Norm

The Norwegian philosopher K. E. Tranøy's analysis of needs and rights, to which I shall return in chapter 3, clarifies that inequality in society stems from the fact that the needs of the 'healthy white male between 20 and 50' are recognised over the needs of other individuals and groups, among which he mentions handicapped and women. Among these needs is the need for sexual satisfaction. This I find reflected in the increasing sexualisation of the public arena in general, and the expanding business of pornography and prostitution.

In Holland prostitution has recently been legalised. Of the 25.000 prostitutes many are illegal immigrants. In addition to politicians, also groups of feminists have supported the legalisation. Presumably the rights and safety of prostitutes will be secured better this way. What I find problematic is that the argument for upholding prostitution in the first place is not discussed. It is tacitly agreed that men have a need for sexual satisfaction that has to be met. When women in Scandinavia and Western Europe no longer seem willing to comply to it, women or children from less privileged parts of the world have to satisfy this need. Also crime connected to sexuality is increasing. The Canadian sexologist Gary Sanders (1998) points to the fact that most of this crime is men's violence against women or children. If this is performed with a golfclub or a hammer it is neither called golf violence nor carpentry violence. But when the tool is a penis, it is called sexual. Is this another example of how the male sexual need implicitly and invisibly determines the definition of what is sexual?

A recurrent theme in the public discourse is a feminisation of Kindergarten, schools and social institutions, and the need for men and masculinity. Recently the chief co-ordinator of military service in the northern region of Norway, Lars M. Frantzen, maintained that the reason why only fifty

percent of the conscripts complete the military service is that single mothers and female teachers have brought them up. The central military management immediately corrected this, assuring that female values enrich the Norwegian national defence. Both arguments implicitly maintain that men and women not only *are* different, but that women are evaluated in the male frame of reference. To the extent that women or their values contribute to the needs of men, they are welcome.

A similar discussion on the damaging effect of ‘masculinization’ in the public arena, of boardrooms, leadership and research, seems to be lacking. According to the Swedish political theorist, Agneta Starck, this is due to an invisible male norm. She points to the fact that there so far has been no research done on why men work and why *married* men work. The invisible male norm is, although never spoken of, always there. Inherent in this norm is an understanding of the male as non-handicapped, non-old, non-refugee, non-child, non-woman. The male has never been a child and will never be old. He is in other words an independent being. Since all of us are born as children and many of us get old, the ‘independence’ of the male seems to be upheld by the dependence on others. These others are women: mothers, daughters, sisters and wives together with the 90 % female staff in the institutions that take care of children, the handicapped and the old (Starck’s lecture at the World Women’s Conference in Tromsø June 1999).

According to the Danish neuro-psychologist Lis Ehlers, women throughout history have been able to reproduce symptoms similar to the real illnesses in their time. For each man there are five women with unexplainable symptoms. In the last twenty years illnesses have appeared that cannot be treated by medication or by operation. One million Americans are diagnosed as having ‘chronic exhaustion’, and five more are waiting to get one. The problem is that once a diagnosis is made, it is officially justified to accept the symptoms and live accordingly. In reality women are to be pitied. We, Ehlers says, sympathetically including herself, do not find our role in the world and get symptoms from the body that risk turning us into chronic patients. A characteristic for these women is that most of them have middle education as social educators, office-workers, caring staff, etc. and that they are enormously busy in their lives (Weekend Berlingerren, 24/4 1999). It seems relevant to see this in connection with women’s care work.

## Care, Work and Women

In Norway as in the other Nordic countries the transfer of caring responsibilities in the sixties and seventies from the private sphere to the public services has turned into an important part of the female labour market. Already in 1984, the Norwegian sociologist Kari Waerness described the development of a new ideology praising informal care over public care. She pointed to how this reinforced women's problems in achieving more command over their own lives and in reaching a greater measure of economic independence (Waerness, 1984: 189). In an interview in 1999 concerning women as losers in The National Health Insurance, Waerness concedes that neither women's liberation nor women's achievement of higher positions have led to basic changes in the division of private caring tasks.

“It is a painful fact that it is still women that are the majority both in unpaid caring work and in low paid jobs in fields of service and care. So far no reform has been able to get men to take main responsibility for combining their career and child care” (Velferd, 1999, no. 3: 11).

This became confirmed in a course Work and Care in Western European Perspectives, arranged by Women's Studies in Utrecht, Holland. Care in official documents and statistics is used to indicate unpaid or low paid work. A difference between the concept and practise of care is not mentioned. The texts almost never refer to whether care is for children, husbands, elderly, handicapped; whether it is private or public; whether it is for those in need or whether it is an intrinsic part of the human condition of existence. The concept of care seems, considering the lack of attempts, difficult to define. Maybe this is mirroring a reality where care is as all-encompassing and paradoxical as the concept of mother/woman: praised and denigrated at the same time, but always marginalized. There is 'care' and there is 'real' work. The female body symbolises the one, the male body the other. Implicitly the ideology of caregiving is that there shall be no difference between how care is practised in the private sphere and in public institutions. The tacit message is that women's liberation forced care-work out of the home. Consequently, it is women's responsibility that no one feels the difference.

In her analysis in 1984 Waerness found it important to define care. Caring is according to Waerness a concept that encompasses a range of human

experiences which has to do with feeling concern for and taking charge of the well-being of others. Care is thus about relations between at least two people.

“Whether we analyse caring as ‘labour’ or as ‘love’, it seems highly important to make a theoretical distinction between 1) caring for dependants, 2) caring for superiors, 3) caring in symmetrical relations” (Waerness, 1984: 189).

These different categories of caring relations’ give rise to problems for women in their struggle for greater independence. The *principle* of care, Waerness argues, should be based on equal give-and-take relationships. Informal care relies on *norms of balanced reciprocity* between people in symmetrical relations. Care is, however, most often associated with women and what they do for their husbands, children and other members of the family. Since this most often does not imply reciprocity, it should rather be called *personal services*. When these services are provided for persons that are more or less unable to manage these things themselves, the relation is different in that it is asymmetrical. To provide good care in such relations means to perform the services in such a way that the integrity and independence of the receiver is secured.

Waerness distinctions are still constructive and valid. Care as work is low ranked in practise as well as in language. No trained educator or nurse would like to be called or defined as a care-worker. As long as the metaphors of care are ‘good mothering’, ‘female compassion’, ‘essence of womanhood’ etceteras, it seems insurmountable to get the caring functions respected as work. In order to develop better models of care-giving work, Waerness recommends that

“...it seems necessary to study not only the exploitative nature of women’s traditional caregiving work, but also the positive qualities inherent in it as well as why they seem to get lost when professionalised and socialized” (Waerness, 1984: 187-88).

In this thesis such a study is presented by means of an analysis of the practise of five social educators in their first year of work; how do they think, work, reflect and interact. According to the Dutch philosopher Rosi Braidotti, feminist theory links the thinking process to experience. In order to revalidate experience, the notion of the bodily self is necessary: the personal is not only

the political, it is also the theoretical. To study qualities of women's care-giving work, is to investigate the 'roots of the thinking process', to use an expression of Braidotti.

In the conceptualisation of the Norwegian philosopher Kari Martinsen 'rationality of care' consists in genuine rational acts, learnt at a higher level of competence where we act and decide intuitively. This intuition is not irrational. It is conditioned by the situation. It is based upon experience and knowledge.

"Our culture has rendered moral competence as practical wisdom for women; it is learned in human relations and is judged as less valuable than masculine rationality" (Martinsen, 1998 II: 17).

According to Martinsen, far from being less valuable women's position in practical daily life has made them able to develop rationality to a higher level. The ability to recognise what in the present system made the other dependent in the first place is what differentiates 'rational' care from 'sentimental care'. Sentimental care does not analyse the situation nor does it take any responsibility to work towards a change. Society remains a sort of fate. Rational care, however, demands more than respect for the other's uniqueness. It demands recognition of what has made this person so dependent in the first place.

"The weaker we are, the more institutions and persons have power to define us, our problems and our needs. The solidarity towards weaker groups demands that we combine a participating role with a disloyalty towards the values that uphold the weakness of these groups, also when this group itself is bearer of the system of values" (Martinsen, 1988 II: 18).

My analysis illustrates how five social educators struggle to develop better models of care-giving work and how professionalism and socialisation hinder them, although in a specific understanding of those terms. The reason that professionalism and socialisation can be a hindrance to the positive qualities of care (and women) is that inherent in the 'neutral' theory in which the social educators are trained is an embodied male norm. A further description of this norm and its consequences will be returned to in chapter 3. This norm promotes a system of subject/object relation that is also reflected in the culture into which they are born and raised. As a consequence the analysis reveals how

the social educators are split. At the same time as they work according to the theory into which they are trained, they struggle to find another way of working. A way that can promote the dignity and integrity of both parts in the relation and interaction. The social educators have, however, difficulty in putting *their way* of working into language. In order to understand this it is necessary to look into how theory is traditionally produced.

## Theory, Objectivity and Situated Knowledge

Theory originates from the Greek verb *Teårea* that means to see and recognise. Two basic steps in producing a theory are: 1. to recognise a common factor in different appearances, and 2. to formulate in language the interesting character of this factor. In order to do so, the theorist has to distance him/herself from the unique particularities of each incidence. In humanities each incidence is a person. The individual history, culture, position, situation of this person must give way to the importance of the theory or category<sup>3</sup>. Through distance the rational mind is able to ignore the uniqueness of the body, usually called a subject/object relationship. The repetition of this pattern is by feminist philosophers most often linked to the mind (ratio)/body dualism, which has permeated Western thought since Plato, Descartes and Bacon. This dichotomy has separated human experiences into a spiritual and a bodily realm, correlated with other dichotomies such as culture/nature, man/woman, public/private etc. These are not equally positioned, but valued to the advantage of the former or more exact: culture, man, public is the norm from which the other differs, while at the same time sustaining the dominant. The ability to think was seen as intimately connected to the degree to which the mind was able to distance itself from, or rule over, the irrational passions of the body. Women were seen as less able to do this, as were also slaves and children. The result was exclusion of women from the public realm, academia and therefore also from the production of philosophy and knowledge. This dichotomous thinking leads to the belief that it is possible and necessary for the production of knowledge to

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<sup>3</sup> At a conference in Tromsø 1995 the Norwegian medical professor Sverre Fauske illustrated this in a lecture: *The revolving stage of ethics*. Looking reflectively back at the different stages revolving in his life he had come to realise how his fascination and belief in the effectiveness of the latest theory again and again had made him treat his clients in the light of sameness: as alcoholics.

extract feelings and other sense interferences, in short the body, from the subject when researching the object(s).

However, the split between body and mind does not sufficiently explain the ongoing reproduction of inequality. The persistence of sexual inequality in European culture can only be explained through its heritage from both Greek philosophy and Hebrew religion. In the holistic Hebrew understanding a split between body and mind is unthinkable<sup>4</sup>. In contrast to Greek thinking, where the human being *has* a body, Old Testament thinking considers the human being to *be* not a body, but a creature. The Hebrew language does not have a word for neither body nor mind. As referred to in the Creation myth above, differences of the two sexes are due to their different position. A different position, which is founded and upheld in that the male is not only defining knowledge and sexuality; he is personifying it. This norm colours the relation and position between the sexes by making all other definitions of knowledge and sexuality different and of lesser validity. Greek philosophical understanding split the human being into two domains, a split that became correlated with women and men, nature and culture. Hebrew conception of the human being was that they were God's creatures and therefore whole and unique<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the difference between the sexes stems, not from the body/mind split, but from the position between the sexes and towards God<sup>6</sup>. Whereas the Greek dualistic conception of the human being is concentrating on the individual, the Hebrew holistic is concentrating on relation. Western culture is deeply influenced by both.

This I find reflected in Donna Haraway's position. According to her the narratives of Western culture concerning objectivity are allegories of the

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<sup>4</sup> According to Robert Gordis, there is no dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual in Hebrew. "It is not simply that Judaism regards a human being as an animated body; it sees the human person as an inextricable organic interweaving of body and soul, which are complementary, not antagonistic, aspects of personality" (Gordis, 1977: 35).

<sup>5</sup> The Norwegian philosopher Åge Wifstad maintains that we are bearers of both the Greek and the Hebrew tradition. The Greek means that we recognise the typical in the other - this is to think in terms of diagnosis -, and the Hebrew in that we experience the other as unique - in this case relating becomes the crucial point. Wifstad argues that both traditions are needed in psychiatry (Wifstad, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Prof. Seward Hiltner, Princeton states that: "In a broad sense the Greek side assumed ethics to be the search for the good, while Jews saw the guideposts for their living in the covenant that a living God had made with them. Except in the hands of master like Plato, the abstraction of the Greek view often led to elitism, to a denigration of the body, and to both ascetism and libertism. The more concrete and dynamic Jewish view, except when crystalized into legalism, regarded the body as standard and indispensable equipment and found ascetism and libertism equally alien" (Hiltner, 1977: 21).

ideologies that govern the relation of mind and body, in which the traditional understanding of objectivity has its roots (Haraway, 1997). Apart from the impossibility of doing this, it reveals that the understanding of the relation between mind (ratio) and body is still the old dualistic one. The mind is seen as the ruler of the passionate and unreliable body. The professional is the healthy and rational mind, the one in control of his body. The client is the sick and passionate body without mind i.e. without control. It goes without saying that only a rational mind can ensure objectivity and thus produce knowledge. In contrast Haraway rejects any subject/object split in the production of knowledge. Instead she insists on the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge.

“Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, 1997: 285).

The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. This brings Haraway to argue that only a partial perspective can provide an objective vision. This requires a search of perspectives not known in advance. Identity, however, including self-identity, does not produce science; critical positioning does, that is, objectivity (Haraway, 1997: 288). The alternative to relativism is not totalization or single vision; the alternative is partial, locatable and critical knowledge. Relativism is the claim of being everywhere equally and in that way it is the perfect mirror twin of the totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both make it impossible to see well.

“Relativism and totalization are both ‘god tricks’ promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in the rhetorics surrounding Science. But it is precisely in the politics and epistemology of partial perspectives that the possibility of sustained, rational objective inquiry rests” (Haraway, 1997: 287).

My intention in presenting Haraway’s position is to locate this project in the feminist scholarship of science. Although there is not one single standpoint in feminism, a common goal is to achieve ‘better accounts of the world’ which according to Haraway *is* ‘science’. Feminist theory is close to critical theory in that it provides a critical standpoint from which to deconstruct established



forms of knowledge. Feminists start from “a realization that epistemologies, in their trickle-down effects in the everyday world, play a part in sustaining patriarchal and other hierarchical social structures, both in academy and throughout Western societies“ (Code, 1987). This realisation is built on what is seen. What is seen depends on the eyes of the beholder. To see well is, according to Haraway, not just a matter of having good eyesight. It is a located activity, cognisant of its particularity and of the accountability requirements that are specific to its location. The science question in feminism is about positioned rationality that allows us to become answerable for learning how to see.

## A Flawed Scientific Subject

To see well is supposed to reduce any subject/object split in the production of knowledge. This raises a problem in that this researcher’s ability to see is already flawed in the process of *becoming* a woman. Although I got my education in the late sixties at a time when the question of women’s liberation was most vital, the question of sexual difference was totally absent from the formal teaching at the Faculty of Theology in Aarhus. A situation similar to the one of most students of today. At the University of Aarhus there were only a few female students at the Faculty of Theology, and we were truly grateful to be included. The time had come for sameness. Difference was what had been. To become a priest, as I did after finishing my exams, meant once more to enter a world of men. I was the first one in that county. The training I received at the University, combined with my upbringing, made me work ‘as a man’ for many years. That I was a woman with a husband and children only made it more important to work sufficiently. Since I was always uncertain whether my work was good enough, or rather whether I was intelligent enough, to work sufficiently meant to work as long hours as my male colleagues.

Only years later, in the nineties, when I was asked to share with young female theologians my work experience as a female priest, did their questions make me reflect on *how* I had worked, preached etc. This brought me to acknowledge other forms and layers of knowledge. The Danish philosopher S. Wachterhausen distinguishes between ‘actual tacit knowledge’, which means knowledge that can be explained, although it so far has not been explained *and* ‘principal tacit knowledge’, that cannot be explained, but only be indicated by

means of metaphors. Finally, Wachterhausen refers to ‘integrated knowledge’, which is knowledge that has been incorporated and therefore eludes analysis. By this I want to point at the parallel and crucial meta-process of the researcher exploring sexual difference, of which she herself is a part. Thereby I concede that this project would have been different with another research subject. At the same time I believe that any research is a process that involves and challenges the scientific subject.

In the process of analysing the proposal of a right to a sexual life, and thus the relation between human being, norm, body and sexuality, I became aware that the training that I had received was not only neutral and abstract. It had a body. What made it difficult to recognise injustices done to the different embodiment of woman also made it difficult to see injustice done to the different embodiment of mentally handicapped. This became evident when attending a three-day conference concerning ethics, arranged by the association of social educators in Denmark. A young man, representing the union of mentally handicapped, took the floor on day two and said that he so far had been brought to understand that ‘we’, meaning the social educators, had problems with ‘them’, meaning the mentally handicapped including himself. He thereby revealed that the ethical understanding presented at the conference concerned the difficulties that those of the ‘norm’ had with those diagnosed as differing from this norm. To me his statement became the most important ethical message of this conference. He exposed how easy it is to neglect bodies whose speech has already been silenced by our negligent ‘them’-definitions, diagnoses, and thereby our invisible norms<sup>7</sup>. Inequality in society is upheld by overlooking the difference of material bodies in everyday life. As long as neutrality is idealised in theory and knowledge production, we will continue to be as logical as the Cat in Alice in Wonderland:

‘But I don’t want to go among mad people,’ Alice remarked. ‘Oh, you ca’n’t help that, said the Cat: ‘we are all mad her. I’m mad. You’re mad.’ ‘How do you know that I am mad?’ said Alice. ‘You must be,’ said the cat, ‘ or you wouldn’t have come here. Alice didn’t think that proved it at all: however, she went on: ‘and how do you know you are mad?’ ‘To begin with’, said the cat, ‘a dog’s not mad. You grant that?’ I suppose so,’ said Alice. ‘Well then,’ the

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<sup>7</sup> According to Allucquere Rosanne Stone this is an old Cartesian trick. She argues how easy it is to forget bodily reality in a discourse of visionary virtual world’s builders, rife with images of imaginary bodies freed from the constraints of flesh (Stone, 1992: 113).

cat went on, 'you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now *I* growl, when I am pleased, and wag my tail when I am angry. Therefore I am mad' (Lewis Carroll, 1865/1998: 58).

Although the percentage of female students at the level of University and College is high and increasing into majority, they are still trained into *neutral* knowledge. Trained and normalised into a *neutral* understanding women learn to be part of the subject/object system. This explains why even academic women still accept a gender-unequal society. Paradoxically this makes women repeat the very same system of subject/object that suppresses them. As will become clear in the analysis of the social educators' practise, this hinders women in becoming subjects as well as in being seen as subjects, which again makes it difficult to establish intersubjectivity. This way women become compliant in the oppression, not only of themselves, but also of groups that differ in body and mind to the norm of 'the white healthy male between 20 and 50'. Being raised and trained into the same system this researcher has, in the process of investigating sexual difference, experienced the same confusing change as Alice when meeting the Caterpillar:

'Who are *you*' said the Caterpillar. This is not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I – I hardly know, Sir, just at present – at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then. 'What do you mean by that?' said the Caterpillar, sternly. 'Explain yourself!' 'I ca'n't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir,' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself, you see.' 'I don't see,' said the Caterpillar. 'I'm afraid I ca'n't put it more clearly,' Alice replied, very politely, 'for I ca'n't understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.' 'It isn't,' said the Caterpillar. 'Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet,' said Alice; 'but when you have to turn into a chrysalis – you will some day, you know – and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, wo'n't you?' 'Not a bit,' said the Caterpillar. 'Well, perhaps *your* feelings may be different,' said Alice: 'all I know is, it would feel very queer to *me*.' 'You!' said the Caterpillar contemptuously. 'Who are *you*?' Which brought them back again to the beginning of the conversation. Alice felt a little irritated at the Caterpillar's making *very* short remarks, and she drew herself up and said, very gravely, 'I think you ought to tell me who *you* are, first.' 'Why?' said the Caterpillar.

Here was another puzzling question; and, as Alice could not think of any good reason, and the Caterpillar seemed to be in a *very* unpleasant state of mind, she turned away. 'Come back!' the Caterpillar called after her. 'I've something important to say!' This sounded promising, certainly. Alice turned and came back again. 'Keep your temper,' said the Caterpillar (Lewis Carroll, 1865/1998: 41).

## Theories of Gender and Sexual Difference

The concept of woman in Anglo-American feminist theory has been regarded as relatively unproblematic. Until the 1980s the distinction between sex and gender has constituted the basic conceptual framework. This distinction seemed to resolve the problems of the body. In recent years, however, this distinction has been criticised for being dualistic by indicating gender as mind and sex as body. When gender is seen as socially constructed, the sexed body is left as the material onto which social and cultural inscriptions are printed.

As early as 1983 Moira Gatens, in her article *A Critique of the Gender/Sex Distinction*, criticised the gender/sex distinction for upholding the dualism of mind/body. Since then she has continued to critically unfold the implications of gender theories. The problem of the relationship between gender and sex is not new. Already Freud tried to find a definition of femininity and masculinity. Referring to Freud's work, Gatens argues that perception cannot be reduced to either body or mind, but has to be seen as the activity of the subject as a whole. It is from the problems of the interrelation and interaction of the body and mind that psychoanalysis arose. There is no neutral body; there are at least two kinds of bodies, the male and the female.

The so-called sex/gender discussion, however, started with the psychoanalyst Robert J. Stoller. In his work on trans-sexuality he discovered that the biological sex had a tendency to augment, but not to decide the individuals gender-identity. A person's gender-identity is above all due to post-natal influence, especially from the mother. Gatens underlines two of Stoller's assumptions: 1. The body is neutral and passive, 2. It is possible to change the effects of the historical and cultural specificity of one's life experience by changing the culture's everyday practice. Conceiving the body as neutral and passive and the mind as socially constructed comes close to a behaviourist conception of subjectivity. Stoller's work was praised as a revolution in the

field of sexuality and socialisation. Moreover, it was taken as a justification of the right to equality for everyone, regardless of sex, and was accordingly followed by feminists such as Millet, Greer, Chodorow and Dinnerstein. It became part of ethos of the sixties and seventies. Without knowledge of these theories, I, like many others, was convinced when raising my son and daughter that it was possible to make them equal by treating them alike. The extended research of Norwegian schoolchildren by Rudberg and Nielsen has convincingly demonstrated how twenty years of teaching equality in school has not worked out as intended. The reason being that equality cannot be obtained by ignoring difference.

From the perspective of sexual difference the sex/gender perpetuates the divide of nature/culture, mind/body. Thus the sex-gender distinction in fact re-essentialises sex. As for sexual difference, there have been two theories: phenomenology and French feminism. The French feminists point to the difference in women's bodily and sexual experiences. They demonstrate that women are not only oppressed but can be heretical and empowering as well. The phenomenological theory has been useful to show how constraints of femininity have made it impossible for women to use their embodied capacities for engaging with the world. Both theories have been charged with essentialism (Davis, 1997).

The core of the various theoretical perspectives of sexual difference is that there is no such thing as a neutral/natural body before social and cultural constructing. Sex and gender are intertwined. The theorists of sexual difference maintain in different ways and from different disciplines that sexual inequality is part of the female identity construction with dire consequences for the production of knowledge. This school of feminist thought argues that

“...an adequate analysis of women's oppression must take into account both language and materialism and not be reduced to either one. It (theory of sexual difference) is very critical of the notion of “gender” as unduly conceptualizing social and material factors to the detriment of the semiotics and symbolic aspects” (Braidotti and Butler, 1994: 47).

In her conversation with Judith Butler, Braidotti adds another factor. Gender has found no echo in the French, Spanish or Italian feminist movement because it reflects the English language with little or no relevance to theoretical traditions in the Romance languages (Braidotti and Butler, 1994: 37). The same

can be said in relation to Scandinavian languages. Lately the Swedes have decided to solve the problem by using the Latin word Genus. Women's studies have thus become Genus studies. In my opinion, this does not solve the problem with embodiment. A basic consensus between theorists of gender and theorists of sexual difference is that feminist practise and women's studies of it have to challenge the universalistic stance of scientific discourse by exposing its inherent dualism. As already indicated this includes seeing when and how the universalistic stance is an embodied male need and norm, positioning the female sex and body as other and inferior.

According to Braidotti, a new trend has emerged in the nineties. It rejects biological and psychological essentialism and emphasises the situated specific, embodied nature of the female as well as the male subject. The future challenge is to find ways of recoding or renaming the feminist female subject not as yet another sovereign and excluding subject, but as a multiple, fragmented and interconnected entity. To make sexual difference operative at last is to see women's ontological desire to be female subjects, transcending the traditional vision of subjectivity as gender-free by means of inscribing the subject back into her/his corporeal reality (Braidotti, 1994: 144).

I shall argue that in the existential project of interdependency, of 'becoming' subjects, both sexes uphold and constitute meanings of sexual difference. Accordingly both are responsible for making a change. This includes giving up the comparative measurement and finding a way to express the female knowledge in its own terms and language.

## Ethics - Neutral or Sexed

The focus on ethics has been intense in many areas. From 1990 to 2000 ethics has been an item on the scientific agenda in Norway. The Norwegian Council of Research invested in a programme with the intention of increasing ethical knowledge. In 1995 I got a one-year grant to partake in this programme. For this I am thankful in an ambiguous way. At the same time as it gave me productive training, it - apart from the lectures by K. E. Tranøy - confirmed the relevance of my questioning how ethics relates to reality.

The field of health and social affairs has lately expressed a renewed interest in ethical competence. Although ethical rules are constantly reformulated they do not suffice. Referring to the immense responsibility of

staff that on a daily basis has to make important choices on behalf of their clients Knut Østrem, chairman of the commission of the public memorandum NOU 1994: 8, request that an ethical consciousness is developed. It was with this intention I set out to investigate the ethical dilemmas at stake in the practice of care work. It was a coincidence that the group in the project of supervision is all female. On the other hand, the majority of students attending the school are female. The intention of the project was to find and analyse ethical dilemmas in practise. Through their critical theory feminist scholarship gave me tools to understand that ethical theory is difficult to transfer to daily life and practice due to the intimate connection between sexual difference and ethical interaction. Thus, it was for me as it was for Simone de Beauvoir: my interest in ethics brought me to the asymmetry of interdependency, to the question of sexual difference, of woman.

In 1947 Simone de Beauvoir published the Ethics of Ambiguity. It was her working with this book that made an inquiry of a woman crucial. The precondition in her ethical approach is the abolishment of the opposition between subject and object, which Merleau-Ponty with his phenomenology made possible. Beauvoir's central argument is the necessity to be recognised by another free being in order to be and live as a free person. Built into existence itself, this necessity render a possibility of change, for which both sexes are mutually responsible. However, when one sex is defined as different and of lesser value, freedom becomes difficult to obtain for both sexes. To my understanding ethics has to conceive the political and the personal as mutually constitutive. Ethics that recognise or validate one sex over the other can not be validated as ethics. It is a contradiction in terms. Inspired by theorists like Toril Moi, Sara Heinämaa and Eva Gothlin-Lundgren, who from various disciplines have reinterpreted Beauvoir as a philosopher and an ethicist in her own right, I shall elaborate the actuality of Beauvoir's approach.

Just as Beauvoir's ethics is influenced by the questions that followed in the wake of World War II, the American Laurence Kohlberg began his research deeply affected by the war in Vietnam. His main question was whether it is possible to reinforce the morality of American men. After twenty years of research he came up with a positive result. Most men were able to improve their morality. However, when he included women in his research, his results were less positive. Most women seemed to be unable to improve their morality. Kohlberg's research assistant Carol Gilligan reacted to his methods and criticised them for being biased. The discussion Kohlberg/Gilligan is

wellknown and represented in many books. Suffice it in this connection to say that Gilligan's book: In A Different Voice, 1982 put on the agenda the question whether men and women think and act ethically different according to their sexual identity. Since then it has been intensively discussed whether the difference can be said to go between an ethics of justice, since men seem to be more concerned about principles, *and* an ethics of care, since women seem to be more concerned about relations.

Whatever position one takes to this discussion, there is general agreement that the basic question, whether it is possible to perform differently and be valued as equally ethical, is crucial. An enormous body of scholarship on care and care ethics followed in the wake of the discussion. The intention was - and is - to revalue care and thereby the practise of women. The question is, however, whether this has turned into a celebration of care and - due to the oppressive condition under which care takes place - has left women in much the same position as before. If so, the question is how come and how to find an ethical approach that at the same time allows for difference and equality.

## Methodological Approach

In The Ethical Demand, 1960, 71, K. E. Løgstrup states his methodology to be one of making distinctions and to never stop with any particular key distinction.

“Our task is rather to regard each new ambiguity and each new problem as an occasion for advancing yet another distinction, and so proceeding until all the elements in the proclamation under consideration have been characterised as precisely as possible. To a large extent systematic theology consists precisely in this business of disentangling problems which have been inadmissible lumped together” (Løgstrup, 1971: 6).

This investigation engages in a continuous process to disentangle how ethical dilemmas in the practical interaction of care work are linked or lumped inadmissibly together with female identity. To be able to decipher the complexity of cumulated images, concepts, and representations of women, such as they have been codified by our culture, I have had to draw on theories from various disciplines in a way similar to Beauvoir. When investigating the



question of Woman, Beauvoir realised that although woman's body is a crucial fact in her situation, it does not suffice to define woman by describing her body. Her body is not a thing; it is a situation that makes it necessary to place the biological conditions in their ontological, economical, social, psychological and psychoanalytical connection. Accordingly, her investigation, The Second Sex, 1949, places woman in an existential perspective, implicating her whole situation as an object of study (Beauvoir, 1965: 65, 90).

When the human being is seen as a situation, to do research is no longer to study an object but to shift position in order to critically scrutinise what is actually going on. The term *transdisciplinary, cross disciplinary* describes how feminist scholarship, following Beauvoir, claims the necessity to pass between different discursive fields to create connection where things previously were disconnected (Braidotti, 1994: 93, Code, 1998: 183). Braidotti advocates an epistemic nomadism, which can only work if it is properly situated in the "in between" zones (Braidotti 1994: 93). This may imply to get caught in a set of tensions that may be unresolvable. These very tensions, however, reveal "that if the complexity of a situation is to be negotiated it is as important to be objective in order to contest oppression with well-established facts as it is to be strategically sceptical in order not to allow closure that could erase experiences and differences under an assimilationist rubric" (Code, 1998: 183).

Inspired by a phenomenological approach to philosophy a principal endeavour of this thesis is to investigate thinking as permeated by the existential fact of being a body. The uniqueness of this subjective body implies a similar uniqueness to its experience of sexual difference. In this respect the complex process of construction, the sexual sign on the bodies, becomes crucial as it poses the sexes in different positions in the political and personal spheres. Such an approach is linked to an understanding of the subject as split, fractured and multidimensional. To view the human being as a socially constructed subject changes the conception of what that subject can know or become. Although constrained by historical, cultural and biological facts, this conception of a human being allows for possibilities as well as for change. It implies that social, political and ethical life has to be acknowledged as 'processes involved in' rather than actions that have a definite beginning and end and a clear ethos (Gatens, 1996: 196). Accordingly, situated knowledge embedded in lived experience, will necessarily present contradicting perspectives and challenge the traditional theory - practise split.

This has consequences for the definition of subjectivity and interaction. It results in a shift of focus from being to *becoming*, from certainty to *possibilities*, from truth to meaning or *significance*. A focus that criticises the predominant contemporary treatment of ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics as separate disciplines for favouring the notion that a writer can be entirely objective and able to transcend his/her political, social, and sexual identity. In the sense that this thesis devotes theoretical attention to subjectivity by moving epistemology away from the abstractions of modernity into real world, performed by embodied subjects whose experiences have to be taken seriously, it follows standpoint theory.

To obtain knowledge it is necessary to recognise that one's own location is limited and that it is necessary to learn from diverse located subjects. Respecting the informants' narratives without drowning their experience and voices in theoretical perspectives is to accept and respect that there is no longer one privileged position. On the other hand theories from various disciplines are necessary to understand the layers in the informants' narratives and the variation in viewpoint each informant represents. Moira Gatens uses the metaphor of a tapestry that from the 'right' side gives an impression of discrete figures and patterns but, when turned over, reveals the interconnections of threads (Gatens, 1996: 194). To do research this way is a constant process of critically allowing for different perspectives in order to establish better accounts of the world. As various instruments are needed in an orchestra, various ways of producing knowledge are in need of acknowledgement if we are to be responsible for the world, in which we live and work.

My thesis bear evidence that in order to see, it is important to circumvent as much as possible of my 'privileged' position as researcher and 'unprivileged' position as constructed into sexual difference. However, although the objective subject position is criticised and many different perspectives are presented, they are not to be seen as representing the whole picture when added together. This limitation is owed to a phenomenological approach to ethics according to which I can only *live* my relations with others and when I reflect upon situation and relation I am no longer part of it. This again is connected to the condition of existence that we as human beings have no privileged insight in our own personal representation and construction.

To challenge the traditional split between theory and practise by holding on to concrete and material reality also implies conceding that it looks

different to those differently placed in it. In art and music as well as in life and love it is important to participate and to see from constantly new positions. This again has to do with the world and the language into which we are born. Literary references and narratives of various kinds are used to bring concepts and words 'home', meaning in the right relation to our life and practises<sup>8</sup>.

Investigating the interdependence of sexual difference and ethical interaction has been a most challenging task. It has been necessary to combine theoretical and practical knowledge from many sources. Part of gaining and producing knowledge is to unfold - as precisely as possible - the complex links between ontology, language and epistemology. The imperative to understand and formulate this dynamic in the perspective of sexually different embodiment has often left me exhausted, wondering like Alice:

'Why, I do believe we've been under this tree the whole time! Everything's just as it was!' 'Of course it is,' said the Queen. 'What would you have it?' 'Well, in *our* country,' said Alice, still panting a little, 'you'd generally get to somewhere else - if you can ran very fast for a long time as we've been doing.' 'A slow sort of country!' said the Queen. 'Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run least twice as fast as that!' (Carroll, 1872/1998: 145).

It is my hope that the reader will share my experience, that in the matter of sexual difference and ethical interaction, it takes all the running you can do just to keep up.

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<sup>8</sup> This is inspired by reading the American philosopher Naomi Scheman. Concerned with creating forms of life that place our words and us in the right relation, she argues that "there are no other homes for our words than the ones we create in and through our practises, nor any predetermined ways of specifying what it is to have gotten those practises right, but that does not mean that there is no sense to the idea that we might not be going on as we should be" (Scheman, 1996: 402)



# 1. Identity, Embodiment and Ways of Working

This chapter presents my analysis of a supervision project with five female social educators in their first year of work after graduating as professionals<sup>9</sup>. Experience from teaching and supervising students and staff made me wonder how come it is so difficult to transfer ethical theories to practical work in a way that upholds the integrity and worth of all parts involved. At the beginning of the project I had but a vague understanding of sexual difference, although I had an idea of the importance of sexuality which inspired this project in the first place. The analysis is based on the letters they sent to me before each session of supervision as well as on the conversations in the sessions. To analyse the material and to identify the different layers, it has been necessary to draw on different methods and theories.

## A Supervision Project

### **interests and intentions**

I have had the privilege of coaching the informants in their three years of studying to become social educators. The five informants made their graduation project together, their theme being the connection between theory and practice, ideology and reality. Based on NOU 1994: 8 Development of Competence in Working with Mentally Handicapped they concentrated on the ethical competence of the staff working with these clients. They especially focused on the difficult balance between paternalism and non-intervention. After finishing their exams, they got jobs in different fields of care work; three of them working with mentally handicapped, one at an institution for old people and one in a closed institution for difficult youth.

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<sup>9</sup> The Norwegian 'vernepleier' is in my English dictionary (Kunnskapsforlagets Blå Engelsk Ordbok, 1994) translated into 'Registered Nurse for the Mentally Subnormal'. Since the training for social educators in Norway differs from the training for nurses I have chosen to translate 'vernepleier' as 'social educator'. Traditionally a social educator is trained to work with physically and mentally handicapped persons; gradually the area has been extended to include other groups in need of long term care: elderly, young and persons with a psychiatric diagnosis.

Due to their interest in ethical matters, I considered them able to discern and describe the ethical problems presented to them in practice. When I suggested that we established a supervision project together I was met with enthusiasm. Social educators are rarely offered supervision. Such project would be of mutual benefit. To them I represented an ethical theoretical competence that might help them in their first year of work. My return would be their descriptions of ethical dilemmas in practise. When applying for economic support to travel expenses, they formulated their motivation for participating in the supervision and research as follows:

“In our education, as well as in our group assignment, we have had much theory about ethical competence. Now we want to see if and how we manage to translate this knowledge into practical work with human beings, and whether supervision may help us to effectuate this”.

My following upon these ‘students’ into their first year of practice had three intentions: to get information on the basic dilemmas in the practice of care in order to - if necessary - make adjustments in form and content in the teaching of ethics. Secondly to explore whether supervision could help to translate ethical theories into practice. And finally, if possible, to verify the often claimed need for supervision in the first year of work in the field of caring. The five informants consented to my use of the material in my research project and have been continuously informed about the investigation. After the supervision ended, I have had three meetings with the informants. The first took place in 1997, the next in 1998 and the last in 1999. At all meetings, the informants expressed how they missed the supervision and especially writing the letters. The task of writing forced them to reflect over their work.

### **form and content**

The supervision consisted of:

- Six individual sessions, in which each social educator discussed the dilemma already presented in her letter sent to me prior to each session.
- Six double sessions, in which we discussed theories, elected and presented by me.

Although the analysis is based on the written letters, the dialogues and groups sessions supported me with a wider background for my ongoing understanding, analysis and further investigation.

### **material**

The material of my analysis consists of letters sent to me before each session. With five informants and six sessions of supervision this should have amounted to 30 letters. One of the informants began working a half-year later, which sets the amount to 28 letters. The letters are filed at my personal archive.

The material presents at least two more or less distinguishable levels, most often conflated: the narrative itself and the informant's reflections over the narrative and over herself as part of it. With *at least* two levels, I mean to underline the characteristic of narratives; they are not photographic representations of the incidences reported. Something goes unnoticed; something does not enter the level of language and there is something that belongs to the situation itself. The narratives are written distant in time and space from the situations they describe. And there are unaccountable factors that make every situation and relation unique, unrepeatably and beyond reach of rational reach. This represents, however, the everyday scenario of care work. With this in mind I have decided that they are important messages in the dialogue between practice and theory.

In the introduction I elaborated on the prevailing methodological and theoretical approaches of the project; here I shall present some basic considerations made when processing my analysis of the supervision project.

## Ethics as Presupposition and as Hermeneutic Spiral

Traditionally, ethics is separated into two main parts: the ethics of principles and the ethics of specificity. Beginning with clarifying the basic principles, the concrete problems of the 'special' ethics may be forgotten. Beginning with the concrete problems, it is easy to forget that there is no clean blackboard in ethical matters.

"If we do not have any ethical principles or representations, we may not even discover that we are presented with an ethical problem in a concrete situation.

Any work with material problems presupposes a greater or lesser arsenal of ethical principles and ideas” (Christoffersen, 1997: 14).

The problem is that the ethics of principles has been regarded as the primary of the two. Consequently, ethics has followed the common way of producing knowledge. Due to this inequality between theory and practice in ethics, I have chosen to give the empirical analysis structural and analytical priority. It is the questions and problems of practice that direct my research. On the other hand, I am aware that I am no *tabula rasa* myself. Following Haraway, Gremmen, Christoffersen, I presume that I as a researcher have an obligation to state my ethical standpoint to the best of my knowledge. I am, however, not able to account for every single item that through the years has been included in and excluded from my baggage. What I do know is the great influence the ethics and philosophy of K. E. Løgstrup has had on my understanding and consequently on the way I define and analyse the ethical questions and dilemmas of the material.

I got my education at the Faculty of Theology in Aarhus, where Løgstrup was professor. The aim of Løgstrup is by means of the phenomenological perspective to overcome the split between theory and practise. He maintains that situations, contradictions and conflicts in ordinary peoples existence are fundamental for ethical theory. Løgstrup’s ethical approach is accordingly based on the life experience and not on an objectifying distance to the life we live. My ethical baggage thus coincides with the socio-historical-culture approach mentioned below in that it focuses not on the individual being but on how human beings create and are created interacting with their surrounding. I have chosen to present a summary of the ethics of Løgstrup because of the influence it has had on my own ethical understanding. In addition Løgstrup’s ethics has been brought into the caring field by the Norwegian philosopher Kari Martinsen. In the following I shall present the key concepts of Løgstrup’s ethics, to which I shall return in chapter 4.

### **trust**

According to Løgstrup we are the life and destiny of each other. We have, he says, a contrasting, curious and unconscious notion that a person constitutes his own world and that the encounter between persons therefore means that we only touch upon the other now and then. This is not so. In fact we constitute one another’s world and destiny which in fact is highly disquieting and maybe



the reason to our ignorance of it (Løgstrup, 1971: 17). A characteristic of human life is, Løgstrup maintains, that we trust one another. Human life could hardly survive without this trust. Our life would be impaired and wither away if we were in advance to distrust each other. To trust however is to deliver oneself into the hands of another. Trust and self-surrender is a fundamental part of life.

“Life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person surrenders something of himself to the other person either by trusting him or asking him for his trust” (Løgstrup, 1971: 19).

By our very attitude we shape one another’s world. This trust is given prior to anything else. Life cannot be lived without it. Whereas trust is basic, distrust is the absence of trust. Lack of trust is with the expression of Løgstrup ‘the deficient modus of trust’. Trust is however not our own making, it is given.

### **the ethical demand**

Every meeting implies a non-verbal ethical demand. It springs from the trust always present and primary in relations and its message is accordingly ambiguous:

- I have to take care of the other.
- I cannot take the other’s own responsibility for himself away from him.

The ethical demand is as radical as it is unspoken. One of Løgstrup’s well known metaphors is “holding another person’s life in one’s hand”. This dependence, and the power inherent in it, requires that we use whatever ability we have to free the other person from his confinement and to give him the widest possible vision. “The challenge rests on the assumption that I know better than he does what is best for him” (Løgstrup, 1971: 21). This demand forbids, however, any attempt, even for the others own sake, to rob him of his independence. Responsibility for the other person must never neglect the other persons responsibility for himself (Løgstrup, 1971: 28-29). Communication always implies a risk for a person approaching the other in the hope of a response. This is, according to Løgstrup, the essence of communication and the fundamental basis of ethical life (Løgstrup, 1971: 18). The ethical demand

springs from what Løgstrup calls the ‘spontaneous or sovereign expressions of life’. By *spontaneous* Løgstrup means that what a human being does spontaneously, he does without enforcement; by *sovereign* that it is done without ulterior motives<sup>10</sup>.

### **‘spontaneous and sovereign expressions of life’**

Besides trust the most central of these is mercy and the immediacy of speech (Løgstrup, 1995: 113)<sup>11</sup>. They are basic existential conditions of life and carry as such every form of togetherness: “Co-existence stems from the spontaneous expressions of life, which are stronger than our experiences and our daydreams” (Løgstrup, 1971: 18). Ethics grow from these life expressions; they are pre-ethical in the sense that they are previous to any disagreement about the right thing to do (Løgstrup, 1997: 123). The sovereign life expressions have to be distinguished from circulating ‘thought-feelings’ as revenge, envy and narrow-mindedness. Absorbing our attention and making us circle around ourselves and our own feelings, these ‘thought-feelings’ stand in contrast to sovereign life expressions (Christoffersen, 1999: 34).

The sovereign life expressions originate from an anonymous power, which, belonging neither to you nor me nor to society, uphold our existence. These life expressions are hidden. We get to know them in only crisis, collision or conflict (Løgstrup, 1997: 114). They shape our identity and we experience them in their doubleness as both anonymous and personal. Breaking through our misconception that we owe our existence to our selves, they repeatedly take us by surprise. This comes close to a religious interpretation (Gunder Hansen, 1998: 161). While they have no organising power, they function as criteria. “Since life expressions carry all co-existence and all societal life, they are also an acid test of coexistence and societal life” (Løgstrup, 1997: 135).

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<sup>10</sup> Løgstrup in his later writings ceased to use the word ‘spontaneous’. It might mislead towards an inherent ability; that it is possible to train oneself into being more spontaneous (Gunder Hansen, 1998: 152).

<sup>11</sup> According to Gunder Hansen these three basic sovereign life expressions cannot be reduced to one. “Ethic and communication are intimately connected for Løgstrup in his ontology: entanglement. In trust and immediacy of speech we abandon ourselves to the other; in mercy we take the most radical consequence of the fact that the other abandons him self to us. This is the basic relation: the mutual abandonment, seen from two perspectives (Gunder Hansen, 1998: 157).

## **power**

Løgstrup considers power to be an elementary phenomenon. *Directly* it is always present in our interactions. *Indirectly* power is present in the consequences it has to other persons (Løgstrup 1997:11). He warns against distinguishing between influence and power since this would leave the former white and the latter black, thus concealing that there is power in influence. The reason that power is elementary is that both the one exercising power and the one experiencing it, who may be at several removes from each other, are not necessarily conscious about it (Løgstrup 1997:14). Since the existential reality is interdependency, it is not possible not to have power over the other. Any relation is in itself a relation of power whether it is the life or just the mood of the other that is in my hands. Since there is power in every relation between people, I am obliged to decide whether to use my power to his or my own good (Løgstrup, 1960: 65-66). Løgstrup distinguishes between interdependency as part of life itself and the individuality or will of the other that I do not possess, or decide over. There persists in other words a contrast between the status as independent and the primary condition of interdependence. The fundamental of ethics is thus not a spontaneous act of goodness; this would presuppose a life in mutual respect and independence.

Løgstrup's point of departure is the existential and ontological condition of interdependence (Christoffersen, 1999: 37). Unlike Beauvoir this premise of existential sameness does not lead him to question the norm of human being. Both of them, however, link the personal with the political. Although Løgstrup did not deal with the question of sexual difference, his open mind, combined with his way of disentangling new problems, has encouraged me to go on searching when his suggestions no longer seem to suffice.

## **Woman as Research Object and Subject**

The informants and the researcher are women in that, to use the key concept of Søndergaard, the sign on their body is female. The basic question in this connection is whether it is possible for a woman to interpret the femaleness she is part of herself, and if so, how this can be done. The word Woman is both a universal and a particular concept. The Norwegian linguist Drude von der Fehr maintains the necessity of using universal terms.

“For feminists, the word ‘Woman’ is necessary as a universal or a type, not because we can use it ahistorically or cross-culturally to connote common female properties, but because without such an abstraction (a category or type) we cannot understand the individual and the particular” (Von der Fehr, 1995: 57).

Even if the content of the conception of Woman is constantly changing due to history and culture, the universal terms remain necessary, because we cannot think or act intentionally without them. We need the commonality of concepts. This is a realistic point of view, from which it does not necessarily follow “that the real resides in the particular thing” (Von der Fehr, 1995: 57)<sup>12</sup>. Von der Fehr underlines the importance of realising how types or perceptual experiences and the choice of abstractions relate to our daily life and the politics we choose in order to change it.

To understand the individual and yet general in femaleness, the Norwegian anthropologist Jorun Solheim has suggested that the only possibility of being a subject is to also become an object for oneself. As women, we have to be alienated to our own femaleness in order to interpret and understand it. This is possible, Solheim claims, since there is no single cultural femaleness. It is an abstraction, of which we represent different versions. Furthermore, we are not identical with ourselves; we represent contradictory identities (Solheim, 1990: 41). According to Solheim, there is a difference between knowing femaleness from within as an immanent unreflected reality and knowing about it from without through a critical distance and self-reflection; the difference pertains in knowing i.e. realising what we know. It is in the meeting of these two positions - subject and object for each other and ourselves - that the theory of feminism evolves (Solheim, 1990: 46). Following the stories of the informants, it will become apparent how the informants treat themselves as both subjects and objects. They look at themselves from within and from without, thus enabling me to make an analysis. Without this ambiguity it would have been impossible. As it is, it has just been extremely difficult.

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<sup>12</sup> Teresa de Lauretis distinguishes in Alice does - N:T, 1984 between *woman* as representation “a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses in Western cultures” and *women* as experience, “the real historical beings who cannot yet be defined outside of this discourse formation, but whose material existence is none the less certain” (ibid: 5). Rose Braidotti refers to this decisive distinction and I shall return to this issue in chapter 6.

The researcher has been both subject and object in this process. It has been an advantage of being of the same sex as the informants, but it has also been a stumblingblock. The article of Kathy Davis and Ine Gremmen: In search of Heroines, 1998, has encouraged me to state this as part of the process. They describe how their desire in different topics to view their female informants as heroines threatened to impede their research by *going native*, as they call it. From this experience they argue that to take women's experiences seriously requires that it be put in a broader cultural and social context of gender and power relations. This may include a critical stance to the informants in the interest of understanding their situation more adequately (Davis and Gremmen, 1998: 134). "It is part and parcel of our commitment to validate our informant's experiences, to situate the experiences in the context of gender and power relations, and to engage in self-critical reflection about ourselves as researchers" (Davis and Gremmen, 1998: 149).

This requires that both the informants and the researcher perspective be taken seriously. From this Davis and Gremmen draw two conclusions:

- Taking the informant seriously is not simply a matter of normative commitment. It often involves painful encounters, not always pleasant but providing the possibility of taking both informants and oneself seriously.
- Feminist ideals are not only at odds with our informant's ideals but also with one's own. "Our desire for perfect informants mirrors our desire to be perfect researchers" (Davis and Gremmen, 1998: 150). This means that to acknowledge and accept the researcher's own imperfection is a step towards acknowledging the imperfections of the informants.

Like Davis and Gremmen, I set out to look for feminine heroines who could provide ethical practice from which I could criticise the universal ethical approach. This again sent me into turmoil when it did not work out quite that way. It was of little help that I, through my academic education, have been trained into what Donna Haraway name the 'god tricks' (above: 18). The ability to see is flawed in the process of *becoming* a woman, which does not change easily. Accordingly, the process has been exciting, painful, exhausting and at times deeply frustrating, as if I was at war with the whole world including my own ongoing construction.

## The Socio - Historical - Cultural Approach

In his book Voices of the Mind, 1991, the psychologist James Wertsch presents a method that has supported the analysis of this material. He maintains that there is a tendency in psychological research, especially in the U.S.A. to “examine human mental functioning as if it exists in a cultural, institutional and historical vacuum. Research is often based on the assumption that it is possible, even desirable, to study the individual, in isolation” (Wertsch, 1991: 2). This is often justified by the need to simplify the problems before we can be able to understand how the cultural, historical and institutional variables enter the picture. Instead, Wertsch suggests a socio-cultural approach, which covers a broad field of theories with the common aim to perceive and understand human beings, culture and history as always partite and constitutive in a mutual process of interdependency. The intention of such an approach is to recognise the essential interrelation between these processes and their cultural, historical and institutional setting.

“Whenever action is given analytic priority, human beings are viewed as coming in contact with and creating their surroundings as well as themselves through the action in which they engage” (Wertsch, 1991: 8).

Fundamental for the socio-cultural approach is that it wants to describe human action. It assumes that action is mediated and cannot be separated from the environment in which it takes place. Attempts to focus exclusively on actions, persons or mediational means in isolation are a misunderstanding. *Mediational means* only give meaning as part of an action. It is, according to Wertsch, the most important contribution given by Vygotsky and Bakhtin that “mediated action is an irreducible unit of analysis, and the person(s)-acting-with-mediational-means is the irreducible agent involved” (ibid: 20). Wertsch is thus critical to the tendency of focusing on language and systems of signs in isolation from mediation since it undermines that action and *mediational means* mutually determine each other (Wertsch, 1991: 119).

This methodological approach has helped me to cling to the interdependency between person, action and milieu when other approaches have tempted me to simplify either by falling into the trap of categorising, or into the trap of analysing the themes of the informants without seeing the specific details of every informants actions in relation to their surroundings and

themselves. In other words, this approach has helped me to hold on to the question of how the meanings of sexual difference are created and constituted in our practice.

## The Process of Analysis

The work of analysis has been processed over years and has been influenced by reading, experience, critics, but most of all; it has taken time to actually realise what I found. An experience parallel to the one described by Jorun Solheim: “Years went from when we discovered this connection (between food and femaleness) till we realised that we had discovered it” (Solheim, 1990: 44). This is due to the ‘multilayeredness’ of the process: the informant, the actual situated case involving other persons, her text, herself, the situation of supervision with me the researcher in a constant process with texts to understand texts. The awareness of this I owe to feminist theory. Following Wertsch’s recommendation to give actions analytical priority, theories and literary examples contributing to this intention have been preferred and are accordingly introduced along with the narratives of the informants. In the process, theorists of sexual difference like Grosz, Braidotti, Gatens, and Diprose came up as the most productive. They seem to grasp the materiality of the texts, maybe because most of them focus on the ‘bodily roots’ of the thinking process.

## Presentation

The individual narrative is presented in relation to the theme formulated by each informant herself. Four informants formulated their main dilemma already in the first letter, while the fifth, more concerned about her identity as a social educator, did not. Each narrative is the result of a selection that again already is the result of an analysis. The following three themes are, in my interpretation, common and central to all five social educators:

- Paternalism and Non-Intervention

- ‘Nearness’<sup>13</sup> and Distance
- Limits and Integrity (Autonomy)

The dilemmas are evaluated differently in each narrative due to the difference in personality, identity, working situation, clients’ etc. Not all themes are equally central or carry the same meaning in the different narratives. A fundamental discovery of the analysis is how the dilemma of paternalism and non-intervention is superior, setting the stage on which the other dilemmas are played out. The presentation is divided into three:

- The narrative as it evolves throughout the letters according to my editing. As far as possible I have tried to use or come close to the informant’s own formulations and definitions.
- A contextual preliminary analysis of this narrative in its socio-historical cultural context.
- Presentation of different theories to understand the ‘multilayeredness’ of the narratives.

The informants and the clients are anonymised by pseudonym. ‘Naming’ them by use of one letter has been avoided since this easily could be conceived as both objectifying and neutralising. To use the first name *or* the last name could also give wrong associations either in the direction of familiarity or distance. On recommendation of my supervisor Kjetil Hafstad, I am using both the first and the last name. Even if this at times may sound tedious, I find that substituting pseudonyms for abbreviations became justified in that the informants and clients became more alive.

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Nearness’ is a translation of ‘nær’. ‘Nær’ indicates the opposite of being at a distance. The meaning of the word itself can not be translated into English without interpretation. I hope to make the meaning more clear in the analysis.



## Structure

### I: Paternalism and Non - intervention:

In Grete Jeppsens formulation: “The balance between non-invention and paternalism: this is what I get to feel on my body every day”.

### II: Limits and Integrity:

In Susanne Bjørnsens formulation: “How to take care of and promote the rights of young people to autonomy and integrity while at the same time doing my job in relation to setting limits and correcting behaviour?”

### III: ‘Nearness’ and Distance:

In Liv Fjeldviks formulation: “How to create good relations without it being too ‘near’ for the weaker part in the relation?”

### IV: ‘Nearness’ and Distance:

In Marie Englunds formulation: “How to give care which is ‘near’ and honest without it getting too private or too intimate?”

### V: Professional Identity

The fifth informant Tone Isaksen has not formulated them into a single dilemma. Her narrative combines all three themes focusing on her ethical identity as a social educator.

# I: The Narrative of Grete Jeppesen

## Paternalism and Non – intervention

“The balance between non-invention and paternalism: this is what I get to feel on my body every day”<sup>14</sup>. This is how Grete Jeppesen formulates her dilemma. It is closely connected to the client Lars Petersen and his situation, as he is the only client in this institution.

Lars Petersen is a man in his late thirties. He is diagnosed as autistic with a strong tendency towards self-damage. Two members of staff take care of him, one during the day, and one at night. The reason is “that he hits himself, and then the staff has to intervene and stop him from doing so. At first this is done verbally, and if in vain, the staff uses force to prevent him”. These situations often arise 25-30 times a day. The way they do it is either to throw him on his bed or onto the floor with his hands locked behind him and often with a knee in his back. When I in a supervision session ask for the background for this procedure, she says, that Lars Petersen may simply want more coffee. The staff has decided that due to his health he is allowed to drink only one thermos of coffee before lunch. When his cup is empty, he may begin to utter some sounds, and after that he starts hitting himself. The staff responds to his uttering with “harsh words as SHUT UP, sometimes it helps... maybe it is fear”. When it fails, he is thrown on the bed or the floor.

It is the *way* that he is forced down which makes Grete Jeppesen react. At first she tries to change the procedure. When it is her turn to do it, she asks the other colleague on duty to help. Her plan is that if they are two, each can take one side of Lars Petersen, and the force entailed will be reduced. Instead of helping her, the colleague takes over the situation saying that *he* is able to handle this (Lars Petersen) alone. Grete Jeppesen writes: “From what I have seen so far, a macho culture rules. By this I refer to the fact that it is mostly men that work here, and they seem to believe that one has to prove who is the boss. It is as if they think that this authority has to be achieved by inducing fear”. Some of the male staff talks as experts. They know how to handle Lars Petersen, and have accordingly no problems with him at all. Moreover, one of

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<sup>14</sup> This is a direct translation of an Norwegian expression that comes close to a metaphor: ‘dette er noe jeg virkelig får å føle på kroppen hver dag’. I shall return to the connection between body and language in chapter 2.

them “told me the most incredible things he could make Lars Petersen do. He (Lars Petersen) is just like a kid, he (the colleague) told me. Since he himself had experience with raising his own children, he had no problems with tackling Lars Petersen”.

As time goes by, Grete Jeppesen reflects on whether one’s conception of the human being<sup>15</sup> is reflected in one’s values, attitudes, opinions and actions. If this is the case, she does not understand how she, who rejects Descartes’ mechanical conception of the human being, can use such behavioristic methods. “Does this mean that I in fact do not know what conception I have?” This again leads her to reflect on structures and routines. She herself needs a certain form of structure and routine as to when she is going to work and when she is going to get salary, and from this argumentation she concludes “that we all have to work according to a certain structure may be good for Lars Petersen. I think that the conception of the human being is expressed ‘by looking into the argument behind and how it is performed’ ” (the sentence is not quite logical, but I have chosen to leave it as it is because I think the language mirrors her confusion).

Grete Jeppesen reflects over a staff seminar where the intention is to go through the routines and goals set for the client. The seminar begins with a discussion of who Lars Petersen is to them, and who the staff are to him. Grete Jeppesen is very pleased with this positive opening and becomes accordingly disappointed when the most of the discussion throughout the seminar concerns what procedures they are going to use when he hits himself. Policy seems to be to strive for consistency and uniformity in their procedures in order to increase the security of the staff. Grete Jeppesen fears that this will end up “in an iron hand discipline where a member of the staff can just force Lars Petersen out of his chair and say to him: Now, you have to vacuum, and if he protests he is just forced to do it while the staff holds his one hand behind him so that he can’t hit”. It is frightening, she says, that behaviourism is the most frequently used tool used to regulate problems like this. She wonders whether the theory they have learned can be said to be free of values or whether it “is a typical male

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Conception of the human being’ is a direct translation of ‘menneskeopfattelse’, an often used Norwegian expression at least in the field of caring. ‘Menneske’ means a human being. As mentioned in the introduction ‘human being’ is an indication of the species. Although the human being comes in at least two different editions, the word ‘human being’ pretends to be neutral as to sex. Here Grete Jeppesen undoubtedly uses it in its neutral sense of including both sexes. However, as I shall demonstrate in chapter 3, the concept inheres a notion of a male norm. By using this word I want to indicate that this norm may be part of Grete Jeppesens ambiguity.

product, since it fits so well with the traditional male way of thinking... simple solutions... nobody reacts to using violence as means to get Lars Petersen to do what they have decided he should do, except me". The staff consists in eleven persons, of which two are women. Only Grete Jeppesen reacts to the violent methods used towards Lars Petersen. In a note she adds, that there are exceptions; an educated milieu therapist of the male sex quits his job, tired of working with men that only believe in *rationality*<sup>16</sup>.

During the seminar some of the staff mention that Lars Petersen has become more nervous since the two social educators have arrived. To this Grete Jeppesen comments: "It seems that our presence alone creates fear. When we moreover question their way of doing things, they of course feel insecure. Maybe they are disappointed too, since we have not given them other clear-cut solutions". Grete Jeppesen adds how she has been able to work differently even in situations where Lars Petersen was on the verge of hitting himself. Somehow she succeeded in getting him to cooperate with her and concludes: "What I am trying to say is that we have to investigate more closely the *way* we do things".

It is a problem for Grete Jeppesen that she so easily gets socialised into the existing culture and system of work, although she does not sympathise with it. It scares her that she so easily gets used to the standard procedures of tackling Lars Petersen by force. "I feel that I have to be very conscious about what I think. I easily accept things I don't like when I am not conscious about them". At the end of the year of supervision she again brings up her misgivings about the macho methods. "One night I was very scared and shocked over the way one of the staff treated the client I work on<sup>17</sup>. What scared me most was how terrified he looked when this staffmember talked to him...it is so bad that I was in turmoil a long time after. This is how I discovered that I had given up caring about things I should care about".

Grete Jeppesen ends her last letter by underlining that the school "puts too little emphasis on the responsibility one has when working. When one starts working, one discovers that the dilemma discussed in theory at school is part of everyday life, for example the dilemma of paternalism and non-

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<sup>16</sup> Rationality is often connoted to men. It is not clear whether this is Grete Jeppesen's expression or the milieu therapist's. The important thing is that it is used negatively, referring back to 'a traditional male way of thinking'.

<sup>17</sup> This expression 'work on' seem to indicate that Grete Jeppesen also comes to objectify her client.

intervention. But it is not easy to be aware of these dilemmas if it is not acknowledged that they are in fact dilemmas”.

## Contextual Analysis

Grete Jeppesen identifies her problem as the classical ethical dilemma between non-intervention vs. paternalism. The dilemma is central in any asymmetrical relationship from child/parent, client/professional and pupil/teacher to the more political question of whether UN or Nato is to intervene in another country or not. It concerns first of all *if* and *when* one is to intervene or not. In Grete Jeppesen’s narrative, however, it is *not* the classical dilemma that is at stake. In practice, the question is not *whether* they shall intervene or not, and the problems connected with this. This decision has been made in favour of intervention, of paternalism. The question is *what* they are going to do when Lars Petersen is hitting himself and *how* they can make him do what they have decided he shall do, e.g. vacuum. This becomes clear, when I ask *why* Lars Petersen hits himself. The answer includes the example of the coffee mentioned above, but more important, I learn of the situation in which this takes place. Both members of staff on duty spend most of the morning watching him. Spontaneously I comment that under such circumstances I too might be found hitting myself. Grete Jeppesen is, however, not interested in following me into any theoretical discussion. Without words she reproaches me for saying something so irrelevant. To her, the *way* Lars Petersen is put down is important. It is the *way* she wants to change.

So what has happened? Has the classical dilemma changed when transferred from theory to practice, or is practice something quite different from theory? And why is the *way* so crucial to her? Let’s follow her arguments step by step in order to trace why the *way* is so important to her. Even if they are deeply intertwined, three different layers are discernible:

- the *way* and culture
- the *way* and difference in body
- the *way* and theory

### **the way and culture**

The way Lars Petersen is tackled is a way to get respect and authority, which seemingly has to be won through inducing fear. This is done by means of more violence than necessary, rude language and the triumph of being able to make him do things. In her first letter Grete Jeppesen categorises this as part of a “macho-culture” and her description gives the impression that she is working with primitive men. It is that bad, she says *and* continues with describing how she likes the staff and how well they have received her!

The explanation seems to contain an ambiguity; on the one hand she wants to work in another way, on the other she finds herself socialised into the culture and the way used there. When I in a later session question her about the many forceful interventions she does not remember that there has ever been a problem. And yet at the end of the year she suddenly, by watching how Lars Petersen looks very frightened interacting with a staffmember, realises that she has overlooked something that she should have noticed. This is, as I shall argue below, connected to another ambiguity: that of ‘we’ and ‘them’, present in almost every institutional culture

### **the way and difference in body**

When Grete Jeppesen describes her dilemma she refers to her body: “this is what I experience on my body everyday”. This may be an underlining of the statement, a superlative, but it may just as well be a bodily expression of the materiality of the experience. She is also restrained. In a double way: her point is not taken *and* she is shoved aside. Neither her suggestion nor her body is of any use in the present situation. From the male staff’s point of view, the reason must be that she cannot handle it i.e. Lars Petersen alone. That she intends to introduce another way of doing things is not understood. For Grete Jeppesen this is part of “macho culture”. There is no understanding for the idea of an alternative way of doing things.

Grete Jeppesen maintains that there are *two ways* of doing things. The ‘*macho*’ way of doing things already in place has been reinforced at the seminar. She fears that the consensus on procedures will lead the male staff to push Lars Petersen up from his chair and force him to do the household duties while holding one of his hands on his back to prevent him from hitting either himself or them. This is one way of doing things. Another way is *her way*. She describes how she twice, even at times when Lars Petersen has been in a difficult mood, has succeeded in getting him to co-operate and to do his duties

of housework without using force. From such experiences Grete Jepsen concludes that the *way* things are done is important and necessary to look into.

The problem is that she and her female colleague by their very presence manage to make the staff insecure and - according to the staff - they also make Lars Petersen more nervous. This is an indication of why *their way* of working does not gain respect or influence. It is different, as their body is different, a difference that signifies lower value just by being different. This raises intriguing questions that I shall discuss below. Here I shall follow how this other bodily way of working makes Grete Jeppesen question the grand theory's universality.

### **the way and theory**

When Grete Jeppesen discovers that she is working in a way in conflict with her conception of the human being, she tries to find an answer. She reflects over the need for structure and admits that she also has such a need. This argument is used to defend why she lets herself be socialised into the working culture of her colleagues. However, when the seminar enforces the structures in order to make Lars Petersen perform his duties of housework, she fears in *which way* this will be performed. In other words, it is not the structures themselves, but the *way* they are conducted, which she finds to be wrong. Consequently, the explanation of her socialisation is not to be found in the structure, but in how the structure is performed. Whether she realises this or not, is not clear. Anyway, she questions whether the theory, in which she is trained, is in fact a male product. Since it supports men's way of performing their work, it cannot be neutral as to values. This offers another perspective on why she is working at odds with her values. The theory in which she is trained is laden with values that sustain a way of working at odds with the way and values in which Grete Jeppesen wants to work. By following Grete Jeppesen in her insistent maintenance of the importance of the *way*, the link between the way of working and theory/knowledge production has become obvious.

As regards the question raised by Grete Jeppesen, I shall use the theory of the Australian philosopher Elisabeth Grosz, presented in her book *Volatile Bodies*, 1994. Grosz belongs to the feminists of sexual difference who are concerned about the body as the *lived* body. On the one hand the body is a signifying and signified body, and on the other it is an object of social coercion, legal inscription, sexual and economic exchange. The body cannot be understood as a neutral screen, a biological tabula rasa on which masculine and

feminine traits are projected. The body is sexually specific and as such it codes the meanings projected onto it in sexually determinate ways (Grosz, 1994: 18). Thus, feminists of sexual difference including Grosz do not conceive of the body as pre-cultural, pre-social or pre-linguistic, but rather as a social and a discursive object, bound up in desire, signification, and power. In chapter 2 I shall present the more epistemological basis of her theory.

## The Body of Sexual Difference and Grete Jeppesen's Way of Working.

As sexually specific the body codes the meanings projected onto it in sexually determinate ways. When Grete Jeppesen defines her problem as the classical universal dilemma of intervention vs. non-intervention, she adds using a metaphor: “that is what I get to feel on my body every day”. In the introduction to Volatile Bodies, 1994, Grosz argues:

“The body is an ally of sexual difference...it helps to problematize the universalist and universalizing assumptions of humanism through which women’s - and all other groups - specificities, positions and histories are rendered irrelevant or redundant” (Grosz, 1994: ix).

This is exactly what Grete Jeppesen is experiencing. In other words, as sexually specific her body is an ally against the universalism that school and theories have taught her. Her body is telling her that something is wrong. She ends up saying that the school has to teach the students more about the responsibility of work. The universal dilemmas are in fact real, but difficult to recognise. Moreover, she needs someone to reaffirm that they are dilemmas. This can be interpreted as a defence for the fact that she feels socialised into the ‘macho’ culture way of working. It is however also a signal that her body is not only an ally. It is also an enemy in the sense that it is deceiving her. When she discovers that she has been socialised into the culture that she despises and has named ‘macho’, she blames herself for not being conscious of what is going on.



In other words, Grete Jeppesen (her body)<sup>18</sup> has been socialised into numbness. It is difficult to believe what one's body says when it is contradicted by the body of 1. culture, 2. structure, and 3. theory. Like some incest victim she has been able to cut her body off, and has for a long time not felt anything. She thought she had another conception of the human being, but discovers that she - her body - is performing as if she has the same conceptions as her colleagues. This indicates that it is neither the universal dilemmas nor the responsibilities of work, which the school has failed to teach. The failure is that it has not taught or discussed whether different ways of working may stem from sexual different embodiments.

Grete Jeppesen's insistence on the importance of the *way* leads her to question the neutrality of the theory in which she has been trained. All along she implicitly gives information about how bodies construct each other in interaction. Her body changes due to the culture embodied in her male colleagues. Lars Petersen's body changes according to whom he is interacting with, and even the male colleagues are bothered by the presence of the female social educators. This confirms Grosz's theory. The body is not a material body on the one side, and its historical and cultural representations on the other side. Inscriptions and representations constitute and produce the body simultaneously.

“One sex cannot be simply reduced to and contained by one's primary or secondary sexual characteristics, because one's sex makes a difference to *every* function, biological, social, cultural, if not in their operation then certainly in significance” (Grosz, 1994: 22).

Consequently, sexual difference does not allow an outside position. “There is no Tiresian position, no position outside of or midway between the two sexes, from which to objectively analyze them” (Grosz, 1994: 191-192). The theory of sexual difference however suggests several perspectives: how is the *way* of working related to the sex of the body; and how is it related to individuality; what is due to the intermediation and constellation of the different relationships; and how is Lars Petersen contributing to the interdefinition in the different relations? Not knowing about sexual difference Grete Jeppesen thinks that there is an outside position. This allows her to label the male way as

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<sup>18</sup> In chapter 2 I return to the problem of the word 'body' and the problem of language.

‘macho-culture’ without labelling her way of working. This hinders her to see that her male colleague may find her way of working just as inadequate. Knowledge of sexual difference would have her reflecting what is best for the client, who after all is also male. Is he in fact best served by being restrained forcefully? The theory of sexual difference has made me consider the possibility that a male in our culture feels less humiliated being restrained forcefully by other males than being subjected to Grete Jeppesen ‘female’ treatment. On the other hand I find it important to find ways of interactions that prevent use of force.

The story of Grete Jeppesen has a post scriptum. A year after the supervision had finished, Grete Jeppesen told me that she and her female colleague went on a weekend tour with Lars Petersen and a male colleague. Something that in itself supports the idea that her *way* of doing things also has encouraged them to find creative alternatives to drinking coffee in custody of two staff members. After experiencing how Lars Petersen changes in relation to and interaction with the social educators, the male colleague expressed his admiration for the *way* his female colleagues work.

Throughout her letters Grete Jeppesen is tacitly asking for a theory that can support *her way* of working. The crucial question is whether a theory, supporting her way of working will change the subject/object relation, or whether it will be restricted to offer a *softer* way of doing the same. Accepting the theory of Gatens and Grosz, there is no *tabula rasa*-body. The sex of the body makes a difference to everything. Hence, the male colleague cannot just imitate Grete Jeppesens way, as vice versa. The theory of sexual difference underlines a need for a greater tolerance for other ways of working and thinking. The task is not to find a new neutral place or theory, but to open up for differences.

“Sexual difference entails the existence of a sexual ethics, an ethics of the ongoing negotiations between beings whose differences, whose alterities are left intact but with whom some kind of exchange is nonetheless possible” (Grosz, 1994: 192).

But now I am running ahead of myself. Let me present the next narrative.

## II: The Narrative of Susanne Bjørnson

### Limits and Integrity

“How to take care of and promote the rights of young people to autonomy and integrity while at the same time doing my job in relation to setting limits and correcting behaviour?” Susanne Bjørnson is working at an institution where they monitor young people between 13 and 18. The young people are required to attend the institution because of non-adjustment to society. In other words, they have to change their behaviour. This is the background for Susanne Bjørnson’s dilemma.

She is constantly met with demands to make decisions of her own. The reason is that it is important that the young people know how to behave. Susanne Bjørnson finds it difficult to make her own decisions when two of her colleagues are giving her different advice; both reasonable but not matching her own ‘gut feeling’ about the case in hand. At the same time she is expected to be loyal to the decisions made by her colleagues, which she also finds reasonable although she adds “but I have experienced situations where my loyalty to my colleagues have cost me my loyalty to the young people. There are situations in which I think that the integrity of the young people has been violated at the same time as I am expected to sustain the decisions of *the adults* (this is the researcher’s italics). It is in situations like these that I feel that my integrity also is violated”.

One day Susanne Bjørnson makes a decision of her own and in accordance with her integrity, but not loyal to the decisions of her colleagues. A young man wants to visit his girl friend. Since he has behaved so well lately, she decides to give him permission to do so, even if this is against the normal rules. He does not return in time. The blame is put on Susanne Bjørnson.

Susanne Bjørnson describes how at her job “the men work all in the same way. No matter which colleagues they work together with, they work in their own style. Women, on the other hand run around and put out fires”. She presents herself as one that has always done whatever was expected, which she links to the “ ‘female syndrome’: to satisfy everybody, to try to meet all expectations and be friends with everybody”. This is a description that matches Susanne Bjørnson in general and not only at work. “I think this is ‘Susanne Bjørnson in a nutshell’. I experience that at work I try to do whatever is expected of me, and that I change according to which colleague is at work”.

When she is alone with stand-ins and she is in charge of decisions, she does not think that it works out any better.

Half a year later, she is burned out and depressed. Especially over a young man that has aggressively argued that she resembles his mother. Susanne Bjørnson explains that the staff has tried to make rules around the young man more flexible, but it has not helped. Then they made them strict again, without any success. This situation makes her write “It is not easy!!!! There are situations where I feel that I cannot get ‘near’ the young people, and the more I say, the more provoked they seem to be. I notice that it makes me withdraw and avoid getting involved again. To be stuck in a situation of conflict over a longer period of time without seeing any progress is very hard”.

In her last letter Susanne Bjørnson reflects over how at school she was very preoccupied with the right of every human to be valued as an individual person. She remembers thinking how quite simple this would be to achieve, but realises now that it is not that easy. After a year of supervision she returns to her main dilemma with a quite identical formulation: “How to deal with the right of the young people to autonomy and integrity while at the same time doing my job which seem to consist in setting limits and correcting behaviour?”

## Contextual Preliminary Analysis.

As in the case of Grete Jeppesen, putting the young persons into institution has already made the decision of intervention. The question is how to make them behave i.e. how to get them to adjust into the norm of society? Susanne Bjørnson’s theoretical conception is that every human being has a right to be as an individual. In practise, this amounts to a dilemma not only in relation to the young people, but also in relation to her colleagues. Like the youth she has to learn to adjust to the decisions of the adults.

It is her body, more specifically her gut instinct that signals when her integrity is violated. At last when she finally makes a decision of her own she is criticised. How come? In the supervision she lists her arguments for making the decision: a. if the young man was to keep up his good behaviour, he had to feel that it made a difference, b. every person should be handled individually.

Since her argument seems to be reasonable, and she furthermore has been challenged to make her own decision, the question is what is going on?

The interesting thing is that she does not mention her gut feeling, thus indicating that it arises only when her integrity - and the one of the young people - is violated. This interpretation is supported by her not mentioning her gut feeling at all: it has been in accordance with her decision and her rational arguments. In the supervision session, Susanne Bjørnson maintains the good reasons for making her decision, but seems much subdued by the whole situation. While prepared to take responsibility for her decision, she is not prepared for the blame and guilt placed upon her by her colleagues. Maybe the *way of working* which she describes can give us a clue of what is going on.

Susanne Bjørnson reflects over the way of working, but in quite different terms to the narrative of Grete Jeppesen above. She describes two different ways of working:

- The women at this institution, herself included, change colour according to which man is at work. The men work in their own style whoever their colleague might be. To explain why she herself does as her female colleagues, Susanne Bjørnson refers to the female syndrome that is at work also in her private life. This *is* Susanne Bjørnson in a nutshell. In other words, she does not blame the men for this. Even when alone and in charge, she cannot make it work any better.
- Women run around and put out fires. To understand this metaphor, we need to remember that in almost every institutional system there is a separation between 'we' and 'them'. The presupposition for both parts is to accept this. The costs of being found annulling this is high: the loss of respect from both parts.

In my effort to understand this complexity of ways of working and asymmetries at issue, I have found the metaphor of 'no-mans land' useful. This is the name for the area separating two fighting parts. It is a dangerous area, since it is impossible to see who is an enemy and who is an ally. This is also the area where love a la Romeo and Juliet arise. If they had known each other's kinship, this would most certainly not ever have happened, and yet it happens all the time. But this romantic parallel is not the issue here. Instead I ask the reader to imagine no-mans land as the area between the 'we' of the staff and the 'them' of the client, the young people. This is the area where women put out fires. When working, women are described as 'chameleons' i.e. taking

colour from their male colleague. Does this indicate that they do not disagree, discuss, and criticise or that they only do so within the frame of reference the male colleague is setting? At any rate the women are not just performing as shadows; they are busy running around while putting out fires. This signals that fires are lit or burning all the time. How do these fires come about?

According to Susanne Bjørnson's description, her male colleagues work in their own style no matter who the (female) colleague is. This seems to indicate that these fires originate between the male staff and the clients. Interpreting the fires to be a symbol of the confrontations between 'we' and 'them' clarifies why women cannot confine themselves to be chameleons. They have to put out the fires due to what Susanne Bjørnson calls the 'female syndrome'. Women have to meet the expectations of everybody, not only at work but also in general. By using the metaphor of 'no mans land' I mean to indicate that *how* women work is intimately connected to *where* they are working and *why* they are doing so.

In 'no man's land' one has to run to avoid getting shot - meaning taken hostage - by either side. In other words, women neither belong to the group 'we' nor to the group 'them'. In order to meet the expectation of both groups, they have no place of their own, or is it the other way around: because they have no place of their own, they take colour from others and put out fires? Anyway, all these factors point to the same thing: to be a chameleon and to put out fires are intimately connected: these roles leave no room for making decisions of one's own.

This brings us further in understanding what the problem with Susanne Bjørnson's decision consists in. Like her colleagues, she works partly as a chameleon, partly as a fire-woman. The day of her decision she is alone in charge and concerned as always about the integrity of the young people. The problem is *not*, what I thought for a long time, that she allows herself to see the young man not as only client, but also as a singular person in need of special treatment. This is what she and her female colleagues do all the time. The problem is that she makes a decision according to this conception. A contributing factor is most certainly that the young man treats her for what she is that day: in charge.

A problem with the decision she makes is obvious: it cannot be generalised. The danger is however that both groups will try to generalise, the 'we' group by saying that if he can, precedence has been made, and everybody may claim the same right. The 'other' group will say the same, and both groups

will be annoyed knowing that an exception is turning everybody against everybody within the groups themselves. This is as common as it is unrecognised by the institutional system (Skærbæk, 1988). However, 'a failure' like this is also what makes things happen, and changes come about in institutions as well as in society. Thus, this does not suffice to explain the problem with Susanne Bjørnson's decision. It points however at the main problem, so I shall pursue it a little further.

The group of 'we' and 'them' is based on generalisations, necessary in order to secure justice. In the case in question, the same rule of leave of absence goes for all clients. In order to get extra leave of absence the generalisation has to be broken, and the singular person has to be given priority. His or hers problems has to be so special that in order to secure justice for him or her, an exception has to be made. In prison a decision like the one Susanne Bjørnson makes could never be made by one of the 'we' group alone without fearing injustices, based on sympathies, feelings etc. Moreover, it would be very difficult to be prison-guardian if this was possible. What I mean to say with this parallel is that 'no man's land' is a land where a decision cannot be made. On the other hand, a decision has to be made here to secure justice. Suppose now that the problem is not the decision itself, but the person making it.

Susanne Bjørnson is not one of the 'we' group that day. She is in charge of the institution. A staffmember of the female sex whose way of working consists in taking colour from whoever is working, and in putting out fires, is not supposed to make decisions of her own. She is not able to. Therefore, it does not suffice that it is a decision build on rational arguments nor that Susanne Bjørnson takes responsibility for her decision. The problem seems to be the sex of the decision-maker. Susanne Bjørnson's colleagues cannot respect as valid a decision made by a woman, who normally works as a 'chameleon' and a 'fire-woman'. That is why they blame Susanne Bjørnson. According to her, she has made a decision based on solid arguments in accordance with her philosophy of protecting the integrity of the individual youngster. On the other hand, when she admits that she does not function any better alone, she indicates that the stereotype of females is integrated also in her.

Susanne Bjørnson describes a third way of working which seems to involve yet another perspective on how the sexual different embodiment works. I refer to the reproach she meets from the youngster that she resembles his mother. To find ways of understanding how come this makes such an

impression on Susanne Bjørnson, it is necessary to see the constituent parts, each at a time:

- **the situation:** they have tried to adjust the rules to the youngster. To my question she reluctantly says that this has been done *without* informing him in accordance with the policy of the institution that “they (the young) should not have to experience defeat”. Is it possible that ‘mother’ is a metaphor for a person that changes rules and limits according to what she thinks this child can take? The good part is that it takes difference into consideration, the bad part is that one cannot meet expectations that are never formulated.
- **the interaction:** Susanne Bjørnson complains that she cannot get ‘near’ the young people. She has to endure staying out and watching a long-term conflict. In order to put out fires i.e. conflicts one has to be ‘near’. Thus a possible explanation is that ‘mother’ is a symbol for ‘nearness’. A ‘nearness’ that is felt to be an invasion, a transgression, since it always has a purpose: to find out what this youth needs and to change the rules accordingly – without letting him know.
- **way of working:** the young man scolds her for resembling his mother. Is a ‘mother’ a metaphor for a woman that does not take herself seriously enough to take a stand of her own? Instead she lurks around and meets the expectations of everyone (both the ‘we’ and the ‘them’) and no one in particular. In other words, is ‘mother’ a person that doesn’t make a difference to anything?

If this interpretation is appropriate, it is no wonder that Susanne Bjørnson is so upset. Nobody wants to be seen as an embodiment of ‘mother’. The labelling of ‘mother’ pinpoints another aspect of the way women and she herself work: it is in fact not work; it is just being a ‘mother’ with all the inherent negative connotations mentioned above.

According to Susanne Bjørnson's narrative, her dilemma between integrity and limits has shown itself to be not only a question of the clients but also of her herself. They are intimately connected. She tells about a split between the person she wants to be, in work and in private and the one she is. Without integrity of her own, and woman and mother have no such thing, she



cannot fight for the integrity of the clients. The question she leaves us with is: how to work ethically when marked by the sign of woman all over, at work and in private?

## Work and the Sign of Woman All Over

Susanne Bjørnson connects her description of how women work to the basic question of the female syndrome. To this end I find Sandra Bartky's perspective in Femininity and Domination, 1990, illuminating. Bartky reminds us that we all too often concentrate on the hard data of oppression and forget the more refined data, which again is due to the difficulty of seeing it. The consciousness of women is often afflicted with the category of confusion, in other words, a deficiency in categorising things. When she is not heard at meetings, is it then because what she says is not intelligent or because she as a woman cannot be taken seriously?<sup>19</sup> This makes it difficult to know where to direct one's energy: "the very possibility of understanding one's own motivations, character traits, and impulses is also at stake. In sum, feminists suffer what might be called "a double ontological shock": first, the realisation that what is really happening is quite different from what appears to be happening, and second, the frequent inability to tell what is really happening at all" (Bartky, 1990: 18).

This 'double ontological shock' seems to be a very precise description of what the informants in different ways are experiencing. In a culture like the Norwegian, where the general opinion as well as political correctness dictates that equality has been established, it may be difficult to believe what one sees and experiences. What is going on? Is *it* really happening? Or is *it* just my imagination? *It* means marginalization, ignorance, harassment. The blame for

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<sup>19</sup> On the basis of an analysis of videotaped therapy sessions with 14 couples, two Norwegian psychologists Aud Johanne Lindvåg and Siri Thoresen claim that both male and female therapists unintentionally discriminate the female in the couple. The researchers underline that they, socialised into taking women's and men's unequal social status for granted, only through long training learned "to 'see' what happens in the complex triadic interplay" (Lindvåg and Thoresen, 1994: 866). One of the things they 'saw' was: "When a woman asks for divorce she is most often interpreted as indecisive, whereas a man asking for the same is taken as decisive" (Lindvåg and Thoresen, 1994: 868, my translation). It seems as if therapists, the researchers say, recognise and validate the individual needs of the male while the female is seen as relational and with few or no individual needs.

experiencing something that cannot be real, is turned against oneself. According to Bartky, this has to do with alienation. With reference to Frantz Fanon's, 1971, Bartky lists three types of oppression that Fanon uses - without mentioning the oppression of women: stereotypes, cultural dominance and sexual objectification.

1. **stereotypes of women** threaten women's authority. Not only by means of their existence, but by means of their content. In the conventional image of women they deny their womanhood by doing something egocentric or independent. Women cannot be autonomous as men are supposed to be without giving up womanhood. This 'truncated self' is not only created out there in magazines, but within myself, as a part of myself. I find parts of me at war with other parts (Bartky, 1990: 24-25).

This seems to fit the experience of Susanne Bjørnson. She describes - and conceives of herself - as one who always meets the expectations of all other people. In public at work, and in private life: this is Susanne Bjørnson in a nutshell. According to Bartky, the stereotype - by Susanne Bjørnson named 'the female syndrome' - prevents her from maintaining her integrity. Susanne Bjørnson is not at all blaming the outside world, in this case her male colleagues. She alone is to blame for the split in herself, or to put it with Bartky's words, she is at war with herself.

2. **cultural dominance.** Contrary to the colonised black people, women do not possess an alternative culture, a sort of 'innate' culture. "However degraded or distorted an image of ourselves we see reflected in the patriarchal culture, the culture of our men is still our culture" (ibid: 25). In some degree women are similar to a colonised people, but not in all: women have never been more than half a people. This lack of cultural autonomy has several consequences for an understanding of the conditions of women. Contrary to a colonised people women have no memory of 'a time before', a time before women were subjected.

This perspective reveals another layer in the understanding of Susanne Bjørnson. Due to the lack of cultural autonomy, there is no way out of her dilemma. Her way of being is caught up in the female syndrome. She does not know any other way of being than to meet the expectations of other people. At

work this way of being is reflected in how she takes colour from whichever male colleague is at work. Accordingly, she is split between the female syndrome and a universal abstract system deciding values and culture. She belongs to the group of women who have never been more than half a people. To be half a people means to have no memory of a time before. In other words, there is no tradition for working any other way, neither in Susanne Bjørnson herself nor in the milieu surrounding her.

3. **sexual objectification.** Just as workers can be alienated from their work, women can be alienated from their sexuality.

“Sexual objectification occurs when a woman’s sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her” (ibid: 35).

The problem is that one’s whole essence is identified with the body, and that the body in religious, metaphysical, and ordinary consciousness has been considered less worth, in fact less human than reason or personality. Sexual objectification has the characteristics of alienation. It involves normally two persons, one that objectifies and one that is objectified, but they may conflate in one and the same person: the woman becomes a sex object for herself and takes a position to herself as if being a man.

This helps to explain the violent reaction of Susanne Bjørnson when she is called ‘mother’. Apart from the descriptions above, mother is also ‘body’, nature, feeling; all that is opposite to the demands of a trained working woman. She is sexually objectified and denigrated as something of less value. But then, she is a woman. How to protest, how to decipher what is going on in the first place; these questions bring us back to Bartky’s challenge to look into the refined tactics of oppression.

Bartky’s analysis has helped to sort out some of many layers that I am a part of as a researcher. Here I am particularly referring to how for a long time I remained caught in the same denigrated vision of Susanne Bjørnson that she presents herself in. Is that really my clever student? The ontological shock seems to be part of women’s inescapable history and culture. The question that remains to be answered is: if recognition does not change anything, only

magnifies the depression, is the search for consciousness and reflection then some kind of masochism? Though different, there are common traits in the two narratives presented, which I shall summarise before attending to the questions raised by these.

## Common Traits in Grete Jeppesen's and Susanne Bjørnson's Narratives

### **other ways of working**

Both can be said to be in search of another way of working. In both stories, it is their body that signals that something is happening in the relation and the situation in which they or others are involved. Both are concerned about the integrity of their clients. Now, Grete Jeppesen does not use the word integrity either about herself or her client. It may be due to the fact that they are different persons and it may be because of the different milieus they are working within. In Grete Jeppesen's narrative it is important to notice that her definition 'macho-culture' especially is directed against un-educated men. In the story of Susanne Bjørnson, her colleagues have at least the same educational training as her and her question about integrity has to be seen in this context. Furthermore, it is easier to identify with people only a few years younger than one is than with a mentally handicapped person older than one is.

In spite of the differences, the narratives have much in common regards how the institutional system is constructed in relation to the clients. The young people and the mentally handicapped are both categorised as in need of change, of normalisation. Setting rules and limits according to which they are supposed to behave does this. This is as stated above not a question of intervention or non-intervention. The institution is in itself a sign of separation between the normal ones and the ones who are to be normalised. A 'we' and a 'them' have been constituted. Now, the 'we' is also split within: a young man quits working in Grete Jeppesen's institution, and her female colleague votes along with the men at the seminar.

Moreover, as demonstrated above, the female 'we' is split within itself. While Grete Jeppesen sees her compliance to culture as *her* weakness, she also manages to see it as due to a value-laden theory at odds with her values. While Susanne Bjørnson sees her way of working as *herself* in a nutshell, she also takes a decision in contradiction to this. Both of them postulate that another

way of working might support the dignity and integrity of the client at the same time as they are describing how this is connected to their own dignity and integrity.

## ‘Body Doubling’ and Interdefinition

As trained workers both Grete Jeppesen and Susanne Bjørnson are placed in the ‘we’ group, while their bodies remind them that they also belong to the group of ‘them’. As suggested above, they may even not belong in either group. This poses the question of how to understand the split incorporated in these two women? I shall return to Moira Gatens referred to in the introduction for her critic of the sex/gender scheme; this time for her theory on the image of ‘body doubling’ and the connected interdefinition. Referring to how body theorists have indicated the body image as basic for our social life, Gatens focuses on another important aspect of the body image: its ability to function as a seemingly independent entity. This body image is double in the sense that it allows us both *to imagine*, and *to reflect* over ourselves in our present situations; in other words, to be our own ‘other’. This implies the ability to project us into the future and back in time.

“We can be objects, for ourselves and to ourselves: recipients of our own sadism/masochism; esteem/disdain; punishment/reward; love/hate. Our body image is a body double that can be as ‘other’ to us as any genuine ‘other’ can be” (Gatens, 1996: 35).

Gatens explains how my experience of my own body is just as constructed as my experience of the body of the other. The privileged relation, which every individual has to his or her own body, does not include a privilege over how it is socially constructed. Even if my body is felt to be most private and my own, in times of sickness, alienation or vulnerability, I also feel the otherness of my own body. Gatens underlines that this is not to be confused with the alienation of the sixties or seventies which concerned the unreflected internalisation of norms and attitudes. Gatens refers instead to literature and movies and how they often represent doubling by use of the twin figure. Each twin mirrors and at the same time is complimentary to the other, one of them always playing the

dominant part. A similar dynamic is, according to Gatens, to be found in the gendered relation between the sexes.

“Each is deeply complicit in maintaining not only her or his *own* body image, but also that which it assumes: the body image *of the other*. Aggression requires submission, independence requires dependence, and sadism requires its masochistic counterpart. Each only ‘sees’ what is antithetical to it, that which is complementary, and this ‘seeing’ is itself socially constructed” (Gatens 1996: 36).

When every sex is at the same time both antithetical and complimentary to the other, the relation consequently demands deep complicity from both sexes. It involves mutuality and a necessary interdefinition absent in other types of social stereotypes. The experiences of Grete Jeppesen and Susanne Bjørnson seem to reveal yet another dimension in the light of this image of body doubling. The split in themselves mentioned above is at the same time part of an interdefinition: they describe their way of working as both antithetical and as complementary. What they do not recognise is how both parts in the relation are complicit in this interdefinition. Grete Jeppesen observes how terrified Lars Petersen looks when interacting with the male colleague. However, she does not see herself, just as the male colleague does not see himself. The same goes for Susanne Bjørnson. She does not recognise her share of the interdefinition that turns her into ‘mother’, even if she does give the necessary information that enables me to do so. This again seems to be linked to the fact that we have no privilege over our own construction in this interdefinition, forever processing. The American author and philosopher bell hooks<sup>20</sup> describes something strikingly familiar in her book: *Wounds of Passion, 1997*. Of the request of a psychotherapist she and her fiancée attend, they record their quarrels on tape. “I am shocked when we play the tape. Mack sounds so viciously violent. That does not surprise me. I am shocked by the sound of my voice. I sound like a ten-year-old girl” (hooks, 1997: 191).

The question that puzzles Gatens is: why is it that women themselves take active part in their own oppression? As mentioned above, both informants - supported by bell hooks - seem to say that we do not see or hear ourselves. For that purpose we need others or a tape recorder. But there is much more to

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<sup>20</sup> bell hooks writes her name with small letters.

say about this and I shall come back to this below in different ways and perspectives. Here it suffices to take note of Gatens' point as important. She constantly underlines the necessity of seeing the interconnectedness of the textual, the discursive and our concrete, material and sexed bodies. "The body's own text is 'written' upon by other bodies, other texts, and it in turn 'writes upon other bodies and other texts'" (Gatens, 1996: 38). This means that the feminist project cannot be transformed into a separatist strategy. In other words, Gatens is opposing the theorists who work towards an autonomous form of feminist subjectivity<sup>21</sup>. She argues that what is necessary is to recognise the interconnectedness and not to repeat the typical male insistence of autonomy. To leave the solipsism of autonomy it is necessary to address and to recognise the other other in our social relations. Since this is not connected alone to the frame of heterosexuality, Gatens argues the need to open up for both intra-sexual and inter-sexual relations.

According to Gatens, there is no meaning in the often-used sentence 'deep down I am quite another person'.

"The self only exists in the complex web of its varied relations – there is no 'above or beyond' of these relations, no apriori or transcendent 'I'. To posit a full female morphology inevitably involves addressing the phallic morphology of the male form" (Gatens 1996: 38).

This is beautifully portrayed in the movie: *You have got mail*. The two main characters become more and more in love when writing e-mails to each other. When they meet in real life, unaware that they are mailing partners, they also

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<sup>21</sup> The Norwegian psychologist Siri Erika Gullestad pleads in her book "Å si fra" (*To say no*), 1992, for the use of the concept 'autonomy' in a psychoanalytical object-relational framework. Her intention is to open up for self-decision and independence in relation to others. Gullestad argues that the conception of autonomy should be reserved for a certain modus of relation, a certain way of being that cannot be reduced to other concepts, thus autonomy is to say no in situation where one's own interest is different from that of the other's (Gullestad, 1992: 210). The problem in relation to my understanding is formulated by Gullestad herself, who maintains that "it does not make any sense to speak of autonomous self-representation if there has not been created a centre to take responsibility for own feelings and acts (Gullestad, 1992: 117). In other words, Gullestad does not question the definition underlying 'a responsible self' just as she is reluctant to see any relevance in sexual difference (Gullestad, 1992: 190). In this thesis I shall argue the absolute relevance of sexual difference in order to validate different ways of being and working, and thus different definitions of what it is to be 'a responsible self', and how this is created in interaction and interdefinition. To this end I hope to demonstrate the need of a philosophical - and ethical - approach that abolishes the opposition between subject and object.

get to like each other. However, the female main character becomes aware that the male main character is in charge of a book chain, slowly killing her little bookshop. She starts to despise him and, faced with her arrogance, he in turn begins bullying her. Both seek consolation in writing e-mails to each other about this terrible person they have recently met who has the ability to make them behave contemptuously. The movie reflects a common experience: I find myself behaving differently to different persons. Moreover, in some relations I dislike the person I experience myself to be and seek consolation for this in other relations. I shall return to this in chapter six.

The interdefinition at stake is influenced by a lot of other things: prejudices, prior knowledge, envy etc. When the other is diagnosed as stupid, a prisoner, religious, Serbian etc., I know how to think and act; I no longer need to be attentive to the individual person. Let me give a couple of examples to illustrate what I mean. When a convicted person enters prison, he may already have a long criminal record. In this it is stated how he is and what kind of person he is, and the new place treats him most often accordingly. When a naive prison chaplain tries to do otherwise it often turns out that the system is right. No one asks how he has turned out this way. Another example may sustain this point of view. A social worker told that as a fairly recently appointed leader of a welfare office she had had a consultation with a client, an elderly woman. It turned out very well, and she drove the woman home. Next day, she was told that this woman was famous for hitting the staff; in fact the staff considered her rather dangerous. Of course, the social worker says, next time she asked to see me, I was not available. It did not occur to this social worker, that she and the woman had made another interdefinition that in fact had turned out in favour of the client and also of her as a professional. In other words, if one is met with an expectation of fear that you might hit, it must be tempting to fulfil the expectation. This is not necessarily conscious. This interdefinition and all that influences it of presuppositions and forejudices may seem simple to decode, but in real daily life it is not.

Before I attend the question of how come this asymmetry is produced in the first place, I want to present some reflections of the Swiss author Max Frisch who, in his Tagebuch 1946-49, attends the theme of interdefinition and suppression, and thereby also the power of expectation to which I shall return.

“To a certain extent, we are what others, friends and enemies, take us to be. And vice versa. We are authors of the others. In a hidden and inevitable way



we are responsible for the face they put up; responsible not for their abilities, but for how they are developed. It is we that block the way of a friend whose stagnation worries us. Our conception that he is stagnating is yet another link in the chain that is slowly suffocating him. We wish for his change, a wish that we extend to all nations. And yet, we are the very last to change our opinion. We think that we are the mirror, and have seldom any idea to what extent the other for his part is mirroring our stagnated conception of the human being, are our creation, our victim” (my translation of Dagbogsblade, 1960: 14).

Frisch illustrates this by a story. In Andorra a young man lived. He was thought of as a Jew. Every day he met the stereotype of a Jew in the eyes of the Andorrans. Even the more radical Andorrans, who felt more sympathetic since he was a human being, despised the Jew for his abilities, his intellect e.g. The young man questioned himself: was he a Jew, did he think about money all the time, did he not love his native country? And more and more he had to admit, that he did think about money, and he did not love his native country. He died a terrible death that was long talked about although no one missed him or felt any pity. Until the day it came out what the young man himself did not know: he was adopted, and his parents were Andorrans like you and me, says Frisch. The Andorrans no longer talked about the young man or his death, but they discovered in the mirror that each of them had the features of Judas (Frisch, 1960: 15-16).

It is said, Max Frisch adds, that you are not to make any image of God. If we take this to mean God as the inconceivable and unique reflected in every human being, this is a sin in which all of us partake. The third generation of young Germans feels that they are met with contempt because of their nationality. Many Serbians no doubt feel the same today. And they may question themselves as the young Andorran did: are we like that, have we deserved this contempt? The question of why women contribute to their own oppression is thus parallel to the question of why prisoners, social clients, or a Jew in Andorra, a Serb in Croatia contribute to their own oppression. No matter what they do to behave differently, it most often becomes further a confirmation of the stereotype and moreover, the attributes or stereotypes tend to become integrated as in the case of the young Andorran. Recognising the other as an equal partaker in the interdefinition and interconnectedness thus shows, as Gatens points out, the solipsism of the concept of autonomy.

## Love and Domination

The story of the Jew in Andorra underlines how we become participants in our own oppression. In accordance with Max Frisch, the American psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin maintains that domination is a two-sided process upheld by both parts involved, both the one that exercises power and the one that submits to it. In order to investigate how this domination is still produced and upheld, I shall introduce Benjamin's theoretical contribution in her book: Bonds of Love, 1988. Her point of departure is Simone de Beauvoir's famous notion "that woman functions as man's primary other, his opposite, playing nature to his reason, immanence to his transcendence, primordial oneness to his individual separateness, and object to his subject" (Benjamin, 1988: 7). Realising that every binary split tend to reverse its terms, Benjamin sets out to criticise not only the idealisation of the masculine side but also the reactive valorisation of femininity. Her main question is why these positions continue to shape the relationship between the sexes in a time when society has formally established equality.

According to Benjamin it is the dualism of autonomy and dependency, which underlies the gender polarity of masculinity and femininity that forms the postures of master and slave. She argues that this structure of domination can be traced from the earliest awareness of the difference between mother and father, and to the global images of male and female in culture. Domination and submission is understood as a complementary of subject and object, where each mirrors the image of the other. It is replicated in masochistic fantasy, the most common figure of erotic domination. Permeated by gender polarity the Western culture establishes the positions of master and slave by means of dualism as autonomy and dependence. This way the early bond of love in the private sphere is intimately linked to a system of society in the public sphere (Benjamin, 1988: 7-9).

Various theories of self-psychology maintain that development happens through separation and individuation. This underlines the ideal of an autonomous person as one able to manage without the object. Till recently the child has been understood as passive and a part undifferentiated from the mother, who again was conceived more as an object for the need of the child than as a subject. Since women almost everywhere in the world are the primary caregivers, both the boy and the girl must differentiate in relation to the woman-mother, the paradox being that in order to achieve independence, the

child has to be recognised by the one he/she is dependent of. As the mother often is seen as an extension of the child, as an object, and often performs her caregiving accordingly, both the girl and the boy turn to the father for identification. While the boy in this process is confirmed in his identity, the girl has to submit to the authority, autonomy and freedom of the father since he belongs to the opposite sex. In other words, both sexes seek recognition for their sexual agency from the father. This Benjamin links to the missing desire of the female, which underlies the master/slave, the subject/object relationship of inequality.

As a way out of this bond of domination, Benjamin presents the theory of intersubjectivity. She refers to the research presented by Piaget, Bowlby and especially by Daniel Stern claiming that the child is primed as separate and not symbiotic with the mother. This means that the individual develops in and through relation to other subjects. Accordingly the other plays an active part in the struggle of the individual to discover and create reality. This alters the understanding of the relationship between child and mother, and the view of the mother, Benjamin claims, has accordingly to be altered. The recognition that the child seeks and needs is something that the mother is able to give only by virtue of her own independent subjectivity.

The crucial point in the theory of intersubjectivity is the importance of recognition: that the self meets – and is met by - another self in its own right. Instead of a meeting between a subject and an object, a subject meets another subject. The intersubjective theory represents a difference to what Benjamin calls the intrapsychic perspective.

“Whereas the intrapsychic perspective conceives of the person as a discrete unit with a complex internal structure, intersubjective theory describes capacities that emerge in the interaction between self and others. Thus intersubjective theory, even when describing the self alone, sees its aloneness as a particular point in the relationships rather than as the original ‘natural state’ of the individual. The crucial area we uncover with intrapsychic theory is the unconscious; the crucial element we explore with the intersubjective theory is the representation of self and other as distinct but interrelated beings” (Benjamin, 1988: 20).

Sameness and difference exist in a paradoxical balance of oneness and separateness, whereas the traditional model is based on the complementarity of

difference and sameness, oneness and separateness. The latter view is maintained due to a fear that dependence on the other will threaten one's independence. To transcend the experience of duality, so that both partners are equal, requires a notion of mutuality and sharing. In the intersubjective interaction both partners are active; it is not a reversible union of opposites. Rather, it is the ability to share feelings and intentions without demanding control, to experience sameness without obliterating difference (Benjamin, 1988: 48).

Modern thinking pretends to refer to the neutral individual, not sexed and universal. Behind this is most often the concept of masculinity, of male rationality. The separation between the public and the private - and the sexual division of labour and the connected social vehicle of gender domination - is in other words linked to the father of autonomy and the mother of dependency. "As in erotic domination, the process replicates the breakdown in tension: the subject fears becoming like the object he controls, which no longer has the capacity to recognise him" (Benjamin, 1988: 185). When domination is rationalised, it becomes invisible, natural and necessary. Male domination is no longer merely a function of personal power relations, although also there, but something inherent in the social and cultural structures independent of what the individual men and woman want. Accordingly, the increasing number of women participating in the public sphere has no influence on its rules and processes. They have no place from where to speak and be heard. The social rationalisation has a paradoxical tendency to neutralise gender differences and at the same time intensify the dichotomies.

"The polarity of subject and object is the enduring skeletal frame of domination, ready to be fleshed out with manifest gender content when the situation demands. This is especially true of the distinction between public and private: at one moment it is ostensibly about "work" and "family", at another, clearly about men and women. Thus we are often confused by the way that gender difference "floats" in social reality, inconstant but never truly eliminated... this inconstancy is exacerbated by the fact that the dichotomous structure informs both individual psychic representations and collective cultural representations" (Benjamin, 1988: 216-17).

Seen in the light of Benjamin's analysis, the stories of Susanne Bjørnson and Grete Jeppesen illustrate most concretely how their sexual identity and their

way of working are deeply integrated within the system of subject/object in the broader knowledge production of society and culture. Both want and try with amazing energy and insistence to overcome this structure, but fail to do so. They are either consumed or coloured by their colleague, the client or the culture. Even when alone in charge, Susanne Bjørnson says, she is not able to do any better. The complementarity has been integrated, and the relation of dominance is reproduced even if there are no men present. By taking colour from their male colleagues, Susanne Bjørnson and her female colleagues reproduce the system and at the same time by putting out fires they bear witness that this system does not function without their intermediary soothing work. When Susanne Bjørnson makes a decision of her own, her argument is not heard. The reason is that she has no place from which to speak so she is heard; she is not a subject in her own right, she is working accordingly, and this comes down to the compact of 'mother'. By using the metaphor of no-mans land, as mentioned above, I intended to show how women work in this area, and how their bodies consequently perform as battlefields on and in and over which both parts fight. This leaves them with no place of their own; not even their body can be said to be their own.

Benjamin suggests that it's time women start claiming their subjectivity. This I find somehow contradictory with the analysis she presents. To demand something, I have to have a place from which I am heard. To be a subject I need recognition of someone equal to me. When Susanne Bjørnson is identifying with the youngsters against the adults (her colleagues), it signifies that she also has no integrity of her own. What she does not have, she cannot give. Or rather, the youngster cannot be helped by recognition from a person not recognised herself, not even by herself. The stories of Grete Jeppesen and Susanne Bjørnson show how difficult it is to claim subjectivity in a society where gender differences are neutralised and at the same time intensified, as pointed out by Benjamin. However convincing Benjamin's analysis is of how and why domination keeps on shaping the relationship between the sexes, she leaves us with no answers to the question: how to get a subjectivity of one's own? Before looking at this I shall present the dilemma of 'nearness' and distance, presented by the narratives of Liv Fjeldvik and Marie Englund.

### Part III: The Narrative of Liv Fjeldvik

## ‘Nearness’ and Distance

Liv Fjeldvik is working at a newly established institution for patients with the diagnosis dementia. Her dilemma is “How to create good relations without it getting too ‘near’ for the weaker part in the relation?”

The staff that has applied to work with this kind of patients has different opinions as to how the work at the institution should be done. Some want to “systematise so much as possible” and others want to put themselves in the position of the client. Liv Fjeldvik describes a situation that enlightens this difference between structure and enlivenment. A patient shows great resistance to going to the toilet, a resistance that increases when she has been “unlucky”. Structures of set times to go the toilet may prevent these failures and at the same time uphold her dignity. This requires staff to follow her to the toilet, and the use of both coaxing and force. Moreover, it is very psychologically demanding. “The question is most often whether it is right to limit the painful toilet visits, so that she sits from 9 a.m. to after dinner, gets shifted at 15 a.m., sits again to 21 p.m. when she gets a new diaper. **Or** (the researcher’s underlining) is it an idea to find her ‘natural’ times for relieving herself, and follow her at that time?” Liv Fjeldvik feels that this is the dilemma between paternalism and non-intervention, and writes in the margin that according to her definition to sit in diapers is non-intervention and to have set times for visiting the toilet is paternalism. In passing she mentions that in order to get the client to sit on the toilet the staff have both to coax and to use force: “In this painful situation we change sex”.

Liv Fjeldvik characterises herself as a very committed person with a great capacity for empathy. And she is convinced that “ ‘nearness’ creates security in a chaotic day”. After a while she calls this way of working her method. She realises that “the method I use is vulnerable and very personal. And dependent on my ability that day to tackle the present situation. To seize the potential of the moment demands both professionalism and personality”. When working, however, she finds her method to embody “all the fancy words” such as autonomy, confidence, and mutual respect. In her letters Liv Fjeldvik tells two case stories:

1. An old female patient resists having a manicure to get trimmed. It seems that the problem often has been solved by one staffmember holding her, while another cuts her nails. This has given the patient

bruises on her arm, and she is frightened. By grasping a situation where the patient shows interest in having a manicure and by “letting everything else go”, the staff succeeds to turn it into a pleasant experience. The patient thinks that she is attending a beauty clinic; she is served coffee, she promises to pay next day, and so on.

2. In her work with an elderly male patient, Liv Fjeldvik tells that “I sing and play the guitar a lot, something he is quite fascinated by... but the relationship gets to ‘near’. And I am reflecting over what to do about it”. Something similar has happened to others in the staff, she writes. It is an example on how difficult it is “to enter in a relation with another person in a professional way; to be personal, but not private”. Finally, Liv Fjeldvik decides to continue the singing and the playing, and to retire from the washing situation.

By and by Liv Fjeldvik becomes more conscious of her role as a social educator. Other people (not identified) have given her positive feedback on her ability to fulfil the role as social educator ‘without hitting others in the head with it’. “I demonstrate in practise that I get things to function instead of talking about the right way to do it.... It is really fun when one (herself) sees that what I have learned actually functions in practise and is useful to other people”. However, social educators have to document their way of working theoretically: “If one can get practise to function, it is important to be able to explain theoretically why and how”.

The ethics coming from the autonomy of the inhabitant is more important than the norms of the staff. Good ethical attitudes are often shoved aside to the advantage of the norms in the institution. Liv Fjeldvik is convinced that she has become more secure in acting “morally right instead of acting after old habituated norms. This business with ethics is often a gut feeling, is it not?”

At the end of the supervision she writes that “(I) work with myself to set up limits and I repeat hundreds of times that now you have to make your self very clear and not be so-called ‘softie’. I have to set limits for myself - how others are allowed to treat me. Not to be so ‘accommodating cute’. All this in order to be respected”.

## Contextual Analysis

The narrative of Liv Fjeldvik is a description of how all three central dilemmas in the complexity of every day life is intertwined. As in the narrative of Grete Jeppesen, the dilemma of paternalism and non-intervention is not so much a dilemma whether to intervene or not as it is about ways of performing the intervention. While Grete Jeppesen talks about *her way*, Liv Fjeldvik tries to solve the problem of intervention by means of “a ‘near’ method of her own”. This way of performing contains problems related to the balance between ‘nearness’ and distance, and the balance between limits and integrity.

### **the ethical dilemma of paternalism and non-intervention**

The internal dissension divides the staff into those that wants structures and rules, and those that want to seize the right moment in the situation. According to Liv Fjeldvik the example with how to attend to the elderly patient with toilet-problems represents the classical dilemma between paternalism and non-intervention. Her description is translated exactly as un-logical and un-grammatical as it is written in her letter. Hours and hours has gone by trying to find a doorway into her description. I ended up with interpreting the paragraph as a conflation of a. a description of the dilemma between paternalism and non-intervention, and b. a suggestion of another third way. The dilemma of paternalism and non-intervention is performed in two different ways of intervening; either a structure of set times to attend the toilet or to let the patient sit in the diapers. By OR she indicates a third way. The latter is the way of Liv Fjeldvik: to find the ‘natural’ times for relieving. In order to find the natural times of this particular patient, and to seize the moment, ‘nearness’ is needed. This is the method, which Liv Fjeldvik from then on calls ‘her method’. I shall return to this method more extensively below.

### **the balance between ‘nearness’ and distance**

‘Nearness’ is an important condition for the way of working that Liv Fjeldvik calls her method. One has to be ‘near’ to the clients to grasp the signals as for example a. the natural times of relieving and b. the right mood to have nails cut. To take the latter example first. The elderly patient has normally had her nails cut in accordance with the rules of the institutions which come down to regularity and a forceful way of doing it if the patient resists. Together with a colleague Liv Fjeldvik manages to find another way by seizing the right moment and by ‘giving a damn to all other things’, which must refer to the rules of the institutions and probably also some others things planned for that



day. Doing so, the patient relaxes into a satisfied customer, asks for coffee and wants to pay. A result that tells something about the entire procedure, including the nail cutting. It is worth noticing that although the method requires 'nearness', the situation itself is characterised by distance. In other words, her method requires:

- 'nearness' to find out when the patient herself wants assistance
- willingness to skip all other things
- a sensitive way of performing it

In the other example, however, her 'method of 'nearness' creates a problem. This happens in the relation with the elderly patient for whom she plays and sings. 'Near' can be too 'near' for the weakest part in the relation: "How to create good relations without it gets to 'near' for the weaker part in the relation?" The question is whether the peculiar neutrality of her formulation together with the fact that she takes her central dilemma from this situation indicates that something else is at stake. Is Liv Fjeldvik in fact uncertain about who of them is the weaker one? Maybe they both are weak. Due to her position, she is in charge to withdraw, a possibility that he does not have. Implicitly she points at a major difference between them in that he as a patient cannot defend himself against the method of 'nearness'. Has her method of 'nearness' turned against her and involuntarily made her into an object of his love/sexuality? If yes, both can be said to objectify the other. The same has happened to others, Liv Fjeldvik says defendingly, it cannot be her guitar alone. It is, however, worth noticing that it is the singing and the playing that turns the relation intimate, and not the washing situation as expected. First when the relation has become too intimate, she chooses to withdraw from the wash situation presumably because it now will be painfully sexualised.

Her method demands a high degree of attentiveness. She admits that it is vulnerable and much influenced of how her 'dayform' is. When she endures periods of difficulties at home, it is influencing her work, which is the same as her method. While the intention of the method was to secure the patient, it fails to do so in these periods, and when she is off duty. Then why choose this method? The reason is quite simply, as she states that she is a very engaged person with a great ability of empathy. She does not find herself able to work otherwise. Furthermore, this method has demonstrated for Liv Fjeldvik that the 'fancy words' as autonomy, confidence and mutual respect is working in

practise. Being aware that it is in action that the social educator has her strength, Liv Fjeldvik underlines the need of theorising this practise. How this is to be effectuated, she does not comment on.

### **the way and the sex**

In the case-story concerning the toilet problems, the staff shifts sex from female to male. This sex-shift seems to take place when coaxing does not suffice and physical force is needed, presumably to get the patient to walk a bit further and/or to sit/stay down on the toilet. Thus, to coax is characterised as a female way of working, and to use physical force is characterised as a male way. The way of working is, however, linked to the situation. According to Liv Fjeldvik's description, it is the 'painful' situation that forces them to shift sex. The painfulness consists in the fixed structure that often requires use of physical force. Since the staff is all female, they have to 'shift' sex in order to manage. Why does Liv Fjeldvik mention this shift of sex? Is it a refined way of criticising the group in the staff that wants structure by saying that it belongs to another sex? Or is it a way to tell how alienating it is to work in a way contrary to one's sex? Or both?

### **body and ethics**

According to Liv Fjeldvik's understanding, ethics stems from the 'autonomy' of the patient. Autonomy is to be understood as the wish and want of the patient. This is, and should be seen, she says, as more important than the norms of the institution. The problem is that it most often is the other way around. The example with the elderly lady exemplifies this: the norm of the institution is that nails have to be cut regularly even if the patient protests. Isn't ethics a gut feeling, Liv Fjeldvik asks? This rhetoric question becomes more understandable when seen in the context of Liv Fjeldvik's case stories. In both cases, Liv Fjeldvik is acting according to her definition that ethics is stemming from the patients; it is her gut that functions as a tool to define and fulfil whatever needs the patients have.

Thus, ethics understood as stemming from the 'autonomy' of the client correspond with Liv Fjeldvik's way of working. The method of Liv Fjeldvik is helping the individual patient against general structures and rules, thus addressing the dignity of the client. This does, however, not include that her own dignity is addressed. Favouring the norms of the patient over those of the institution may help the patients. Any mutuality, however, is difficult to trace.

### **limits and integrity**

Her method and her understanding of ethics have brought her in a serious dilemma. Her 'gut' feeling about the wish and want of the patient has made her play guitar and sing for an elderly male patient. This relation has become too 'near'. When I ask her what it does to her when 'near' gets to 'near', she gets very upset and anxious. Without really answering me, she does not want to leave my office, and when she at last does leave, she remains standing talking to me in the corridor. Since she does not want to talk about how the situation has affected her, it is an awkward situation. Neither of us says the word sexuality, but both of us, I think, acknowledge that this is the core in the problem of too 'near' 'nearness'. Does her anxiety express shamefulness or is she upset because she understands my question as a reproach: this is your own fault for working in this way singing and playing guitar? And is her reaction correct, am I blaming her?

Her last letter reveals that she has been seriously reflecting. The result is a decision to set limits, not being so nice-stupid. It seems that she has realised that she may get feedback at work, but at the expense of her integrity. Her way of working may respect the dignity of the client, but it is not returned. This she blames on herself. *She* is too 'softie'. *She* has to change and has begun exercising to set limits for herself. However, this is not an easy task since she and her way work is linked intimately together in a method of 'nearness'.

The story of Liv Fjeldvik illuminates how she, as Grete Jeppesen, finds *her* way of working while protesting to a more structural way of doing it. Her method is linked to how she defines ethics. Her gut is the tool that grasps the needs of the patients. When she does not get respect, it is her fault. This raises the question of how the female identity affects and is affected by care work.

### **'Wounds of Caring'**

In her book Femininity and Domination, 1990, Sandra Bartky is concerned about this issue. She takes point of departure in Nel Noddings definition of a caring attitude towards another. According to Nodding, care and the attitude of caring is a displacement of interest from my own reality to the reality of the other; I receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other; "care involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the

other's". Within this definition, Bartky says, women run the risk "that our unreciprocated caregiving may become both epistemically and ethically disempowering" (Bartky, 1990: 111). It seems unavoidable that women at times will have to disagree with the person(s) she cares for. If she consistently rejects values of the one she cares for, her caring will suffer; if she keeps it for herself, she will run the risk of developing a distanced and false care. Whatever she does, her relation will suffer from it.

Instead Bartky challenges us to look into the 'wound-emotional support' more deeply. Agreeing that women seems to give more than they get in return, she is concerned about "the subjective and deeply interiorized effects *upon women ourselves* both of the emotional care we give and of the care we fail to get in return" (Bartky, 1990: 109). She refers the sociologist Theodore Kemper for stating that love, affection and emotional sustenance far from being purely private transactions is part of the macro-social domain of status. The consistent giving without return is a performance, acknowledging the male supremacy and at the same time a contribution to our own demotion. "By failing to attend to her in the same way she attends to him, he confirms for her and, just as importantly, for himself, her inferior position in the hierarchy of gender" (Bartky, 1990: 109).

This corresponds to the way Liv Fjeldvik thinks and works. She is using herself as a tool and at the end of the first year Liv Fjeldvik realises that she is not respected. As Grete Jeppesen, her way of working is performed in opposition to the dominating culture. A culture characterised by validating structure over the wish and want of the individual and a forceful way of performing the task. Worth noticing is that even if the staff is all female, there are two ways of working. And it is the structure way that is the dominant one. Above in the story of Susanne Bjørnson, the female way of working seemed to include a special place and a special task. In this story it seems that the same interdefinition or splitting of working task is taking place, this time among women. Is it the work, the working place or the staff that requires this kind of double structure?

As already indicated, Liv Fjeldvik introduces a third way of working between paternalism and non-intervention. This she names *her* method. In order to seize the moment and to respect the norms of the patient, she has to get 'near', or in the words of Nodding, 'to step out of one's own personal frame and into the reference of the other's'. Sometimes as in the example with the nail cutting, her method works out very well, and sometimes as in the example

with the elderly man, it gets complicated. Whatever explanation the difference may be, Liv Fjeldvik ends up trying to change herself in order to get respect. In Bartky's words, her unreciprocated caregiving has rendered her both epistemical and ethical disempowered. The effect of giving care with no mutuality is integrated to the degree that it is *her* fault, and that *she* has to change.

### **'epistemic' authority**

An intrinsic problem is, according to Bartky, that women seem to lack what she calls 'epistemic' authority. This is often seen as an automatic consequence of the male monopolies in school, church and society. The active role of the women themselves is forgotten. Even if she sees the power of men, it is abstract, while the man besides her is most concrete. She sees his wounds and tends to them, even if he abuses her.

“And while she may well be ethically and epistemically disempowered by the care she gives, this caregiving affords her the feeling that a mighty power resides within her being” (Bartky, 1990: 115).

This makes, according to Bartky, a counterexample to Foucault when he holds that the institutions of confessions, religious or psychiatric, are disempowering the ones confessing. Here in the heterosexual intimacy, it is opposite: the confession is not disempowering for the male, but for the female that listens to it. The man that is her superior in the gender hierarchy reveals that he too can be weak. This gives the woman a feeling of agency and personal force. The man that receives this care is, however, not changed. His superior position is not abandoned nor his privileges and the confessional care do not give the woman another status. The feeling of power is something quite different from actually having power in the world. The result is that she is empowered and disempowered in the one and same act.

Bartky recognises that the theorists of care want to validate the status of women and extend it to the domains of commerce and politics. Many of them have, however, failed to see the moral damage women may get from the emotional work. “Clearly, the development of any ethics of care needs to be augmented by a careful analysis of the pitfalls and temptations of caregiving itself” (Bartky, 1990: 118). But this is one part of the history. We have to look into

“...the subjective effects of the labour we perform on a daily basis - including our emotional labour - and of the ways in which this labour structures the subjectivity both of those who perform it and of those whom it serves” (Bartky, 1990: 118).

The social educators in the present analysis sustain this. Their position and status in combination with their construction by means of disciplinary practices have made them attentive to the needs of others over their own. Public work and payment is just reinforcing this, especially in the traditional areas of women’s work. They are simultaneously empowered and disempowered. This is, I reckon, what confuses Liv Fjeldvik. She is in charge. She chooses her method. Her intention is the best. And yet she is disempowered.

### **the innocent pleasures of everyday life**

Bartky recognises the work of the object-relationists and their argument that since women have more permeable ego limits and put greater emphasis on attachment and relations the psychological dimensions of co-parenting has to be changed. Bartky however suggests that we imagine changes in the life we live *now*.

“We need to understand better than we do now, not only the processes of personality development, but the ‘micropolitics’ of our most ordinary transactions, the ways in which we inscribe and re-inscribe our subjection in the fabric of the ordinary. The most prominent features and many of the subjective effects of this inscription can be grasped independently of any particular theory of personality formation. We need to locate our subordination not only in the hidden recesses of the psyche but in the duties we are happy to perform and in what we thought were the innocent pleasures of everyday life” (Bartky, 1990: 119).

This has enabled me to understand why it takes Liv Fjeldvik such a long time to realise that her way of working does not give her respect. Seen in this light, her dilemma is a most precise illustration of the need to look into “the duties we are happy to perform”. Her method seems to be intimately bound up with her construction. In order to get respect *she* has to change, even though she finds her method to embody the best qualities of caring, even mutuality. She

gets positive feedback, but she does not feel respected. Is it possible to work in accordance with one's embodiment and at the same time get respect?

## Part IV: Marie Englund's Narrative

### 'Nearness' and Distance

Marie Englund<sup>22</sup> works in a collective of six inhabitants of whom three are relatively self-reliant and three demand a lot of help. Her dilemma is "How to give care which is 'near' and honest without it getting too private or too intimate?" This is exemplified in her relationship to a 25-year-old male inhabitant, here called Niels Gunnensen.

Niels Gunnensen began a couple of years ago to get violent seizures of aggression, which eventually meant that he had to move out from his parental home. He is very sociable but also unstable and aggressive. Especially in relation to one of the female staff, here called Musse Carlsen, his aggression is explicit. Niels Gunnensen feels secure in relation to her, she says defensively. The rest of the staff agrees that Musse Carlsen has taken the role of a mother towards him, an interpretation Marie Englund finds sustained by the fact that he is aggressive also towards his real mother. However, Marie Englund does not think that this 'motherly' relation in itself causes his aggression. It has to do with setting limits or rather not setting limits. Niels Gunnensen rarely gets clear-cut limits from Musse Carlsen as to what behaviour is acceptable or what is not.

Marie Englund is afraid to end up in the same sort of relation as her colleague. She adds that she will not accept being hit at work. When Marie Englund starts attending Niels Gunnensen she realises that it is difficult "to know where to draw the line between having a good relationship and being too intimate **and** (my underlining) that of being able to set up limits. If the relation gets too intimate, it is very difficult to relax at home, especially if one experiences that 'confidence' has been broken". When I ask whether it is possible to have different relationship to him, she confirms that it is. There is a female staff member, whom he cannot manipulate; in fact he does not even try. It is as if he knows he won't get anywhere with her, Marie Englund says reflectively.

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<sup>22</sup> Although Marie Englund attended the supervision from the beginning she began working first half a year later than the other four informants. This may explain that her narrative is less comprehensive.



At last the consultant team<sup>23</sup> is asked to help. At a meeting, this team and the staff agree that the core of the problem is a lack of limits. Marie Englund realises that it is necessary to act on this decision. She fears, however, that the rules suggested to safeguard limits will be met by aggressiveness by Niels Gunnensen. This is difficult. “It is so easy to use too much force. This is the classical dilemma between paternalism and non-intervention”. In reality, it works out better than expected. Niels Gunnensen adapts to the new limits without much protest. Even Musse Carlsen is able “to set up much more clear-cut limits and she respects the rules we have agreed on”.

## Contextual Analysis

In the narrative of Marie Englund, all three themes are intertwined. The point of departure is the balance between ‘nearness’ and distance, which turns into the dilemma of limits and integrity under the overall framework of paternalism and non-intervention.

One of Marie Englund’s colleagues, Musse Carlsen, endures psychological and physical attack from Niels Gunnensen. Marie Englund agrees with her colleagues that it is a mother/child relation, since Niels Gunnensen also hits his real mother. However, Marie Englund finds that Niels Gunnensen’s aggression also has something to do with Musse Carlsen’s reluctance to set limits for him. One thing is, however, to analyse and reflect over a relation in which one does not partake, another is to enter it. When Marie Englund begins to work with Niels Gunnensen, she experiences *how* difficult it is “to give real care without getting too private or too intimate”. This dilemma is intertwined with the dilemma “where to draw the line between having a good relationship and being too intimate **and** (my underlining) that of being able to set up limits”. Let’s look into her formulation. It seems that a good relationship and being too intimate belong together, and that they are in opposition to limits. In other words, in the intimate i.e. good- relationship, there are no limits. What convinced Marie Englund that her colleague has a motherly relationship to this client is that Musse Carlsen is hit, just as his real mother is. To be a mother seems to allow for hitting, even when the child is grown up. On the other hand, Marie Englund maintains, the motherly character

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<sup>23</sup> In Norway, there has been established consultancy teams (Habilitering team) for mentally handicapped all over the country.

of the relation is not causing the aggression. The hitting has to do with the lack of limits. First when entering this relation herself, Marie Englund seems to acknowledge the contradiction between a good relationship on the one hand and limits on the other. When a 'near' and honest relationship is seen as being essential for good care, and when lack of limits is seen as threatening this relationship, the dilemma is obvious. Marie Englund does however not allow hitting at work and realises that limits have to be set. The problem is how to actually do it without losing the good relationship that is a prerequisite for good and honest care?

### **limits and integrity**

Marie Englund states that "If the relationship gets too intimate, one has great difficulty in relaxing when at home, especially when the confidence has been broken". The last sentence reveals that the relationship already has turned too private, too intimate. This intimacy makes it difficult for Marie Englund to relax when being at home. Especially, when confidence is broken. What is the content of confidence in the first place and what or who has broken it? Given that the relationship between Marie Englund and Niels Gunnensen has become 'intimate', it must be loaded with confidence. What does 'intimate' mean in this connection? Does it mean that she has avoided the role of mother, but instead has got another role to fight with? Does intimate have sexual connotations? What is the connection between lacking relaxation at home and the broken confidence?

Whatever difficulties her formulation presents, it is evident from her description that this relation is a mixture of a private and a professional relationship. If the prerequisite is that a good relationship, of which the private is used as a model, is without limits, then limits are always in danger of ruining the relationship. The danger of getting hit is not to be underestimated, as it is in fact very real. A former student told me about her deep frustration that the school had not prepared her sufficiently for this part of the work. The result is, she confirmed, that every day is filled with negotiations, dependent who is involved in the actual relation. In this staff there are two extremes. One consists of the motherly colleague Musse Carlsen, the other is a colleague working night shifts. This staff member Niels Gunnensen has not even tried to manipulate; he knows that he will not succeed. Between these poles are the majority of the staff, who experience the relationship with him to be so difficult that they eventually call for expert assistance.

The consultant team considers the main problem in connection with this client to consist in a lack of limits. The staff agrees to set limits as regards housework, hygiene and in relation to social situations. Moreover, the staff is to behave in the same way in order to make him accept the conditions and behave accordingly. Marie Englund is concerned about how they are to respect Niels Gunnensen's autonomy and poses the question of how they are to avoid using too much force. This she identifies as the classical dilemma of paternalism and non-intervention. Thereby she indicates that she does not find her own way of working as being an intervention. If on the other hand her way of working is seen as an intervention, then this would explain Niels Gunnensen's lack of reaction: the rules have changed but his situation is the same. From his perspective the dilemma may not be paternalism or non-intervention but that one way of intervening has been exchanged with another. Maybe Niels Gunnensen's lacking reaction means that he prefers rules to eternal negotiations with everyone every day. Is set rules (paternalism) better than daily negotiations (maternalism)? The question in need of an answer is on the one hand whether the dilemma between a good but non-intimate relation and setting limits is connected solely to the female sex and on the other hand whether fear of violence is part of this dilemma?

## Common Traits in the Stories of Liv Fjeldvik and Marie Englund

### **nearness and the concept of care**

Both stories tell about a presupposition of the interdependence of 'nearness' and care. The more 'nearness', the better the relationship and care situation. The concept of distance is only mentioned as the negative opposite, as the cold, impersonal professional relationship. 'Nearness' is the core concept. Why is it then that they do not reflect over what 'nearness' is, how near 'near' is; and who decides what is 'near' or too 'near', and to whom when and where? They just presuppose 'nearness' as the only way to conceive and accommodate the other person in his or her individuality. Maybe they have not realised the complexity of 'nearness'. It seems they maintain that 'nearness' in care is indisputable good. This is according to the Danish anthropologist Anne Knudsen a confusion of categories: to conclude that when people are clients

they belong to a group that - regardless of whatever else they are - wants this kind of care (Anne Knudsen, 1996: 25).

However, when Liv Fjeldvik and Marie Englund start to wonder whether 'nearness' is a mean by which they make clients do what they want them to do, I see this as self-reflection taken to the point of self-flagellation. On the contrary, rather than subduing clients or anybody else, their whole identity is geared towards fulfilling the needs of others. 'Nearness' is a mean to this end, in which they themselves dissolve into body, otherness and 'mother'- the only refuge left to them. Consequently, these others have to confirm the caregiver's identity by doing what they are asked to do. If they do not, she has not succeeded. Since there is no distinction between her and the need- fulfilling function she takes on, the one to blame is the caregiver herself. For the female worker in the caring field this is devastating. It undermines every attempt she makes to be recognised. The more she tries, the more she confirms the subject/object system that oppresses her.

### 'Nearness', Incarnation of Femaleness

Where does this attachment of 'nearness' to the female come from? The Norwegian anthropologist Jorun Solheim has presented an intriguing approach to this issue by looking into the historical and cultural background. Solheim's hypothesis is that our modern culture defines femaleness as *the* incarnation of 'nearness'. All universal thinking in modernity, she argues, originates from a conception of human being as it was conceived in the romantic period. When it is no longer evident who one is, when the identity no longer is decided by the inclusion in genealogy, then the idea of a 'personal holism' arises. The modern concept of identity can be read as a search after a 'personal holism' which no longer is 'ascribed' but that has to be scripted (written)" (Forskjell, 1996: 7). It is thus the 'romantic' gender-figuration that puts the mother and motherness as *the* basic figure in femaleness.

"The embracing and nutritive femaleness is also an unlimited and absorbing femaleness. The ideal embrace is at the same time a source of dissolution of the limits of self. The modern feminine 'nearness' can be said to liberate strong symbolic fantasies around the limitlessness and the self-dissolving in the intimate union" (Solheim, 1998: 97).

The female intimacy gets attached to an ideal of education that at the same time sets free and imprisons the male, a contradiction that later has come to create a fundamental dilemma in the modern gender-figuration. First of all she is to be his guarantee of identity, his 'care of the self' (Solheim, 1998: 95). Solheim explains that the pre-modern femaleness was split in two contradictory things: the holy as representation of the closed and the unclean as representation of the open. In the modern intimisation of the female these aspects have been intertwined. The result is an ambivalent and double image of woman.

Solheim positions her understanding in opposition to the Lacanian inspired conception, which take femaleness to be a lack, a deficiency in language and culture. This conception is based on the postulate of phallus as the primary signifier. It splits the originally oneness between mother and child by including the child and excluding the mother from symbolic language. Solheim, however, referring to Winnicott and Dinnerstein, maintains that femaleness, far from being outside symbolic language, is the fundamental reference of meanings. When women remain mute as cultural subjects, the explanation is not exclusion but rather inclusion. As Solheim says: femaleness speaks all over (Solheim, 1990: 41).

Solheim's line of argument is that the primary symbolic experience is attached to the female. She is the first Other, the first object of desire. It is reasonable to presume that in all cultures an 'epistemology of nearness' in some way or another is connected to conceptions of femaleness (Solheim, 1998: 88). Therefore, as subjects' women are caught in the symbolic structure of meanings, connected to the unconscious pre-linguistic universe of meanings. Accordingly, 'nearness' refers back to the Romantic conception of human being and has permeated the female identity to the degree that it has become a historical and cultured ideal. First and foremost in the private sphere, directed towards man and child, but also elsewhere. Femaleness in the modern culture has been given the role as the incarnation of the principle of 'nearness'.

From this perspective it becomes more understandable why the social educators do not reflect over the concept of 'nearness'. It is not a concept. It is their way of existing. It is more or less their identity, and therefore also their ideal of a care concept. Marie Englund's female colleagues characterise Musse Carlsens relation with Niels Gunnensen as a mother-role. Marie Englund agrees since Niels Gunnensen also gets aggressive and hits his real mother. It is Marie Englund's firm intention to avoid such a relationship. And her argument is

interesting: this she will not tolerate - at work. In other words, to be a mother is to tolerate aggression and even to be hit. As suggested above, implicit in Marie Englund's dilemma is that although it at work should be possible to set limits, it does not function that way in actual relations and situations. The reason is that although she can imagine a 'near' care relation with limits she cannot herself establish such relationship. This consequently hinders her in understanding the lack of aggressive reaction from Niels Gunnensen. As already indicated he just might have a different understanding of 'nearness'; he might in fact be relieved over being met in a different way. Maybe he, as Solheim suggests, not only feels free but also imprisoned by the 'nearness' as most of the female staff represents it.

Solheim has especially focussed on the problematic nature of the body as regards to limits. The relative lack of limits in the female body in relation to the male body indicates a sexual difference of fundamental importance for symbolic meanings. "The body is our primary medium of limit experience" (Solheim, 1998: 9). The argument is that all cultures to a certain extent sort out the meaningless (chaos) from the limited (order) with reference to sex and body. Our culture does it in such a way that the open and limitless coincide with the female. The modern problematic dilemma concerning 'nearness' and limitlessness is inextricable from this form of gender metaphysics.

"As long as the concept of 'nearness' is adhered to the female, we are locked in a mixture of sex and culture that continues to re-produce a fundamentalism in which the female shifts between holiness and uncleanness" (Solheim, 1998: 100).

The stories of the social educators, especially those of Marie Englund and Liv Fjeldvik, seem to confirm Solheim's theory. Their bodies are not only private; they are part of a cultural text and as such bearers of meanings for others. Since Solheim assumes that the conflation of 'nearness' and sex has its origin in the human beings experience of 'nearness' and bodily limitlessness in relation to the mother, it is worth noticing that Marie Englund and Liv Fjeldvik at the time of the project were the only mothers among the informants. The reason that neither of the informants problematise 'nearness' seems to be a result of a culture that has rejected symbolic meanings of the body. Since women for so long have been objectified as body, many have refused to talk for the body in fear of biologism and essentialism. The same criticism has been raised against

the theorists of sexual difference. I find the perspective of Solheim useful because it places Western culture as just as filled with the symbolism of blood, food etc. as all other cultures. To be unaware of this is in some way part of postcolonialism. The image of woman as Madonna or whore still follows and hinders the female (body) in her work. It therefore seems crucial to look critically at a cultural fundamentalism that still binds us to this image. Without learning to see and recognise sexual difference, I doubt this will be possible. In chapter 2. I shall return to Jorun Solheim's theory of the body as a symbolic universe more extensively

## Part V: The Narrative of Tone Isaksen

### Professional Identity

Tone Isaksen has not formulated one single dilemma but all three dilemmas figure in her narrative. They centre on her identity and agency as a social educator. Together with another trained social educator Tone Isaksen works mostly in a small institution with three multi-handicapped persons from 16 to 26 years.

Tone Isaksen is in turmoil over the expectations of the local council members. When hiring the social educators they said that “there is so much mess and the level of competence has to be raised. They almost said that with us hired, the problem was already solved”. It is the condescending evaluation of the competence of untrained care-workers that Tone Isaksen reacts to. They have an experience that should be valued and respected. Social educators may after three years of school have a theoretical knowledge, but little experience.

After a while Tone Isaksen becomes interested in the problems of the short-term employment that many untrained care workers have to endure. She wonders how she is to avoid the role of ‘buffer’ between the leadership and the staff. Most of all, however, she is concerned about her own role in the ‘home’ (i.e. the institution) since “it is quite difficult to find my place in this system. There are no other social educators at work here and thus no role models. I have to find a way all on my own”. The most difficult part is home visits: “I come as a total stranger and am supposed ‘to take care’ of them. It is so difficult to know how much contact one shall try to establish”.

Tone Isaksen reflects a lot over how her own personality affects the people she is working with. She feels she needs to be conscious of her own development as a social educator person and makes a list of areas she needs to be aware of:

- **mutuality and respect.** As for these concepts she thinks that she is competent and capable when working with people. She thinks that she has something to give, but wonders whether she is a bad receiver: “I wonder whether the reason is that I reckon that other people cannot do it as well as I can or that I want it done my way? This is a frightening thought since it amounts to a lack of respect of other people. Help, this is not good”.



- **involvement.** In her work with other people Tone Isaksen realises that she easily gets involved with them (the clients). It does not take long before she becomes fond of them, which makes her ask: “How come this involvement and attachment? Is it simply because one comes to love people after a while or is it an expression of happiness because I achieve a sort of self-confirmation? I wonder what professional distance is?”
- **validating others.** From reading Alice Miller, Tone Isaksen has learned how important it is for a child to be loved for what it is and not for what it may become. Inspired by this she writes: “In caring for other people I often think that one is nicest to the residents when they behave as ‘we’ want them to. I certainly love them most when they are nice and don’t protest loudly. Again a frightening thought. When I have decided that one of the residents has to sit still while he brushes his teeth, and this person does not do it, I get irritated. This is not when I am most happy about ‘them’. Yes, this is really frightening, and I do not really want to admit it”.

The co-operation with the school that the clients attend in daytime has made the difference between school and ‘home’ evident. In the school there is a better balance between professional competence and everyday competence. In the house everyday competence dominates too much and as a result the care given is “fragile, co-incidental and very personal”. The better balance at the school has become manifest in that one of the clients is capable of doing much more than Tone Isaksen had expected from seeing him in his ‘home’. The fact that the care becomes dependent on the individual caregiver she regards as natural since there haven’t been educated people working there for quite a long time. “I do not mean to say that the care given is bad, I just do not think that it is as it should be. To achieve a balance as they have at school cannot be done over night”. On the other hand, some of the staff seems almost to have a natural gift when it comes to working with people. It is marvellous to see”. In conclusion, she thinks that she is able to see “the difference between those with a long training and those without any. People with training have in some way developed a critical and reflective way of thinking”.

When Tone Isaksen becomes supervisor for a student in short-term practise, she reflects over what is meant by ‘personal suitability’ which again and again occurs in jobadvertisements. “I think that there are some abilities which have to be present if one is to be able to work with human beings”. It is

not that everybody has to be the same, but some are just more able than others are.

After half a year in the job Tone Isaksen concludes that the two social educators, of which she is one, “have become much more aware of their own role at work... now it has been accepted that we do not do practical work as cleaning without a special reason. Instead we spend our hours planning, making structures, etc.” Moreover, they have made dayplans for each resident. The latter makes her pose me the question: ”Do you think I am a strange social educator since I get stomach ache when I see all those maps where every aspect of the life of the resident is divided to main and subordinate objectives?”

## Contextual Analysis

The story of Tone Isaksen can be said to focus on the role of the social educator, inwardly in terms of professional and personal content, and outwardly in relation to the un-trained staffmembers and her superiors in the local council. As the story develops, it becomes clear that they are mutually interdependent. The more Tone Isaksen becomes aware of her identity as a trained social educator, the more she sees the difference between trained and un-trained people. And parallel to this, she distances herself from direct work with the residents.

In the beginning Tone Isaksen is very upset by the local council’s condescending evaluation of un-trained staff. The reason for her reaction is probably not only that the staff has experience and knowledge and this should be valued and respected, but just as much that she herself identifies more with the un-trained. This again has to do with her uncertain identity as a social educator. There are no role models to follow and she has to find her own way. After half a year she thinks that she is able to see the difference between a trained and an un-trained staffmember. Seeing what the staff at school achieve has made her see the care given in the house as dominated by everyday competence and thus as too personal and random. At the end of the supervision she has no doubt about the difference. The trained social educator has a critically reflective way of thinking. There are, however, some that have a natural gift for working with other people.

While she is reflecting over what happens in relations, especially how she herself is and relates, she moves further and further away from direct

client-related work. She ends up working with planning and organising. The only thing that bothers her is that in order to plan for every aspect of the individual resident's life she has to split them up in main and subordinate objectives.

### 'The Arrogant and the Loving Perceiver'

The American philosopher Marilyn Frye makes a parallel between the relation of man and woman *and* of caregiver and care-receiver. It is especially her description of 'the arrogant and the loving perceiver' that has been useful to understand the process Tone Isaksen is partaking in. Frye takes her point of departure in the statement of the Bible that man is the ruler of nature including woman. From this perspective Frye describes man as one who with arrogant eyes looks at everything around him as if they were either for or against him.

"This is the kind of sight that interprets the rock one trips on as hostile, the bolt one cannot loosen as stubborn, and the woman who made meatloaf, when he wanted spaghetti as "bad" (though he didn't say what he wanted). The arrogant perceiver does not countenance the possibility that the Other is independent, indifferent" (Frye, 1983: 67).

When woman does not service man, it can only be because he is not good enough or that something is wrong with her. He can try to make things better, but if he does not succeed, the only reason is that woman is unnatural, abnormal, damaged, etc. "His norms of virtue and health are set according to the degree of congruence of the object of perception with the seer's interests" (Frye, 1983: 69). This way is wrong since it manipulates the other's perception and judgement at the root by defining the unwholesome as healthy and the wrong as right. Thus, the other's perception of what is up and down, right and wrong, healthy and unhealthy is conceived as indifferent. This is the most effective hurt one can do. If one learns to understand conceptions this way, one is no longer capable of taking care of one self.

In the light of Frye's description, Tone Isaksen is caught up in the arrogant way of perceiving. It begins with her being upset about the council's expectations of the newly-hired social educators, of which she is one. When she told me about her turmoil, I tried to get her to see the expectations of the

council as recognition. She answered me by explaining how the social educators were expected to carry out a re-organisation that tacitly devaluated the experience and knowledge of the staff already there. I pointed to the possibility of taking the staff's knowledge and experience into account when carrying out the re-organisation. The impact of Tone Isaksen's turmoil I realised first when reading how Frye exemplifies the invisibility of the exploitative mechanism:

“The general strategy involved in all coercion is exemplified in the simple case of armed robbery. You point a gun at someone and demand that she hand over her money. A moment before this she had no desire to unburden herself of her money, no interest in transferring her money from her possession to that of another; but the situation has changed, and now, of all options before her, handing over her money seems relatively attractive. Under her own steam, moving her own limbs, she removes her money from her pocket and hands it to you. Her situation did not just change, of course. *You changed it*” (Frye, 1983: 55-56).

Seen on this background the reason of Tone Isaksen's turmoil is that she is taken captive of others expectations, and indeed she was. Within a year she fulfils the expectations about which she protested. By and by she comes to recognise a difference between un-trained and trained people. When she notices that the client is much more capable at school than at home, it must be due to the difference in training between the staff at school and the staff at 'home'. As she sees it, the staff at school achieves a better balance between professional skills and everyday competence than the staff at the home. This is probably why she changes her perception of the un-trained staff. While she in the very beginning acknowledged their competence, she now sees only their deficiencies.

I propose to see this in connection with Tone Isaksen's reflection about how she reacts to clients when they do not do what she tells them to do. She is painfully aware that she likes the patients best when they do as they are told. This is not how she wants it to be, and she is reminded of how she at school was taken in by the argument of Alice Miller, saying that one has to love the child for what it is, and not for what it through training may become. What she does not seem to see or reflect over is the interdefinition between the staff at school and the client, the role of expectations, the difference in location,

situation, individual personalities etc. Tone Isaksen has, like most of us, unconsciously been raised to be an arrogant perceiver although she wants to be a loving perceiver. The power of expectation is enormous, and has to be used and answered attentively and carefully.

“How one sees another and how one expects the other to behave are in tight interdependence, and how one expects another to behave is a large factor in determining how the other does behave” (Frye, 1983: 67).

The loving eye is a contrary of the arrogant eye. It knows the independence of the other. It is however not selfless which would incapacitate her as a perceiver. Unlike the master or the slave, the loving perceiver can see without the supposition that the other presents a constant threat or that the other exists for the seer's service. To describe the loving eye I take the liberty of citing a long passage of Frye, written in almost poetic language, which made me think of Martin Luther King's: I had a dream.

“One who sees with a loving eye is separate from the other whom she sees. There are boundaries between them; she and the other are two; their interests are not identical; they are not blended in vital parasitic or symbiotic relations, nor does she believe they are or try to pretend they are.

The loving eye is a contrary of the arrogant eye.

The loving eye knows the independence of the other. It is the eye of a seer who knows that nature is indifferent. It is the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination. One must look at the thing. One must look and listen and check and question.

The loving eye is one that pays a certain sort of attention. This attention can require a discipline but *not* a self-denial. The discipline is one of self-knowledge, knowledge of the scope and boundary of the self. What is required is that one know what are one's interests, desires and loathing, one's projects, hungers, fears and wishes, and that one knows what is and what is not determined by these. In particular, it is a matter of being able to tell one's own interests from those of others and of knowing where one's self leaves off and another begins.

The loving eye does not make the object of perception into something edible, does not try to assimilate it, does not reduce it to the size of the seer's desire,

fear or imagination, and hence do not have to simplify. It knows the complexity of the other as something, which will forever present new things to be known. The science of the loving eye will favour The Complexity Theory of Truth and presuppose The Endless Interestingness of the Universe' " (Frye, 1983: 75-76).

The point that Frye makes by this vision is not how it is to be independent of others, but how intelligent women (and others) might be if they were not suppressed. However, she admits, it is difficult to envision such independence as long as that we are raised into the vocabulary of the arrogant perceiver and taught to identify with him and to see through his eyes. We have learned to understand agency and power in nearly the same way as him. In this way we are made to be deadly afraid of being without an arrogant perceiver. This way of looking is what gives life its meaning. This is a terrible disability, Frye states:

"We can't imagine what we can't face, and we can't face what we can't imagine. To break out of the structures of the arrogant eye we have to imagine ourselves to make meaning and we have to imagine ourselves being capable of that: capable of weaving the web of meaning which will hold us in some kind of intelligibility" (Frye, 1983: 80).

If we cannot imagine a life without the arrogant eye, we will not make it. Frye concludes by saying that we women need to know subjectivity in our own beings as well as in our appreciation's of others. This requires that we are under the gaze of a loving eye. Reading Frye has been a meta-cognition for me as a researcher. Time and time again I have gone astray due to my arrogant eye. How can these intelligent social educators think and act like they do? Countless drafts and analyses have been thrown out because of my training into an arrogant perceiver. This is closely connected to the subject/object system and the knowledge production that sustains it. The social educators have insistently witnessed how they have incorporated both eyes. It is, however, their loving eyes that have helped my research in a more productive direction.

## 2. Body, Language and Knowledge

The analysis in the previous chapter demonstrated how the sexually different embodiment of the female social educators permeates their way of working. By drawing on different theoretical perspectives it became possible to identify and understand how meanings of sexual difference are created and constituted in our practises. In this chapter I shall continue to reflect on and expand on the material presented in the previous chapter in order to understand the sexually different embodiment Woman.

To this end I have found it productive to link various perspectives, all pointing at the importance of the body: Sara Heinämaa's analysis of Beauvoir's way of doing philosophy, Jorun Solheim's approach to the body as a symbolic and imaginary text, and lastly, Elizabeth Grosz's epistemological proposal to transcend the ongoing mind/body dualism. Placing the body in the centre and conceiving it as the stuff of subjectivity allows for other modes of self-understanding and of knowledge production. Focussing on the body has been meaningful, but it also gave me problems with language as linked to and embedded in epistemology and ontology. As introduction to what often is called the 'bodily turn' I rely on the American psychologist Kathy Davis's review of what she calls 'embodying' theory.

### The Bodily Turn

The enormous amount of feminist research on the body in the last three decades has, even if very different in approach and disciplines, unanimously raised a criticism of the inherent understanding of the male body as the norm for all other bodies. The history of women's bodies has in various areas been mapped and it has been shown how institutions and cultural discourses shape women's embodied experiences. Accordingly, feminists called for a social theory of the body that could take gender and power into account. Bringing the body back meant "both addressing and redressing the 'fear of femininity' which had made science such a disembodied affair in the first place" (Davis, 1997: 5).

Recently the body has regained major interest. Both the modernist and the postmodernist discourse on the body exhibit however the same contradiction. The body is treated as a location that enables a criticism of

Enlightenment philosophy with its tendency to privilege the disembodied, masculine male (body). On the other hand, the body is considered the site for exploring the constructions of different subjectivity's or the many ways in which disciplinary power is exercised. In other words, the conflict arises between the body as bedrock and the body as construct (Davis, 1997: 2). Post-modern theories have focused on the body by criticising dichotomies like mind/body, culture/nature, and rationality/emotionality. Unfortunately, the new body theory is as masculinist and disembodied as it ever was. All too often it stays "a cerebral, esoteric and, ultimately, disembodied activity" (Davis, 1997: 14).

According to Kathy Davis, feminist theory provides an essential corrective to this new but disembodied body theory by taking power, domination and difference as starting points for understanding the conditions and experiences of embodiment in contemporary culture. The body has always been, and will continue to be, central in understanding women's embodied experiences and cultural and historical constructions in the various contexts of social life.

"From the sexualization of the female body in advertising to the mass rape of women in wartime, women's bodies have been subjected to processes of exploitation, inferiorization, exclusion, control and violence" (Davis, 1997: 10).

An example is how the interconnection between racism and the body has become important. The white woman required yet another and more inferior other - the woman of colour or from non-western countries. Davis mentions how the light-skinned Western ideal of feminine beauty is predicated on African woman with dark skin, broad nose and kinky hair. And how to make this 'black look' into fashion is just another way of colonising, as bell hooks states. Across differences, feminist approaches to the body have invariably attended three problems: difference, domination and subversion (Davis, 1997: 7).

Moreover, Davis points at the crucial importance feminist scholarship on the body have had in linking women's embodied experience with practises of power. Initially power was regarded as fairly straightforward male domination versus female subordination in a patriarchal order. In the wake of the 'linguistic turn', this shifted from a simple question of oppression to how



female bodies were implicated in power relations. According to Foucauldian notions of power the female body was seen as a text that could be read as a cultural statement about gendered power relations.

“Emphasis shifted from power as exploitation, coercion or manipulation to the subtle, pervasive and ambiguous processes of discipline and normalisation through cultural representations” (Davis, 1997: 11).

Concludingly, the central role of difference in feminist scholarship on the body is concerned about how to conceive the body without ending up in essentialism. And on the other hand, how to treat the body as different without drawing on the specific features of women’s embodiment. Assuming that the theorist/researcher herself is embodied, feminist theory has opened up for new ways of doing theory. Referring to Braidotti, Grosz and Gatens, Davis points at ways that use embodiment as a theoretical resource for an explicitly corporeal epistemology or ethics. Davis’s problems about the recent feminist scholarship on the body are twofold:

1. the first problem concerns how priority is given to the deconstructive project. This project consists in dismantling the mind/body split in Western philosophy or debunking gender symbols and dichotomies rather than attending the actual material bodies and their everyday interactions with their bodies and through them with the world around them.
2. the second is linked to the first. It is not only necessary to deconstruct the body as bedrock of sexual difference, but also to do justice to individuals’ embodied experiences. This means that while it is necessary to focus on the features of domination as enacted through the body, it is equally necessary to uncover the myriad of ways in which women engage in subversions, in and through their bodies (Davis 1997: 15).

Agreeing with Davis, I intend in the following to link these two types of problems. The question of sexual difference is related to questions of being and time. Thus Simone de Beauvoir combines an analysis of the historical situation with a phenomenological understanding of the individual. I shall return to this

in chapter 5 where I discuss Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity in the light of the present situation. In the following I hope to clarify how philosophy as phenomenology contributes to the aim of the thesis: to understand how the differently embodied woman is produced and socially disempowered.

## Phenomenology

According to the Finnish philosopher Sara Heinämaa, Beauvoir's writings about sexuality and ethics reveal a specific understanding of the philosophical task and practise to which she was inspired by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Husserl regarded philosophy as phenomenology to be a foundational science. It studies the basis of the empirical sciences, the ideas that empirical science has to rely on, the ideas of nature, history, society, mind and body. This way of doing philosophy involves the task of being radical and critical. It poses the ultimate questions, for example the foundations of the theoretical enterprise, the hidden assumptions and engagements that it relies on. Consequently, they cannot be answered in the same way as empirical questions that only lead to new problems and paradoxes. In Husserl's definition phenomenology is a study of phenomena. This means the ways in which the world appears or presents itself to us in experience and how we relate to the world and its beings. The aim of studying the phenomena is to see the constitutions of meanings of reality. This influences the questions. The question about death is not 'What is death, or how does it happen', but rather 'How does it happen that we experience death as an occurrence'. When the issue is sexuality, the question is not what it is or how it happens but rather how come we experience it as difference and opposition.

The concept of the living body is a core concept of Husserl. It means that the living body (*Leib*) differs essentially from the material object (*Körper*). The body presents itself to us in two different ways: as the starting point of all activities (*Leib*) and as their passive or resistant object (*Körper*). The living body is primary and appears essentially as the expression and instrument of the spirit. This was further developed by the existentialists and by Merleau-Ponty (Heinämaa, 1999: 117-118). According to Merleau-Ponty, the subject is a corporeal given. Movement, perception and feelings are primarily bodily modes or styles and so are acts of speech and thought. The cultural and individual histories form together the background for new acts of meaning.

These relations of the body are not external or causal but internal relations of meaning and expression, which means that the body is bound up with what it encounters: things and other subjects. Therefore its features cannot be described without contradiction.

“From the embodiment of the subject and its intertwining with the world, it follows that the subject is not transparent to itself, but forever ambiguous. The body-subject does not coincide with itself, it does not belong completely to the world nor is it entirely outside the world. Or in Merleau-Ponty’s own words, “the world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself” (Heinämaa, 1997: 26 citing Merleau-Ponty, 1945,1993: 467).

The conception of the human body as a subject of actions has implications for the understanding of sexuality and sex. From this theory, sex and sexuality are no longer to be understood as attributes, but as styles, as modes of being. This again has two consequences for the notion of sexual identity: the unity of style is not something beneath or behind the concrete actions. Expressions of a personal style, of smile, hair cut, clothes are concrete manifestations and have to be studied as such. A personal style does not consist in a collection of actions, but is a way of acting, rather like a melody. For sexuality this means that it is not enough to study for example childbirth. A study of the whole activity is needed to try and find its tones and melodies. Merleau-Ponty compares sexuality to odours and sounds that spread from throughout the whole body and unto objects around it. It in a way structures all activities.

The later and unfinished work Le visible et l’invisible, 1964, confirms that Merleau-Ponty already in his most well-known work Phénoménologie de la Perception, 1945, intended to overcome the dualistic thinking of subject/object, mind/body, consciousness and world. In a review of it in 1945 Beauvoir makes the comment that one of the great merits of phenomenology is that it abolishes the opposition between subject and object. This may be trivial, but it has, Beauvoir says, far reaching philosophical implications. Not only *can* an ethics be developed from this understanding of the relation between subject and object, but it is also *necessary* for a sincere ethical commitment (Heinämaa, 1999: 118). I shall return to that in chapter 5.

Influenced by these philosophers Beauvoir obtains a different view of philosophy. She protests against the idea of philosophy as system building.

Inspired by Descartes' suggestion to question one's convictions at least once in life, Beauvoir rejects all philosophical theories.

“The point is not to become involved in criticizing others; rather, the aim is to question one's own preconceptions, to take responsibility for one's own beliefs and convictions through such self-criticism“ (Heinämaa, 1999: 120).

Beauvoir understanding of philosophy makes her pose the question of sexual difference within and in terms of a phenomenology of the living body. This implies the fundamental question of the sexuality of philosophy itself. In Beauvoir's understanding, sexuality is not just a detail of being. It is an element that runs through our whole existence thereby including our philosophical reflections (Heinämaa, 1999: 119).

## The Question of Woman

Beauvoir begins the *Second Sex* by stating that she for a long time has been thinking of writing a book on Woman, but the question is how it should be posed. Woman is not a well-defined concept; it has many and different meanings and even its sense and relevance can be doubted (Heinämaa, 1999: 121). The difficulty of formulating the question is part of the problem. The many questions posed by Beauvoir about whether women exist, whether it is desirable that they go on existing, can be taken as ordinary factual questions to be answered with yes or no. From a phenomenological perspective, however, Beauvoir is posing fundamental questions concerning woman's ways of being, how she exists etc. Without affirming or denying the reality of woman, Beauvoir proceeds to study the different definitions. Here she distinguishes between three realities: femaleness, femininity and womanhood.

“Not every female human being is necessarily a woman; in order to be a woman, one must participate in the mysterious and threatened reality which is femininity” (Heinämaa, 1999: 122, citing Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe I*, 1993: 11).

If femininity is required to be a woman, then what is this femininity? Is it a product of reality; is it a model or a goal for action and behaviour? Far from

denying the reality of femininity, as some critics have stated, Beauvoir uses the concept of feminine existence. But she sees it not as a static unchanging essence, but as a dynamic process. It is not a fixed reality. To be a woman, one has to become a woman. Woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming. (Heinämaa, 1999: 123, citing Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe I*, 1993: 25,73). Femininity is, Heinämaa says, to be likened with a musical theme. Femininity is

“...not determined by its earlier performance but living and evolving in the environment created by them. It does not reside in any specific organs, persons or practises, but between them. So it manifests and develops in the whole of actions and passions and its specificity is in its modes of changing” (Heinämaa, 1999: 124).

To understand this, it is necessary to remember Beauvoir’s commitment to the phenomenological conception of the living body. The phenomena labelled woman cannot be understood as long as understanding means identifying causes and effects. Seen as a whole the idea in Beauvoir’s work, Heinämaa maintains, was to problematise women’s being in general, to call into question the basic concepts of woman, femininity, and femaleness. What she wants to study is the meaning of the being Woman (Heinämaa, 1997: 32).

According to Beauvoir the phenomenon Woman cannot be understood as long as understanding means identifying causes and effects. Biological, psychological, and social facts and events cannot resolve the problem since the question of woman is ultimately a question of values and meanings (Heinämaa, 1997: 24). The body is not a thing; it is a way of relating to things; a way of acting and being affected by them. For Beauvoir, the body is an opening, a melody more than a solid structure. Sex is a situation, but not in the Sartrean sense. The human condition is indefinite and ambiguous, and as such it allows for different variations and modifications. The body cannot be generalised to a concept or a fixed idea, since it does not reside in the particulars or above them, but in the relations between particulars. This way the phenomenology of the body offers an alternative that allows us to understand

“...the intimate connection between the feminine and the female, gender and sex, not by reducing one to the other, but by studying both as units or aspect of the same system of meanings and values” (Heinämaa, 1996b: 291).

### **otherness and subordination**

The question of femininity makes Beauvoir continue to question her question. Why is she posing this question, what is her own motivation? This gets Beauvoir to study the notions of otherness and subordination. A man would never come to pose a question concerning his particular situation in humanity. The situation is, in other words, not symmetrical.

“Man represents both the positive and the neutral aspects of humanity, woman represents only the negative. Man describes himself in theories and histories of humanity, woman remains in silence. He stands for both the normal and for the ideal, she for the deviant” (Heinämaa, 1999: 124, citing Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe I*, 1993: 15).

This makes Beauvoir formulate her well-known thesis ‘He is the Subject, he is the Absolute, she is the Other’. According to Heinämaa this is not an affirmation of the otherness of woman. Beauvoir radically problematises these basic notions, both the idea of otherness and the notion of subordination.

As stated above, sexuality according to Merleau-Ponty is what characterises our existence already on the basic level of experience. Sexuality is a basic structure of human existence and thus comparable to mortality (Heinämaa, 1999: 127). Every experience is an experience of a man or a woman. Although in different ways both embodiments realise and recreate the human condition in its ambiguous character. It is worth noticing that instead of looking for causes or effects, Beauvoir concentrates on the nature of the phenomenon and states that the dependency and subordination of women has never occurred. Thereby she suggests regarding it not as a fact or a necessary structure but to see it as a way of appearing, its ontological meaning being somewhere between these two extremes (Heinämaa, 1999: 125). Hence, Beauvoir maintains that sexual relations do not need to be structured in subordination or difference.

Holding that women and men are two variations of human embodiment leads her to question how come that one sex is taken to be the sole essential and the other is defined as pure otherness. To this Heinämaa remarks that sexual difference might be more deeply embedded in our experience than skin colour and other racial differences. Agreeing with Heinämaa I read Beauvoir to

be arguing for two things. The first is that woman and man is two variations of human creature. The second is that they are totally different embodiments. Beauvoir has been extremely criticised for this standpoint. How can she hold both? I shall argue that it *is* possible to maintain both arguments: sexual difference and existential sameness. In fact it is this ambiguity that makes Beauvoir's philosophy and ethical approach still interesting<sup>24</sup>. I shall return to this more extensively in chapter 5.

In this light the philosophy of Beauvoir gives a productive perspective to understanding the narratives of the social educators. When the body is conceived as a basic framework of meaning and truth, when it consists of a mixture of earlier movements, acts, gestures and expressions, femaleness and womanhood cannot be reduced to any single origin. It is so deep in our existence that it is not possible for a scientific abstraction to account for it. It is a way of being. The stories of the social educators have illustrated how their bodies are important for the way they think and work<sup>25</sup>. The story of Liv Fjeldvik underlines how her way of working is linked to her identity and how difficult it is for her to change it. Marie Englund reflects seriously over a colleague's 'motherly' relation to a client and is determined to avoid making the same mistake. However, she does not succeed. Both examples confirm that the body is not a thing that, through rational reflection, can be ordered or directed to do this and that; it is always already living in relation, and this relation affects it and vice versa.

In this way the practise of the five informants confirm that the body is not an object of knowledge but a precondition for all objects and knowledge. When this body is sexually different, as in their case, it also relates, lives and

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<sup>24</sup> There is however no doubt that Beauvoir in her varied production of philosophy, novels and memoirs can be found contradicting. The criticism made, also by many feminists, that she is not systematic, strikes me however as being quite irrelevant, since this was never her intention. To me it is more interesting how her writing reflects her way of doing philosophy. In Feminist Theory & Simone de Beauvoir, 1990 Toril Moi maintains that the hostile critics strategy personalizes the issue and reduces the book to the woman. "The implication is that whatever a woman says, or writes, is less important and less interesting than what she *is*" (ibid: 27). Moi defends Beauvoir's right to intervene in the intellectual and political fields – and to be taken seriously. "Women's right to intellectual activity – particularly to philosophy – has always been hotly contested by patriarchal ideology. Simone de Beauvoir's fate at the hands of her critics shows that the struggle is by no means over today" (ibid: 52).

<sup>25</sup> The sentence 'how their bodies are important for the way they think and work' indicates how the language available to me will not allow me to express that the social educators *are* their bodies. Language tends to uphold a dualism between mind and body meaning that it upholds an understanding of a person *having* a mind and a body, and not *being* a mindful body or an embodied mind.

acts differently. In the historical situation Woman is 'othered' and subordinated in relation to man. Susanne Bjørnson and her female colleagues are coloured by the men they are working with, thereby confirming both that sexuality is comparable with odours and sounds that spread throughout the body and objects around it *and* that there is a difference between the bodies at work. Women change colour, men do not. Or do men change but in another way, a way opaque or impenetrable for women? At any rate, even when Susanne Bjørnson is alone and in charge she finds it difficult to find her own style, sound and odour. On the other hand, the situation is not static or forever determined. Change is possible. Interacting with the young man about his situation, Susanne Bjørnson shows the ability to make a decision of her own (above: 54-58).

The 'othering' of Woman seems to be integrated in her construction. The body is both a melody, a way of living *and* at the same time it is 'other', also to oneself. This difference in sex and embodiment has consequences for the knowledge produced. Sexuality is not only a detail of being, but also an element that runs through our whole existence, including our philosophical reflections. "The values and meanings that are crucial here are not the ones forced on us by others - society - but those that we realise in our own actions. They are not external to the body, but its own (re) creations" (Heinämaa, 1996: 302). This is according to Heinämaa why de Beauvoir writes that 'one *becomes* (devenir) a woman' and not that one is made such.

## The Body as A Universe of Symbols

The Norwegian anthropologist Jorun Solheim has in several articles, most of them collected in the book The Open Body, 1998, developed a theory of the body as a universe of symbols. This field of symbols belongs to a hidden or repressed discourse in the modern Western culture. Symbolic phenomena are not considered to be real, but rather to be some sort of imagery. The paradox is that our Western culture has relegated every form of bodily imagery from the realm of rationality, truth and science while the basic paradigm at the same time is dependent on a correct imagery of reality. The body has normally been conceived as a piece of nature without ability to communicate anything on the level of meaningful reality. In contrast, Solheim maintains that imagery is the primary expression of the body. The body is a carrier of a universe of symbolic



meaning, exactly because the bodily experiences are not meaningful in themselves.

“Every bodily experience of a human being is - whether it is something as fundamental as hunger, thirst or pain - always culturally transmitted and inscribed in certain structures of meaning where the signals of the body are formed as signs or symbols; in other words as expression of a message” (Solheim, 1998: 60).

These symbolic meanings are internalised and experienced as fundamental. The body is a basis in our structure of recognition; it is “the landscape where the traces of culture are carved in, and through these traces or inscribed structures of meanings we meet and experience the world” (Solheim, 1998: 61). Thus the body comes to function as a text and as a generalised universe of symbols, a set of patterns that can be recognised and read by others. The bodily expressions of an individual are to a certain extent to be considered as private utterings, as personal texts. First when they draw on some common code, meaning understood as signs of meanings for others, they become cultural texts and meanings of structure.

The background for this interest is Solheim’s experience of her own body as a text. According to this experience the metaphors of body language are most precise. They are direct analogies to what they express. While the words, the signs of the verbal language, are digital, dependent on what we have decided them to mean, the symbols of the body are magic and refer to two fundamental forms of connections. The first builds on likeness, that something is like something else. The second builds on ‘nearness’, physical contact, touch and contagion. They seem to respond to the two basic figures within rhetoric, metaphor and metonym. Referring to the American linguist Roman Jakobson who separates between metaphorical and metonymical associations as constitutive traits in human thinking, Solheim asks whether it is possible that our way of thinking, our way of establishing connections of meanings come from these basic figures of sensual associations. In that case, the symbols of the body are not something outside the common creation of meaning, on the contrary:

“The symbolic language of the body - in the same way as the language of dreams or for that matter, poetry - reveals the elementary forms of symbolic

meanings and their connections, where the concrete analogy is the constituting principle” (Solheim, 1998: 63-64).

The open body in our culture presents according to Solheim a real, although hidden, structure of symbols. The symbolic representation is in principle everlasting. It is always possible to establish new metaphorical and metonymical connections. The potential of likeness and touch is unlimited. This shifting border between order and chaos is reminiscent of the border between the profane and the sacred. It is the basis of creativity *and* the beginning of chaos. Referring to Mary Douglas and her thesis that every cultural order is founded on a differentiation between categories, Solheim maintains that the body itself represents limitlessness: openness as potential - or reality. Even if both men’s and women’s bodies are equipped with ‘open’ bodies, women’s anatomical ‘more-openness’ prepare for a symbolic elaboration in which this difference is made more or less absolute.

Solheim’s theory is that while all cultures to a certain extent sort out the meaningless (chaos) from the limited (order) with reference to sex and body, our culture does it in such a way that the open and limitless coincides with the female (Solheim, 1998: 69). When moreover modern conceptions of reality consider symbols as a negation of material reality, the connection is lost between symbolic structures of meaning and their anchor in a bodily and material structure of experience. It is, however, important to be aware that this does not abolish its existence. The limitlessness of the female body can be split into three levels:

1. the basic human experience of limits.
2. food as femaleness.
3. the sexual openness of the female body as a symbolic structure of meaning .

As all three are intertwined I shall summarise 1 and 2, but otherwise concentrate on 3 (Solheim, 1998: 69-78).

**1. the basic human experience of limits.** The primary differentiation from the world happens with reference to the female body. This is a painful process, since the representational identity can only happen through setting limits and repressing the limitless and all-embracing

femaleness. Solheim is referring to Kristeva and her concept of the 'abject body'. The abject is neither subject nor object, but something fundamentally unclean and undecided which is threatened by disintegration from without and within.

**2. food and femaleness** seems to be a common cultural phenomenon. Women are the primary givers of food. Moreover, at a deeper level the body of woman *is* food in that it transgresses limits. She is incorporated in the sense that when we take in food, we get mother inside us. For a woman this is especially problematic because she so to speak has to abject herself to be able to create herself: "as a woman I am connected to mother/food with different symbolic necessity to a man - I am inscribed in a symbolic structure of meaning where this metaphor is fundamental for the definition of femaleness. Mother becomes to a certain extent more 'contagious'" (Solheim, 1998: 72-73).

**3. the sexual openness of the female body** is also a symbolic structure of meaning. It tells about the absolute contrast between the limits of male and female, with the latter's possible association to be opened up, penetrated, filled up with maleness as its absolute opposition. The sexual openness of the female body seems to be the main metaphor for limitlessness in female bodies. In comparison to this female openness and penetrability, the male body appears as closed, contained in itself, in other words: it is pure (Solheim, 1998: 74).

The need for clear-cut limits and uniformity has deep roots in our Jewish Christian cultural tradition, maybe in the monotheistic tradition as a whole. The Jewish Christian concept of holiness reflects this. According to Mary Douglas, the originally Hebrew concept of the holy has two related meanings: that which is separate, untouched, and that which is complete, closed in itself, perfect. In such a universe of concepts the female body is an abomination for God. Instead we worship *Virgo immaculata*, which represents the ideal of the separate body. "She is able to express individuality and autonomy. She has still not been opened - not turned into woman" (Solheim, 1998: 76). The mother figure has given up her identity and exists no longer for her self, only for others. Solheim wonders whether woman in fact is raped all the time, since the coitus takes place in her. Referring to 'And they knew each other' from Genesis she

maintains that the woman's body is more known (knowledge-able) to man than his body is to her. To have the possibility of being unknown is accordingly very different for the two sexes, a concrete, bodily difference.

The classical anthropological literature on shame and honour in the area of the Mediterranean states that the sexual woman personified in the wife is a continuous threat against the established symbolic order. Her sexual openness may bring shame over husband, family and ancestry. It has to be fenced in and controlled, because the woman is conceived as bearer of an embedded openness. The distance between wife and whore is not that large. The mother is another figure, a de-sexualised femaleness, freed from the pollution of openness (Solheim, 1998: 76). At the same time modern sexuality contains new special paradoxes. One of them is the increased sexualisation of the female body that seems to have developed a kind of undifferentiated femaleness without symbolic distinctions. The question is whether we are being confronted with "an image - or an imagination - of a generalised and all-embracing femaleness: a thoroughly sexualised 'mother/daughter/wife/whore', a woman of ever changing combinations open to everyone?" (Solheim, 1998: 78). In that case, Solheim continues, we find ourselves in a modern form of limitlessness that lack comparison in the history of culture. The *undifferentiated openness* is systematically seen as Woman: transgression is no longer a sacred taboo but a systematised violation.

Solheim's approach is based on a historical background that she combines with her own experience and interpretation of the situation today. Tradition has rejected the symbolic and imaginary language into which we - as bodies - are born. The core issue for Solheim is to demonstrate how the symbols with their reference to the body are decisive for understanding and for knowledge production. When this is rejected, the symbolic body language becomes a kind of braille, whose codes are unknown to most of us. This gives another perspective on why 'nearness' gets too 'near' for Liv Fjeldvik and Marie Englund. They are unable to express what is at stake because they do not know the codes of their own body and do not know how others read these codes. Also Grete Jeppesen and Susanne Bjørnson are read in a way they do not understand.

Moreover, the analysis of the practises of the five social educators seems to sustain Solheim's analysis of the difference between the *Virgo immaculata* and the mother. While they all agree that 'nearness' is essential, 'nearness' is the most central dilemma for two of them, Liv Fjeldvik and Marie

Englund. Contrary to the other three, they are mothers. The difference seems to be between motherhood and if not Virgo's, then non-mothers. And this difference is not just read it is internalised and experienced as basic (above: 77-78). If our way of constituting meanings stems from the basic figures of metaphor and metonym, Susanne Bjørnson's reaction when called a 'mother' is more understandable. Although not yet a mother herself, her body is both metaphorically and metonymically, potentially constituted as mother. This again builds a bridge between sexual difference and sexuality. They are based in the same body that structures our recognition.

Solheim's interpretation of the female openness and knowability has been helpful in order to understand and evaluate the experience of the female informants. In this sense, they are part of the surrounding culture. The undifferentiated openness is systematically seen as the image of Woman in our times, not as a taboo but as a transgression, as systematic violation. In the field of caring, work with such bodily materiality makes this most evident. When 'nearness' is an integral point of the method of working, Solheim's theory of the symbolic meanings of the body points to a hidden but no less intensive discourse in modern Western work culture. Face-to-face interaction becomes extremely vulnerable. So do the politics, ethics, supervision and administration of care.

Phenomenological understanding and the symbolically embodied language contribute each in their way to understand how crucial the body of the subject is. The body is *not* a thing onto which social and cultural meanings are inscribed, an inscription that can be erased and replaced with another inscription. Rather, the body *is* fundamental for what the person may become and how she is seen. To Elizabeth Grosz sexual embodiment is the centre of subjectivity. Her presupposition is that knowledge and other forms of social productions are, at least partially, effects of the sexualized positions of their producers and users (Grosz, 1994: 20).

## The Body, the Stuff of Subjectivity

In her article Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason, 1993, Elizabeth Grosz analyses the 'crisis of reason', as it is commonly regarded. In as much as the body is closely associated with women, and the body is conceived to be without recognition, women are conceived as being

less rational and intelligent. Men on the other hand mistakenly regard themselves as purely cerebral, forgetting or repressing their corporal genealogies.

“Men take on the roles of neutral knowers, thinkers and producers of thoughts, concepts or ideas only because they have evacuated their own specific forms of corporeality and repressed all traces of their sexual specificity from the knowledge they produce. In appropriating the realm of mind for themselves, men have nonetheless required a support and cover for their now-disavowed physicality. Women thus function as *the* body for men - correlative with the effacement of the sexual concreteness of their (womanly) bodies... Women’s reduction to the status of ‘neutral’ bodies for men is an effect of the male sexualization of knowledges, a point-by-point projection of men’s sexualized bodies onto the structures of knowledges, and, conversely, of the power of inscription that knowledges, discourses, and representational systems impose on bodies to constitute them as such” (Grosz, 1993: 204-205).

This has, of course, an impact on society, since it consists of men and women. So far women have had difficulties being acknowledged for their intellectual work. To alter this, the body has to be recognised as conditioning knowledge. In her book Volatile Bodies, 1994, Grosz presents a theory in which she argues the body as centre, the ‘stuff’ of subjectivity. It is based on the wager that subjectivity can be thought, in its richness and diversity, in terms quite other than those implied by various dualisms (Grosz, 1994: vii).

“The wager is that all the effects of subjectivity, all the significant facets and complexities of subjects, can be as adequately explained using the subject’s corporeality as a framework as it would be using consciousness or the unconscious. All the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject’s corporeal surface. Bodies have all the explanatory power of minds” (Grosz, 1994: vii).

The advantage with the body is that it in its concrete material specificity raises the question of sexual difference in a way which mind does not. Dualism as introduced by Descartes is the assumption that there are two distinct, mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive substances, mind and body. Each inhabits its own self-contained sphere (Grosz, 1994: 6). The dualistic way of thinking

and conceptualising is attached to a hierarchy in which the one is privileged and the other suppressed and inferiorised. The suppressed is the opposite; body is what mind is not. The important thing is that the body/mind split has been correlated to the distinction man/woman, woman is what man is not.

Philosophy is about concepts, ideas, rationality, judgement, terms that marginalise or exclude the body. As far as mind is connected to maleness, and body to femaleness, then women and femaleness is problematised as knowing philosophical subjects and as knowable epistemic objects (Grosz, 1994: 4). Although there is a recognition of the body, it is often conceptualised in narrow and dichotomised terms that minimise or ignore its formative role in the production of philosophical values – truth, knowledge, justice, etc. This includes many feminist theorists as well.

“Above all, the sexual specificity of the body and the ways sexual difference produces or effects truth, knowledge, justice, etc. has never been thought. The role of the specific male body as the productive of a certain kind of knowledge (objective, verifiable, causal, quantifiable) has never been theorized” (Grosz, 1994: 4).

The problem with overcoming dualism is how to explain the interactions between incompatible substances. Reductionism by reducing mind to body or by reducing body to mind does not solve this problem. As soon as they are defined in this exclusive way, there seems to be no way of reconciling them by understanding their mutual influences or their apparent parallelism (Grosz, 1994: 7). To illustrate her suggestion, Grosz uses the metaphor of the Möbius strip. This is a Lacanian concept, by which he likens the subject to a Möbius strip. The Möbius strip is “the inerted three-dimensional figure eight”. Although Lacan uses it in a different context and for a different purpose, Grosz finds it suitable for rethinking the relations between mind and body (ibid:xii). “It enables subjectivity to be understood as fully material and for materiality to be extended and to include and explain the operation of language, desire, and significance” (Grosz, 1994: 210).

Grosz states that her book is “about” (Grosz’s quotation marks) sexuality, without explicitly discussing it. Sexuality can be understood in at least four ways:

- a. as a drive, an impulse or form of propulsion,

directing a subject towards an object.

- b. in terms of an act, a series of practises and behaviours involving bodies, organs, and pleasures, usually but not always involving orgasm.
- c. as an identity.
- d. as a set of orientations, positions and desires (Grosz, 1994: viii).

In other words, sexuality is a 'slippery and ambiguous term', and is as a concept impossible to keep within predesignated regions. For example, it refuses to accept the containment of the bedroom or restrict itself to only those pleasures that prepare for orgasm pleasure.

"As a determinate type of body, as sexually specific, it infects all the activities of the sexes, underlying our understandings of the world well beyond the domain of sexual relations or the concrete relations constituting sexual difference. Our conceptions of reality, knowledge, truth, politics, ethics and aesthetics are all effects of sexually specific - and thus far in our history, usually male - bodies, and are all thus implicated in the power structures which feminists have described as patriarchal, the structures which govern relations between the sexes" (Grosz, 1994: viii-ix).

Sexual difference and sexuality are thus deeply connected and form the basis from which we think, act, position etc. The decisive questions come in connection with the ontological status of the body:

"...is sexual difference primary and sexual inscription a cultural overlay or rewriting of an ontologically prior differentiation? Or is sexual differentiation a product of the various forms of or inscription of culturally specific bodies? Does inscription produce sexual differentiation? Or does sexual difference imply a differential mode of inscription?" (Grosz, 1994: 189).

Without pretending to present a final model, Grosz votes for sexual difference as pre-ontological and pre-epistemological. The crucial point is to understand subjectivity as irreducibly connected to the specificity of the bodies without ending in two separate types of entities, men and women. By seeing sexual difference and sexuality as bound up with embodiment, this theory has given



some useful tools to interpret how the female body and female subjectivity in the narratives are conceived as different from men's bodies and identities.

With these different perspectives I hope to have demonstrated both how crucial it is to understand - and to conceptualise - how the female body makes a difference and how complex the issue is. The body is not biologically determined, understood in the sense of nature, essence. On the other hand, Solheim wonders whether the actual shape of the female body as container for both a child and the male penis may contribute to the difference in relation to limits and 'nearness'. Common to all of the presented perspectives is how the difference in sexual embodiment and in knowledge production *becomes* decisive for identity, for position, for subjectivity, relation, interaction, knowledge production and thus also for ethics.

The difference is not only a construction that can be de-constructed and changed, although part of it may seem so. It is incorporated, integrated and part of an ongoing interdefinition with the world around. Being 'other' and trained into subordination for centuries has left its mark on the bodily female subject in every way from (personal) identity over knowledge production to (public) position. In this way they all point at the difficulty of change. To make change happen, women among other things have to find their voice, their language, as Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray have underlined over and over again. And, moreover, a position and a place from where to make their voice and language heard. This is however no easy task, and it is to this I shall turn in the following.

## The Problem of Language

When working with this project, I found that language became more and more obstinate. Not language in the meaning of English, Danish or Norwegian, to mention the ones most familiar to me, but language in a more broad sense. When reading the many theories about 'body', I felt they helped me out at the same time as they alienated me. When I began writing, I found myself struggling with the existing language. At a seminar the Norwegian philosopher Toril Moi argued that the sex/gender question in her opinion is best understood when gender and sex are conceived as analytical tools. Above Moira Gatens argued that sex and gender are alluding to body and mind. Both have helped me to see the inherent dualism in these concepts. However, conceiving 'body'

as an analytical tool, did not change the fact that the word 'body' is unavoidable, signalling or even producing dualism. Language seems to resist any other understanding than what dualism has already implemented in it<sup>26</sup>. In the following I would like to demonstrate how my struggle with language comes to reflect the whole topic of sexual difference.

### **language and 'reality'**

The Danish theologian and philosopher Johannes Sløk became important to this project through his analysis of the relation between language and world in his book: Devotional Language, 1996. His point of departure is that the (real) world consists of the phenomena of language. Language *is* the phenomena and vice versa. They are each other's presupposition. With reference to Spinoza, Sløk argues that epistemology, ontology and language presuppose each other, and together they constitute the world. In all three, he says, it is necessary to understand the trinity involved. For this purpose it is necessary to begin with materiality, the concretely existing, with *phainomenon* (Sløk uses the Greek word). In order to explain Sløk uses the Latin expression *perceptio*. In a philosophical context it means any act of consciousness in which one become conscious of something, either by sensing, by imagining or by thinking. Any *perceptio* has a content, a *perceptum/percepta*. Furthermore any *perceptio* has an 'owner', one whose *perceptio* it is, a *percipiens*. This means that *perceptio* is in the middle of a unit: *perceptum - perceptio - percipiens*. These are not independent, they are inseparable. If this is forgotten, we are left with two independent entities: subject and object. The same goes for ontology. The *phainomenon* is also in the middle of a trinity with the prepositions *of* and *to* (Sløk, 1996: 1-5).

The problem is that *prepositions* as well as *perceptum* and *percipiens* have a transcendental character. This is what gives the tension. The risk of transcendence is dualism. In this conception *percipiens* and *perceptum* are first of all independent entities; secondly they might meet and render *perceptio*

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<sup>26</sup> The Danish researcher Sascha Qvortrup maintains in The Body and its History of Culture, 1999, that the attempt to reinstate the body only has resulted in yet a more academic body orientation. It is the same critique of rationality based on the same arguments of rationality. Whenever we want to express something about the body, the body is neglected, because it is cultivated in its abstraction and not in its actuality. Only in its actuality can the body of the singular subject express itself and *be* body. The body is always more than our concepts and can thus not be part of a system. The question is, Qvortrup concludes, whether the body is a condition that we have to accept and whether we, with Wittgenstein, have to realise that there are things we can not speak of and therefore have to be silent about (Qvortrup, 1999: 126-129).

possible. He illustrates this through the example of a tulip. In his garden there is a tulip. It is a thing (*perceptum*), but by isolating it from all other things he (*percipiens*) deprives himself of getting any understanding of it. Already in language, 'tulip', Sløk has made this tulip into a species of sameness: tulips. Moreover, he has forgotten all the connections, which have made this tulip into a particular, unique one: the dog, the house, the garden and Sløk himself, interacting with each other (*perceptio*). In this enigmatic process 'I' manage to turn all other things and myself into something special. By using 'I' Sløk has been tempted to give in to the transcendental character of *percipiens*. "I have imagined that I am an object of a special nature, a biological organism, and that I find myself in a multifarious relationship to everything around me" (Sløk, 1996: 12). This, Sløk maintains, is by virtue of language.

Following structuralism and its keyword *sign* for a word, written or spoken, Sløk argues that language consists in the same trinity as epistemology and ontology: *the designated aspect - the sign - the designating aspect*. Thus, Sløk says, epistemology, ontology and language form a unit: *perceptio*, *phainomenon* and *sign* presuppose each other and together they are reality, the world; the world is always dressed in language. Strictly speaking language does not speak about the world; it is the world that speaks itself by means of language.

Instead of talking of *the* world it would be wiser to speak, exclusively, about *my* world. My world is "the sum of the *percepta* that are constituents in the perceptions whose *percipiens* I am" (Sløk, 1996: 11). In other words, there are no other *percipiens* in my world than myself. According to Sløk most problems stem from the fact that I in my own consciousness can appear as *perceptum* for my own perceptions. The world, however, is language in a double sense. I can speak about the world because the world always already is language. The problem is the transcendental character of language. Sløk refers to two of the early classical Greek philosophical understandings of the relation between consciousness and thing. The epistemological and the representational, both based upon two independent entities: consciousness and thing, subject and object. This is the presupposition of rational language. The goal of rational language is to be able to say what consciousness has conceived of the thing. In order to do so, it has to distinguish between real and imaginary things. The criteria are the truth of correspondence.

According to Sløk this distinction is not possible. The imaginary things are themselves language, since the world i.e. reality is language. Furthermore, a

thing has to be seen in its connection. The rational language is scientific and the result of an abstraction from reality and situations. Not only is the rational language unsituated and non-contextual.

“...it (also) abstracts itself from my involvement in what rational language can speak about. It is exactly the fact that, in principle, I am detaching myself, which makes the situation disappear. It is because I have nothing to do with the things that they become things, for it is because I have no intention with them that they become non-contextual” (Sløk, 1996: 48).

In the example of the tulip above, language has lead Sløk astray into calling it a tulip. This is a determination of species. Already in language the tulip is made into something more than just itself. Moreover, all the tulips connections are forgotten, a garden, a rose, Sløk, etc. Thus, things in rational language become primary (Sløk, 1996: 62), whereas things in a Spinozean conception are left secondary to unity. Sløk maintains that the world is not a collection of things. It consists of situations. The situation is always concrete. The world is always *my* world.

“I have no other world but the world in which I am the percipients, or - to repeat the central concept - the world is the accumulation of phenomena which are phenomena to me, and all of which have a content, something they mean. It must be remembered that they are phenomena of something in the sense that both I, to whom the phenomenon is a phenomenon, and that which the phenomenon is a phenomenon of are absorbed in the phenomenon – as such; that is what makes it impossible to separate myself from what I absorbed in. Absorption means two things in one: 1) I and the thing are absorbed in the phenomenon as its prepositions – 2) we are absorbed in each other. (Sløk, 1996: 49)

The problem is that the phenomena are fragile, the involvement slips and I may destroy my absorption. As a consequence the phenomena turn into things that have nothing to do with me except that I can observe and analyse them. Without absorption the world becomes a collection of things and I an island of myself. That is what rational language presupposes *has happened*. In many ways however rational language is legitimate; it is by virtue of rational language that we get to know about these things and how they work.

“Therefore rational language is most complete when it’s objective, i.e. when the last remnant of absorption has disappeared – when the thing is considered to be as independent as possible from the person who observes it” (Sløk, 1996: 50).

Sløk is well aware of all the theories that deny the possibility of such objectivity. However, that is not his point. He is convinced that the rational language is both useful and indispensable. *As long as* its constraints are seen: the world has become un-situated; this we accept for a while and for the sake of analysis.

“The way the world looks in the perspective of rational language is a result of our manipulation. In its immediate way of being there, it is not at all like that, and when I am absorbed in my world, I don’t speak about it in rational language; but being in it, I speak about it in the language required by the actual situation – in a rhetorical, poetical, ethical or religious language. And if I get to the point where I want to speak about the world, not the non-situational world, but the world which is an accumulation of situations, and therefore, appears in the complex, interdependent relations of the phenomena, then I will speak a mythical language” (Sløk, 1996: 51).

According to Sløk, the mythical language is the precondition of the rational language. This means that the myth is the language in its origin. When the rational language forgets this presupposition, it comes to monopolise every other language and what is understood as the world becomes reduced to materiality<sup>27</sup>.

Sløk’s perspective confirms my struggle with language. His analysis has helped me to understand and identify various layers of my difficulties with language. The human being is not an individual thing; it is always already situated in relation to the world, meaning other bodies or entities. *And vice versa*, which is crucial. It is reciprocal, which is why he begins with *perceptum* and not with *percipiens*. By saying ‘I’ Sløk argues he has revealed the embedded problems in language and epistemology: *perceptum - perceptio -*

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<sup>27</sup> Rosi Braidotti underlines how the instigation of rationality as the founding myth of Western philosophy has pushed abstraction into violence. “Thus diffusing it, philosophy has played a fundamental role in the perpetuation of the hegemonic model of thought and human consciousness that is applied to many other theoretical disciplines. It has also fuelled so many real and symbolic disqualifications and murders of the many ‘others’ of reason, the memory of which is mixed with the origins of our ‘rational’ culture.” (Braidotti, 1991: 278).

*percipiens* is a unit. If this is forgotten, the result is two separate things: subject and object. The same goes for ontology. The problem stems from the transcendental character of *percipiens* and *perceptum*.

Thus, two intertwined layers of my problem with language mentioned above have been illuminated. One was that I was lead astray into individuality. Due to the transcendental character of epistemology, ontology and language, I had manipulated reality and forgotten that this is only possible for a while and for the sake of analysis. I was left with a thing, an entity apart from its situated relation. Another layer of my uneasiness is connected to this. In this individuality, I became cornered within the artificial world of theory, a special theoretical form of language game. In other words, I had been dismantling the body/mind split, as Kathy Davis criticises the recent feminist scholarship for above, and had forgotten the actual material bodies and their everyday interactions with the world around them. In short, it was not language alone I had struggled with, but reality. This reality is, however, not dualistic as I had been raised and trained into believing. The dualism is produced due to the transcendental character of *percipiens*. Or, in other words, when the unit of *perceptum* – *perceptio* – *percipiens* is forgotten, I become a subject and the other an object. The ability to appear as *perceptum* for my own perceptions has added further complications. Rational language had trapped me into forgetting how differentiated and interdependent the world, the language and the bodies - and things - in it are. This trap always exists, as underlined by Sløk and Davis in their different way. Jorun Solheim gives an example in the introduction to her book The Open Body, 1998.

## Different Languages, Different Levels

Modern culture, Solheim says, has cultivated a conception of rationality as thinking itself, and consequently it has relegated the symbolic to the department of irrelevant and irregular entities. It is this belief in the absolute dominance of rationality that characterises the modern conception of rationality. On the other hand, Solheim begs for more rationality since there seems to be very little of it in the world today. Solheim argues that rationality is held captive by a network of symbolic representations that are not understood for what they are: modern magic. An example is the ongoing symbolic coupling between the concept of rationality and maleness. This is

highly irrational, says Solheim. “It represent rather a symbolic confusion of concept and reality or sign and reference - in other words, a thorough mixing up of chart and terrain, in which one, within the words of Bateson, ‘eats the menu’ ” (Solheim, 1998: 17).

In other words, the symbolic metaphor “maleness = rationality” only tells us that the concept of ratio has been associated with certain conceptions about maleness. This operation stems from confusing one level with another; it has nothing to do with logic. It is a metaphorical conclusion and shows that metaphors always are self- confirming. This is why they have such great effect. The same goes for the symbolic way of thinking. It inscribes us in an understanding of reality that is self-evident, an epistemology without distance. In other words, in order to do research that intends to bridge theory and practise, different languages are needed and different levels have to be respected. To my understanding, this is another way of saying that ‘perceptio’ is a necessary link between ‘percipiens’ and ‘perceptum’. When we forget this link, we end up taking thinking itself for rationality, which paradoxically leaves us with very little rationality. But let me return once again to Sløk.

## Human Being and/or ‘Body’

My interest here is to look into the argumentation that leads Sløk to state that, due to the individualising dialectic revealed in language, history goes on, language changes and with it interpretation and vice versa. To clarify this, he focuses on the concept of ‘human being’. The problem is, he says, that we know what we mean; we are all human beings. On the other hand, the concept is difficult exactly because we cannot say anything about it. When Aristotle tried saying that ratio, the ability to speak, two legs, were required to be a human being, he at the same time came to construct the concept of the ‘deficient’ human being.

The damages done then is still present, Sløk says, even if we in principle have reached the recognition that every human being is ‘a human being’. Consequently, ‘a human being’ has no qualities/abilities, cannot be met, or can be met everywhere, in every concrete human being. Sløk formulates it like this:

“...every single human being is the revelation of ‘man’. ‘Man’ may be tall, small, of average size – he may be black, yellow, white, haggard, and fat; he

may have black hair, red hair, or be bald – and we can go on like this, forever. But we can't deny that whatever 'man' may be in particular situations, he is still 'man'. One human being is not, in any sense, more true, or real than any other human being...There is no difference between man and 'man', for every man is 'man' by being so" (Sløk, 1996: 24).

What is intrinsically important for Sløk to illuminate is that there is not - and cannot be - an ideal or 'right' form, size, essence or substance. Accordingly, there can be no right or ideal language in which to interpret reality.

"To claim that one linguistic interpretation of the world is more true than another one is just as meaningful as it is to claim that a blue-eyed human being is more 'human' than a brown-eyed person" (Sløk, 1996: 27).

Therefore, no culture is truer than any other culture. To my understanding this includes difference in sex, race, handicap and other differences. History and culture and language change due to this differentiation. Without mentioning sexual difference, Sløk's interpretation leaves room for any different interpretation the female sexual embodiment may contribute with.

Sløk does not mention the notion of 'body' although Spinoza does. I suggest seeing this as a crucial part of his interpretation of Spinoza. The human being *is* a body. Gatens confirms this understanding, saying that according to Spinoza there is only one substance. This substance "is single and indivisible; body and mind enjoy only a modal existence and may be understood as 'expressions' or modifications of the attributes of substance, that is, extension and thought, respectively. The human being is conceived as part of a dynamic and interconnected whole" (Gatens 1996: 109). As Grosz stated that her book is about sexuality although it does not explicitly discuss it, I reckon that Sløk could claim that his analysis intends to overcome dualism by incorporating the human being without explicitly discussing it. Contrary to Sløk, Gatens, Lloyd and Grosz use the word 'body' all the time, when referring to Spinoza as in general. Is the difference between the vocabulary of Sløk and these feminists due to the sexual different embodiment of the theorists? While Sløk as a male theorist is - and can be - satisfied by leaving room for different interpretations and embodiments, feminist theorists have had to deconstruct the mind/body split to see how the sexually different embodiment has been neglected, relegated from any place in knowledge production.



Consequently, I suggest seeing the two different ways as complementing each other. Grosz's metaphor of the Möebius strip I find an interesting effort to conceive the interrelation between body and mind differently. However, in order not to become cornered in the artificial world of theoretical dualistic individuality, Sløk's model of *percipiens* - *perceptio* - *perceptum* is necessary. It is an epistemological parallel to the socio-cultural method, presented in chapter 1. They point however in different ways at the mediated interdependency of person, situation and action.

Thus, it is the factual interrelations, interdefinitions and interactions in which we all partake all the time, which make it difficult to circle in what subjectivity is, what 'I' means and accordingly what sexual difference means. I shall return to the question of subjectivity more concretely in chapter 6. The example of the tulip is frightening because it reveals something always implicit in the relationship between language and the world. It is particular, because of its place in a particular garden, and yet it is categorised as a flower, and more specifically as a tulip. Every woman is particular, and yet categorised as member of the female sex. How is the difference between women, their uniqueness, to be perceived while at the same time doing justice to their commonality?

This underlines once again the need to investigate the individual difference that each person makes in his/her involvement with the world around him/her and the meaning each of us attach to it. As Kathy Davis says, it is necessary to focus on the individual's embodied experience; how the features of domination are enacted through the body and at the same time uncover the many ways women engage in subversions, in and through their bodies. And moreover, it is important to remember that most of us have many different relations, and accordingly many different experiences. It is precisely in this I see the possibility of change, and therefore also the responsibility of each of us.

## The Sexual Situatedness of the Researcher

However, the paradox of the statement of the equality of every human being, and the inequality we seem to reproduce, is still there. Society seems to display, what Sløk calls a meaningless, hierarchical difference between the interpretation (and culture) of those with blue eyes and those with brown eyes

(and men/women), here as everywhere. And this leads me to a basic notion of this investigation. The sex of the researcher. The thesis investigates sexual difference and the interdependency of identity, subjectivity and knowledge production. It seems important to state how the subjectivity of the researcher is part of the process and how, as argued by Grosz above, it cannot but effect this investigation.

My research took its early steps in a research milieu that reinforced my hunch in a paradoxical way. First as a bodily feeling of great distress and uneasiness, not unfamiliar from years at University, but on the other hand not fully recognisable either. Then an actual experience helped me to formulate the problem. At a seminar about political philosophy, I encouraged myself to pose a critical question. The lecture suggested taking the old Greek polis as model in modern society. I questioned the possibility of using this model today, since it exhibits a hierarchy. The leader of the seminar rejected my question with the words: "If we can forget women for one moment". The last three words were spoken very distinctly and authoritatively and underlined by the pluralis majestatis of 'we'. The feeling of anger, shame, impotence was immense. In the light of this experience of 'arrogant perception' I suddenly knew - and felt - that my research topic was intimately related to the experience of not being included in the normative and dominant discourse, whether of knowledge production, of the notion sexuality or of ethics.

Reading the book The Gender of Knowledge, 1995, written by the Swedish sociologist Karin Widerberg, reinforced my hunch still further. Both of us were young in the sixties and apparently we had had many similar experiences in a time where there were few women at the universities. But again it was her writing that actualised and legitimised mine. The book consists of two interrelated parts. One is her own story and the other is feminist theory. In the first part she mentions how the body had no place in the room of knowledge when she grew up. In her youth it became evident to Widerberg that "...the room of knowledge belonged to man; it is about men and it is represented by human beings. To be human one had to be like a man" (Widerberg, 1995: 67).

To become visible as a sexual being required therefore a split. Widerberg argues that girls had to choose between the body and the mind, and that her choice became crucial for her relation to not only the opposite sex but also her own. If one chooses the mind, one chooses to grow up in a man's world. Hence, to choose mind, and to be seen as a mind by men, called for

contempt for her own sex. In overcoming this split feminist theory has been most important, Widerberg states.

In order to become part of knowledge production, it is essential to state and to analyse one's own sexual situatedness as a researcher. This project would have been different if the researcher was of another sex, another race, and another class. As I shall return to repeatedly, the 'inter-' is of major importance in this project: the interdefinition, the intersubjectivity, and the interdependence. Thus the question recurring along in the process of research was how come I had not noticed before? How could I believe my experience and reflections now? In this way, it became a meta-ethical problem that I did not believe and did not want to believe what I found out. As Widerberg rightly maintains, to choose to be seen as a mind by men, as I had done for many years, had resulted in contempt for my own sex. When doing research, it hit me like a boomerang, both in form of wanting the informants to be heroines and in doubting myself as a valid researcher. In seeing this connection I have been inspired by Ine Gremmen and Kathy Davis (above: 39). Again, Widerberg's reflections are interesting. They have come about as a result of an analysis of her own past. And mine. We did not know - we were happy just to be there at all.

## Conclusion

From different perspectives it has emerged that Woman is positioned differently and that this difference also leads to her devaluation. The narratives of the social educators have given some traces of how sexual difference or variations of this difference are created and constituted in practice, in the work place. In the process of analysis it has emerged that not only the informants but also the researcher has been raised and trained into the same system of philosophy that produces an oppositional system, the subject/object system, "we"/"them". They towards their clients, me towards them. This stems from the dualistic conception of the human being as consisting, on the one hand, of mind/ratio and, on the other, of body – and the resulting oppositions between culture/nature, rationality/emotionality, man/woman. To overcome dualism without ending in reductionism to either body or mind, the body has to be understood as the stuff of subjectivity.

In order to avoid getting caught up in the theory of individuality, in which language tends to keep us, another framework of understanding is necessary. Seeing the human being as always situated in the world, involved in relations, makes it possible to discern how different languages represent different levels of reality. When this is forgotten, and rationality is confused with reality and the symbolic language is excluded as being irrelevant and irregular, the popular notion of men as rational and women as emotional, as it is daily exposed in the media, in conversation, jokes, popular novels, ladies and men's magazines, even books, is reproduced.

Consequently, we have to acknowledge our contribution, its context and impact, and critically scrutinise how we ourselves engage in subversions in and through our bodies. How is it that we, meaning all of us, already and always involved with each other and the world around us, continue to produce inequality between the sexes? Are there common traits that justify that women across class, race and sexual preferences, are relegated to certain areas of work, with low wages, low esteem and are more or less kept out of knowledge production and decision makings in public life and economics? Or is the problem that as long as there is only one frame of reference, women will always be considered different, meaning inferior. This poses the question of what it takes to be counted among human beings. Who sets the agenda, and how is another agenda to be set, or rather how are agendas to be avoided?

### 3. Sex, Sexuality and Sexual Difference

In the previous chapter I pointed at various understandings of the body, all of them maintaining that the human being does not *have* a body. It *is* a body. This body influences both subjectivity and knowledge production. Accordingly sexual difference will be reproduced as long as knowledge production dismisses the contributions of differing embodiments as un- or less important. In this chapter I shall demonstrate how a proposition of sexual equality at the level of theory, meant to include 'all human beings', comes to maintain sexual inequality at the level of practise. The norm of the human being is more than an abstract concept, it is embodied i.e. it is a body. By means of validating the needs of this body over other bodies, it positions and constructs the sexes differently.

NOU 1991:20: Rights of Human Beings with Mental Retardation is a public memorandum. Part III of NOU 1991:20 concerns ethical matters. Among the rights mentioned is the one I shall concentrate on: "All human beings, also those with a physical or mental handicap, have a right to a sexual life" (NOU, 1991: 46). Through analysing this proposition in its context I shall argue that inherent in the notion of 'The Human Being' is the norm of the 'white healthy male between 20 and 50'. This norm is produced of favouring over bodies that differ the needs of the 'white male embodiment'. By turning the sexual need of this body into a right including mentally handicapped, the proposition consequently replaces the inequality between mentally handicapped and human beings with the inequality between men and women. While acknowledging and respecting mentally handicapped as sexual beings, I shall take issue with the enrolment of them (and anyone) in the norm of the human being.

Since the context of this proposition offers only scarce and general information, I shall present and analyse a documentary showing how the question of a sexual life is handled at a small institution in Denmark. This analysis demonstrates how sexual inequality is created due to an understanding of sexuality as stemming from a male 'sex drive'. This necessitates that sexuality is investigated from the point of view of sexual difference. To this end I shall refer to the Canadian physician Gary Sanders and the Danish researcher Else Christensen. To understand how sexual inequality in society is produced and re-produced, the Norwegian philosopher K. E. Tranøy has been influential. His analysis of how need, right and justice is linked, has helped me

to see how inequality is anchored in the norm set by the needs of the 'healthy white male' body. This asymmetry is reinforced when it is proposed to make 'a right to a sexual life' part of public responsibility. To establish equality before the law for the sexually different body, Drucilla Cornell suggests transforming the general normative standards by means of protecting minimum conditions of individuation for each individual.

Presenting and discussing these different perspectives, I hope to demonstrate how the proposal of a right to a sexual life reflects sexual inequality in society, and consequently why it is crucial to understand the proposal in the light of sexual difference.

## 'A Right to a Sexual Life'

UN resolution 9 Dec. 1975: Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons" says in Art. 3: "Disabled persons have the inherent right to respect for their human dignity. Disabled persons, whatever the origin, nature and seriousness of their handicaps and disabilities have the same fundamental rights as their fellow- citizens of the same age, which implies first and foremost the right to enjoy a decent life, as normal and as fully as possible".

The resolution was followed by other similar resolutions, all establishing rights on behalf of these and other marginalised groups. As a consequence of the ideology of integrating mentally handicapped into society, the big institutions were closed in Norway as in most of Europe. NOU 1991:20 is a public memorandum and constitutes a major and impressive effort to clarify the consequences of these resolutions and to secure that the intentions of the Norwegian Reform are understood and implemented. NOU 1991:20 is a proposition to the Government, and not yet legally authorised. Several of the points mentioned are, however, formulated as rights. These rights implicitly bear witness to the historical violation of the dignity and integrity of mentally disabled and handicapped citizens.

### **what kind of right is 'a right to a sexual life'?**

The Norwegian dr. juris et dr. med. Aslak Syse has analyzed this proposed right from a legal point of view. Like many of the other rights mentioned in NOU 1991:20, a right to a sexual life is not dependent on any legal system or sets of belief. He points to the fact that neither Norwegian law nor International

law formulate the rights of individuals to enact their sexual life or to get sexual satisfaction. The individual's right to such satisfaction has been placed in the sphere of privacy. This privacy is protected through regulations such as the European Commission for Human Rights, article 8:

”(1) Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence. (2) There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedom of others” (Aslak Syse, 1993: 2-3).

As the use of personal pronoun in the formula indicates, 'everyone' is male; thus, when the Commission establishes the right of privacy to include a right to exercise sexual activities in the private sphere without interference, it appears to be the right of the male to decide over his wife and children which is protected. In this way the right of privacy may protect against violation from society. At the same time it however keeps society from interfering in matters of marital abuse.

No legal right, I suggest to understand the right to a sexual life as a claim-right. To conceptualise the right to a sexual life as a claimright qua nature seems to serve the main purpose in NOU 1991: 20: to grant mentally and physically handicapped individuals the same status as their fellow citizens. With reference to Alan Gewirth the Norwegian philosopher Henrik Syse in his thesis defines a claim-right by the following formula:

“A has a right to X against B by the virtue of Y”, where A is the right-holder, X the “object” of the right (that to which one has a right), B the person who has the corresponding duty, and Y the justificatory basis or ground or rule of the right” (Henrik Syse, 1996: 16).

Using this formula allows discerning various problems. Let me begin with Y. The 'nature' of a right is determined by how Y is understood. There are different possibilities. A 'legal right' will be a right, which (ideally) will be upheld in a court of law, and where Y is thus the equivalent to positive law. A 'moral right' will be a right supported by a certain (for instance philosophical

or religious) rule or system of belief; this rule or system will then be Y. A ‘natural right’ is considered to be upheld and supported by nature, meaning that it is regarded as being common to all human beings qua human beings; thus, it is not dependent on a specific system of law or a specific system of beliefs in order to be a right. Y is, in other words, equivalent to nature.

In the following I shall concentrate the discussion on the mentally handicapped. The above mentioned formula allows me to identify two additional questions inherent in NOU 1991:20. When Y is defined as a claimright upheld and supported by nature, then both A and B are as human beings entitled to the same right. The formula, however, points at A as the right-holder and at B as the duty-holder. This poses two questions, which are intimately connected: 1. When and how can A be said to have a right against B when they both are granted the same right? This question is related to the second question. 2. What is the content (X) of the right? To answer these questions, I shall analyse the context in which the right to a sexual life is placed.

## Sexuality and Sexual Life in the Context of NOU 1991:20

NOU 1991:20 acknowledges some of the difficulties arising when proposing a right to a sexual life. It says that this is an area with a multitude of different values, norms and convictions. That society as a whole has been reluctant to talk about sexuality and sexual life of the handicapped. Time has come for professionals to talk openly of norms and feelings related to sexuality. Personal attitudes among the caring staff cause conflict in the practical situations. It is therefore necessary to develop a common attitude. Consideration for the client is given priority over that of the staff, who is expected to be tolerant. There will be demanded no duty to act against own personal conviction, norms and values (NOU, 1991:20: 46).

Whether the staff is to concretely help the client to sexual satisfaction is not to be answered generally. A twisted formulation in Norwegian language reveals the contradictory difficulties of this dilemma:

“On the background of an ethical consideration it can also not be said that concrete help to mastering sexlife may not take place whatsoever” (NOU,



1991: 20: 46, my translation of "På bakgrunn av en etisk overveielse kan det heller ikke hevdes at konkret hjelp til mestring av seksuallivet ikke bør skje uansett").

NOU 1991:20 is illuminating a pertinent and serious problem of daily life. Ignoring it as has been the common principle so far is no longer a solution. It is, however, difficult to extract what understanding of sexuality and sexual life the text is based on, and consequently what the staff is expected to do. No one will have to go against their personal convictions, norms and values; on the other hand, a common attitude will have to be developed in order to give considerations for the client priority.

The question is whether the staff's personal attitudes causing the conflicts are related to sexuality as such, or to sexuality in relation to mentally handicapped people? In the first case, it may well be a reluctance to draw sexual themes out of the personal sphere and into the public working place. It may also be a different valuation of sexuality, a different understanding. In the second case, it may be a concern for the clients. That they are better off without sexuality since it is difficult for them to find partners. Or quite the opposite, as presented in the documentary below, that the staff is most anxious to help with matters of sexuality.

If 'a common attitude of tolerance' turns out to be as minimal as the old and well-established principle of ignoring<sup>28</sup>, the gravity of the problem is missed once again. Showing respect for the privacy of the clients could undoubtedly solve something<sup>29</sup>. Let me give some examples: do not enter the client's room without knocking and awaiting an answer, do not forbid guests to enter and to stay in the clients private room, do not forbid readings of sexual literature in own room etc.

A main problem is that the context fails to give any hint as to how sexuality and sexual life is to be understood. What is the content (X) of the

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<sup>28</sup> Clarence J. Sundram and Paul F. Stavis states that agencies often prohibit all sexual activity either by formal or informal politics. Even if it is not clear how many agencies that operate under such policies, whether out of religious conviction of the sponsoring agency, parental pressures, or staff filosofies, the authors suggest that the number is significant. More often though, sexual conduct is discouraged by simply providing no privacy for the residents to engage in sexual behavior (Mental Retardation/ August 1994: 246)

<sup>29</sup> Sundram and Davis are sustaining this: "More often, sexual conduct is discouraged by simply providing no privacy for the residents of the program to engage in sexual behavior. In both cases, the likely result is to deny the sexuality of all the residents, to fail to make sex education and training available, and to limit activity to furtive and secret encounters whenever opportunity presents itself" (Mental Retardation/August 1994: 256).

right? Instead the text is formulated in a way that confirms the difference between staff and clients. The staff is seen as individuals with differences in values and norms, while the clients are seen as an undifferentiated mass. Moreover, it demonstrates a superficial understanding of norms and feelings: If we just talk openly about our personal attitudes in relation to sexuality they either disappear or turn into a common attitude. Such an understanding fail to recognise that attitudes most often are built on values and norms, early inscribed and often non-conscious and therefore not accessible on a conscious, rational level. Again, it is remarkable that a corresponding differentiability in norms, values and convictions on the part of the clients is not mentioned at all.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that NOU 1991: 20 is concerned that the right to a sexual life becomes more than just theoretical talk. And there is no doubt that it makes the staff responsible for the necessary changes<sup>30</sup>. Referring to Kant, Gertrude Nonner-Winkel distinguishes between perfect duties and imperfect duties: “perfect duties are negative duties, that is, duties of omission (e.g. do not kill, do not cheat, etc)” (Nonner-Winkel, 1993: 144). I find this distinction helpful as it pinpoints the dilemma inherently present in the proposal of a right to a sexual life. Although formulated in a grammatically messy way it sustains that concrete help to the mastering of sexual life can be ethical defended. Thereby confirming that sexuality is conceived as something, which might involve active participation of the staff. A right to a sexual life includes help, when the rightholder (A) lacks the ability to fulfil this right. Help is something active, and this is what gives trouble. In other words, perfect duties are in fact dismissed as not satisfactory by the context of the proposal. Thus, the implications of the right for the caring staff become manifold. They are both A and B. How to respect the mentally handicapped persons as well as the staffmembers as equal rightholders when mentally handicapped persons need help to obtain satisfaction of their right?

In accordance with my analysis of the context to the proposal, I intend to present some of the challenges in this field. First a clarification of how I hope to do justice to the individual mentally handicapped, although I have had to restrict the chapter to focus on them as members of a social group.

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<sup>30</sup> In Denmark it is possible to help the client in contact with a prostitute (Vejledning om Seksualitet – uanset handicap, 1989). In Norway this is seen as conflicting with U.N.’s convention against trade with human beings and prostitution ( 1949, cit. from Aslak Syse 1993: 16).

## Mentally Handicapped as a Social Group

When diagnosed as mentally handicapped, and this goes for the whole group no matter level of functioning, one is categorised as different, irrespective of one's gender. A difference which tends to increase due to the different position following the diagnosis. The diagnosis is done on an evaluation of the I.Q. which ranges from nearly 'normal' functioning to nearly not functioning. When diagnosed as mentally handicapped, the individual person becomes member of a social group. In using the concept 'social group', I am referring to the specific concept developed by Iris Young: "A social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life" (Young, 1990: 43).

I find this Young's concept fruitful because it embraces both individuality and group affinity. As such it supports and enlarges the basic conception in this thesis of the intertwinement of interdependency and independence. With her view of group differentiation as multiple, cross-cutting, fluid and shifting, Young offers a critique of the model of the autonomous, unified self which is so often used without regard for the special interdependency of mentally handicapped. According to Young, the social ontology underlying many contemporary theories of justice presumes that the individual is ontologically prior to the social. This ontology is most often connected to a normative conception of the authentic self as autonomous, free, and standing apart from history, choosing its life plan entirely for itself (Young, 1990: 45). In contrast Young claims that groups do not exist apart from individuals, they are socially prior to individuals. A person's particular sense of history, mode of reasoning and being, is partly constituted by his or her group affinities. According to Young says, group affinity

“...has the character of what Martin Heidegger (1962) calls "thrownness": one finds oneself as a member of a group, which one experiences as always already having been. For our identities are defined in relation to how others identify us, and they do so in terms of groups which are always already associated with specific attributes, stereotypes, and norms" (Young, 1990: 46).

Young underlines that the fact that identity is defined in relation does not mean that a person has no individual style or is unable to transcend or reject a group identity. Also, we do shift group for example when growing old. Individual

identity is constituted relationally, and in this respect group categorisation and norms are major constituents (Young, 1990: 45). A social group is then no different than any other group. Just as all other groups, age, gender, class, sexuality, religion, and nationality differentiate the social group.

Social justice does not require that the differences melt away, but that institutions promote the reproduction of and a respect for group differences without oppression. In relation to the social group in question, the mentally handicapped, the reform that took place in 1990ties intended to do just this. The problem so far has been that the admission ticket to equality seems to consist in sameness. This has to be seen in the context of an ideology that has defined difference as of lesser worth and value (Braidotti, 1994: 147). However, an invitation to sameness has proved to have costs of its own, and the time has come to re-evaluate differences. One of the areas in which the mentally handicapped find them treated differently is education, as the often used sentence ironically illustrates: “We have 120 pupils and 10 integrated”. In the following I intend to show how the proposal of NOU 1991:20 of a right to a sexual life exemplifies the impossibility of obtaining equality without recognising difference.

Although ‘integration’ is the official policy, segregation is most often the result. This segregation influences identity and development. As for the question of sexuality, they face far greater difficulties than other children and youngsters. Even today most children and young people get most of their information in these matters, not from their parents, not from teaching at school, but from books or magazines that they get hold of, from peeping and listening, and first and foremost from their playmates and friends. These are activities that mentally handicapped most often are excluded from, partly because they have no playmates, partly because of their lesser rationality, partly because they are treated as children even after they are grown up.

Mentally handicapped are said to have less knowledge of and sensitivity about their own body. Maybe it is due to their isolation from playmates. Maybe they just have a way of being in the world, which we have still not learned to appreciate. What we do know is that they seldom have playmates of their own age and that parents or/and the staff in school as well as in institutions function not only as parents, but also as playmates, friends etc. Consequently a mentally handicapped person rarely experiences an equal relationship. In so far as identity is linked to the body, and both are parts of an ongoing process where each of us is challenged through interaction and dialogue with different

partners, part of the problem being diagnosed as mentally handicapped is linked to their social segregation.

In accordance with the diagnosis, a mental handicap implies less ability to understand on the conceptual level. A couple of examples may illustrate the difficulties. A young female social educator was asked by a mentally handicapped how to use a condom. She used a stick to teach him how to put it on. He learned easily how to do this. Alone with his girlfriend, he brought the stick, put the rest of the condoms on it, and went happily on with his lovemaking. Having discussed the principle of concrete instruction, one of the participants in the programme mentioned above, a nurse, told how she at last succeeded in instructing some young mentally handicapped women how to use sanitary towels. She went with them to the toilet, pulled her trousers down and showed them how she changed her own towel. Afterwards her colleague was most impressed: "How did you manage to have menstruation to-day?" And the nurse laughed and said: "I didn't. I used raspberry syrup, and you wouldn't believe how it pasted!" Having presented these stories, I am reminded of the areas in which I myself have to be instructed very concretely in order to understand the message. This again poses the question of how much of the reduced ability to understand at the level of concepts it is possible to ascribe to the diagnosis. Maybe most of the difficulty in understanding is related to social segregation and isolation, and, in my own case, to certain areas into which I have not been socialised.

However, the intention with these two examples was to show how delicate and difficult it is to instruct, especially in areas of sexuality and the body issues where it may be difficult to be as concrete as necessary. In order to be able to teach and instruct in this area we need to know a lot about sexuality, both objectively and subjectively. By objectively I refer to facts about how the body functions, and by subjectively I refer to the values and norms of one's own sexuality, many of which we most often have no direct access to. The whole area of sexuality is for most of us dominated by understatement, by subtlety and vulnerability. This makes it yet more difficult to teach in a concrete way.

The people in charge of the above-mentioned training programme, the Danish social educator Jørgen Buttenschøn has, in co-operation with his colleague Karsten Løt, done pioneer work in this area. The aim of their work is to achieve equality and recognition for the mentally handicapped, as is the intention of NOU 1991:20. For a number of years, they have collected material

and developed courses, both for staff and for mentally handicapped. Besides objective knowledge of the body, of different variations of sexuality, different remedies and teaching methods, the training programme included an obligatory intensive seminar where the participants worked with their own values along with an experienced Norwegian sexologist. The aim is to become aware of taboos, blind spots and emotions that may prevent even extended knowledge from being used appropriately. Another obligatory task in the programme is to prepare and arrange a course, preferably for mentally handicapped, around the theme of sexuality.

## Sexuality - Need and 'Nature'

The basic concept of sexuality, underlying the work of Buttenschøn, is a definition of sexuality as a need for satisfaction, the same for both sexes.

“Every single human being is composed of some innate and some developed drives and needs. One of the basic needs, which affect us throughout life, is the drive of sexuality. Good and evil, it is part of our personality, independent as it is of intelligence, how the body is build, height, weight, abilities and temper. Whether we want it or nor, it recurs again and again and demands to be satisfied” (Buttenschøn, 1992: 14).

Buttenschøn refers to undocumented investigations, which have shown that the sex drive does not differ from one person to another, although there is great difference as to how we react to this drive. His many examples from experience confirms that violence, self-damage, depressions etc. are diminished, when the sex drive is satisfied one way or the other.

Above I suggested understanding the right to a sexual life, proposed in NOU 1991:20, as a claim-right, more specifically as a natural right. The difference between Buttenschøn's and my conception of sexuality can be said to stem from how we understand nature. In my interpretation above, nature is defined existentially; I define Y, the justificatory basis of the right, as equivalent with nature, common to all human beings qua human beings. In Buttenschøn's understanding, nature is understood biologically. Consequently, the sexual need is conceived as a physiological drive which, due to nature, *has* to be satisfied. I shall argue against such an understanding of sexuality by

demonstrating how it inherently bears on male connotations, and how it therefore in practise tends to reproduce sexual inequality. Due to the segregated labour market, a justification of this right will have damaging consequences for the sexually different body in the field of caring: woman whether staff or client. Since it is difficult to pinpoint this theoretically, I have chosen to present a Danish documentary: *Longing for Love*, 1989, translated into Norwegian for teaching purposes in 1995.

### **Presentation of a documentary**

A young mentally handicapped man lives together with three other tenants at a small institution. According to the female headmaster telling the story, he badly wants a fiancée. Luckily enough a young woman of his acquaintance from the day centre comes to live in the institution. The staff tries to match them. One of the scenes shows how a staff member, together with the two young people go shopping in a pornshop to buy the young woman a new intimate massage stick. We learn that the young woman likes to bring it with her when using the bathtub. The shopkeeper presents them with several sticks, all in the shape of a penis, small ones and big ones. The young woman grabs one of them and start biting it, while it buzzes. The reason why the young man is accompanying them is not evident.

Later on the headmaster informs us (the audience) that the staff watched a porn-video in the living room together with the two youngsters with the intention of instructing them how to perform sexually. After some reflection, the staff realises that maybe this form for sexuality with four men and one lady on the roof of a car is not very normal! We get a glimpse of the scene when they watch this pornfilm. The big eyes of the young woman and the anxious face of the young man looking at this twisted performance are equally impressing. The headmaster says that whenever the two youngsters hold hand and caress each other they are to be ushered into a room, where the staff hope they will do what it is intended they should do. Since the young woman is physically strong the staff is not afraid that anything will happen against her will. Anyway, the match does not seem to work out. Maybe the young man does not know how to perform. The staff then produces a plasticwoman and finds out that he knows where to penetrate. But after more encouragement the matching project has to be given up.

A little later the young man is reported to have taken off his pants in front of a group of small boys in the neighbourhood. The staff decides to take

him out for a few days to get him to realise that he is mentally disabled and that there are things he - like everybody else - is not allowed to do. On returning to the institution, there are other things that he is asked to do: twice a day he is to masturbate. He is asked to sit in the bathtub where he is given a special lotion for his penis in order to help him obtain satisfaction. During this procedure we learn indirectly that the staff consists of women. They walk in and out of the bathroom while he is masturbating in the bathtub. He challenges them to participate. But this he has to do alone, they inform him, underlining that this is a serious task and that they won't let him go until he has done what he is told. The aim of the masturbation is to avoid him getting violent, especially during night shifts when only one female staff member is on duty.

Since his body movements are rather stiff and awkward, the young man is getting a massage in order to make him more relaxed. The headmaster ends the film by saying that the staff is still in a process around the theme of sexuality. At the moment they are discussing letting him give them a massage; the headmaster could for example take her blouse off and let him massage her neck and shoulder. "The point being", as she says, "that he cannot learn to distinguish between this (sensuality) and sexuality when we cannot". The last scene shows the staff walking along the beach with the young client in the middle. They are all hugging him and giving the impression that they are intimate friends.

First of all, I find it important to remind the reader and myself that this documentary does not pretend to be a textbook. It is documenting a process of work, based on long-time supervision. This supervised practise reveals an understanding of sexuality as a physiological need that has to be satisfied one way or the other. This understanding raises several questions as demonstrated in one of the first scenes, the visit to a pornshop. How come that this massage apparatus has the shape of a penis? Is it her own wish and desire? Is the wish sexual or is it just a nice toy? Has it been presented to her as an indirect way of training her to heterosexuality? Does the scene where she bites the massage stick intend to illustrate that the young woman is ready for a relationship that includes heterosexual intercourse? Whatever the answer to these questions, the scene indicates that it is a natural thing for a young man to accompany his girlfriend in their first period of acquaintance into a pornshop to buy her a massage stick.

Having seen the porn movie together with the couple, in order to instruct them how to behave sexually, the staff decides that this version of sex



may neither be quite normal nor sufficiently instructive. It is, then, difficult to understand why the staff did not prepare themselves by watching the documentary before showing it to the young couple. Most of us are shy and uneasy when forced to watch sexual activity together, and not every institutional group with different values and norms would feel comfortable about discussing such a film openly, with clients present.

While the staff are concerned about whether the young man knows where to penetrate, they are not concerned about whether the young woman is prepared to receive it, far less whether she wants it at all. Or rather, it seems as if they do not question this at all. The young woman's sexual need, desire or knowledge about sexuality is seemingly of no interest, apart from the fact that she has a massage stick, formed as a penis. At least the documentary does not inform us that she has had any instruction for herself. The documentary leads us believe that the young woman likes to have his attention, she smiles at him, and lets him hug her. Maybe she is expressing the same as other young women: they like to hug and fondle but don't really want so much more.

The documentary intends to offer 'help' to a couple with no experience and restricted understanding of how to satisfy their sexual needs. More interesting than the methods, though, are the attitudes and conceptions that are revealed. First of all, the 'needs' in question are seen as belonging to the young man. If the male need is not satisfied it is associated to violence. Preferably, the young woman should be the satisfying agent. When this is not feasible, he has to be intensively instructed how to do it for himself, twice a day to safeguard the lonely woman on night duty. According to this logic, the young woman's unsatisfied need is not seen as threatening. Neither, for some reason, is her safety seen as threatened although she is left alone with him as a "lover". And in fact, she does succeed in turning him down. How come, then, that the staff are afraid?

The massage discussion implies that a distinction between sensuality and sexuality might help to prevent misunderstandings and thereby also sexual assaults. A closer look into how the staff manages to distinguish between sensuality and sexuality when interacting with the young couple indicates, however, that such a distinction depends on the position of the participants. The staff hugs and caresses the young man when walking with him along the beach (sensuality). When they teach him how to masturbate, he has to do by himself (sexuality). When the client sits in the bathtub and comes with inviting words to the (female) staff watching, they react indignantly. When it comes to

the young woman, however, the staff reacts differently. When she and the young man are seen hugging, the staff takes it to be a sign that she also wants sexual intercourse. They interpret the hugging and caressing as leading on to sexuality, thus confirming that in relations between equals sensuality and sexuality are sequential.

To the best of my understanding, this has to do with the asymmetrical position of the staff. As staff it is possible for them to distinguish between sensuality and sexuality in relation to the young man. This distinction, however, is subordinate to the assumption of sameness in sexual embodiment – which, as we have seen, is based on the norm of male heterosexuality. Regardless of position, the female sex has the responsibility of rendering the male sex what he needs. Consequently, the position of the staff is used to this end: first they try to match the two clients, and when this fails, they instruct *him* to satisfy *his* need through masturbation. When they consider participating in massage with him, this is yet a confirmation of how *woman* is constructed and constructs herself into asymmetry: to accommodate male needs in order to prevent sexual violence.

In other words, I am arguing that the suggestion to distinguish between sensuality and sexuality is an expression of the different (female) embodiment, partly an expression of desire, and partly an attempt at defence. In both cases a differing conception of sexuality is revealed: One in which sensuality is not necessarily followed by intercourse, at least not penetration. Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen and Monica Rudberg maintain that we have to see this difference in relation to identity. Our very first experience of being a separate person coincides with the discovery of our sex. Gender is an inseparable part of our identity.

“Our point is here that identity is unthinkable without gender - we are not individuals with gender, we are gendered individuals... what we try to describe is that gendered identity constitutes an individual essence: you cannot put it on and off like a strange hat; we are our gendered identity” (Nielsen and Rudberg, 1994: 74-77).

To explain the continuous differentiation between the genders, Nielsen and Rudberg turn to psychoanalytic theory, represented by Nancy Chodorow in her book The Reproduction of Mothering, 1978. According to Chodorow the two genders go through a different development in the early years of life, when

responding to the big task of early childhood: separation and individuation. As a result of this the two genders come out with different psychological baggage. The identity of the boys is built in relation to separation - he is different from the mother. The identity of the girl is built in connection to the mother - she is like the mother. Identity for the girl is connected to intimacy and likeness, for the boy to achievement and difference.

“And while the boy at least part of the way can accept a sexual relationship without tender feelings, the girl can accept tender feelings without sexuality for an equal part of the way. As time goes by this will not become less of a problem” (Nielsen and Rudberg, 1994: 31)

This means that girls and boys have very different connotations to intimacy (love) and sexuality. For the boy intimacy and dependence become difficult, as it reminds him of the time when he was a helpless baby and not a boy. For the girl it may become a problem to know where she ends and other people begin. This identity construction is a hindrance in being able to perceive and relate lovingly which according to Frye is the ability to neither assimilate or reduce the other (above: 84). I shall return to this issue in chapter six.

Throughout the documentary, sexuality is defined as satisfaction of a need. By putting sexual intercourse at the centre, showing them porn movies, buying the young man a plastic-woman, and the young woman a massage stick, and by concentration on *his* performance, the norm of sexuality as male and heterosexual is sustained. The efficiency of this normalisation is underlined every time I use the documentary for teaching purpose. The students, mostly women, are more than anything else impressed. Their reaction reminds me of my own reaction the first time I was presented with the documentary. The intriguing answer to why it took me such a long time to recognise and to deconstruct the injustices done to both young people in the documentary, is that I, although a generation older, have been constructed into pretty much the same conception of sexuality. This again is the same understanding as the training programme imported from Denmark is based upon.

## Social Expectations and Sexual Practises

Even if situated in a Nordic context, the conception of sexuality, discussed above, is parallel to the description given by the American sexologist Gary Sanders, M.D. In an article: An Invitation to Escape Sexual Tyranny, 1998, Sanders focuses on how we are subjected to common social assumptions and attitudes with respect to sexual activity. Men are socialised to have and to accept the belief that sex is their right and that they are naturally more sexual than females. Women on the other hand are socialised more than men to believe that sex is a necessary duty. Both men and women are socialised to accept the belief that real sex must include sexual intercourse. By questioning this, Sanders offers a fundamental critique of the understanding of sexuality, which also is the leading concept in the NOU report and in the documentary.

Referring to the present discussion of both female and male authors, Sanders claims that these traditional attitudes and values

“...come from our civilisation’s social history of close to 5,000 years of recorded patriarchy. *The “tyranny” of patriarchal assumptions is seldom seen more clearly or felt more acutely than in sexual activity* (Sander’s own italics). The patriarchal beliefs of sexual intercourse as being true sex and that men have the right to sex (i.e.intercourse) invite women into sexual submission and men into sexual dominance” (Sanders, 1998: 2).

In Sanders’s own practise women often make comments like ‘A man *needs* to have sexual release’ or ‘He may find another more willing woman if I don’t give him the sex he wants’. These statements, Sanders says, witness how the woman is being further submitted by accepting the patriarchal assumption that women are responsible for men’s sexual gratification. Sanders’ main point is that sexual intercourse - and the escalating process towards climax and satisfaction - does not offer an equal sexual opportunity for both sexes. This is furthermore sustained by the different anatomical potential, a commonly shared knowledge that however seems to be ignored in our sexual practises.

The influence of patriarchal assumptions does not stop at obvious sexual issues. The historical belief that men have the right to take sex by violence if they cannot get it any other way, has according to Sanders, been translated in our times into a confusion between sex and social responsibility when dealing with sexual behaviours. “What we are actually talking about is

abuse that has been mediated sexually rather than sex that has been mediated abusively” (Sanders, 1998: 4). The notion of sexual abuse confuses the notion of sexuality and the notion of violence. This is true even in the case of sexual assault, rape. The ‘victim’ is blamed, either for the ‘seductive’ dress she is wearing or her invitation to a cup of tea. If a woman refuses a man or does not agree with him, his self-righteous indignation permits him to take her by force. This is not sex, Sanders says, but violence through assault.

“Therefore, when someone assaults another person with their genitals, we shouldn’t call it sex or even rape but rather assault that was mediated sexually. Continuing to think of sexual assault as a sexual event invites still further submission to patriarchal notions of sex” (Sanders, 1998: 4).

Only in the last fifty years or so, Sanders says, have our social expectations of sexual activity shifted from a male sexual ‘right’ and a female reproductive ‘duty’ towards a more mutual emotional experience called ‘making love’. Unfortunately, our sexual practises have not kept up with our social expectations. Hence, Sanders recommends that sex be defined from an interpersonal contextual perspective. Such a definition invites both sexual partners to take on personal responsibility for their own sensual/sexual arousal as well as for the interpersonal context. Since a man does not become sexually aroused when examined by his physician, male or female, it is the interplay between action and context that determines whether the experience is sexual and not so much the behaviour itself (Sanders, 1998: 8).

The injustices done by the confusion between the notion of sexuality and the notion of violence, I find to have been paradoxically supported by the ‘erection power’ of the pill Viagra. The massive economical support in developing it and the enormous sale success is convincing evidence that sexuality is still defined as relying on penetrating intercourse. And, moreover, that sexuality is still the basic area when it comes to producing inequality between the sexes. It is Sanders awareness of sexual difference (along with different sexual orientations), which enables him to recognise not only the old but also the new disguises of the patriarchal right to sexuality. His suggestion to define sex from an interpersonal perspective to overcome the gap between our social expectation of sexual activity and our sexual practises is most important.

I find it necessary to underline that the mutuality he recommends in order to overcome the gap between our social expectations and our sexual practises requires a recognition of the difference of the other as equally valid from both parts involved in the relation. The difficulty of this recognition is to be found in how both sexes have been raised according to a conception of sexuality defined by the male sex. Thus, the intriguing question is how to change this. For the past thirty years or more women have been fighting for sexual equality. What effort has the different sexual embodiment so far made to change the concept and practise of sexuality? To what extent have women succeeded in forwarding a sexuality of their own? I shall refer to a review that demonstrates how difficult it has been, and still is, for women to administer a sexuality, which reflects their different embodiment and desire.

### **female sexuality**

In an article titled Provocation, 1989, the Danish researcher and therapist Else Christensen writes about how she is provoked by women's new way of administering their sexuality. While there has been a preservation of new sexual freedom, she says, there has also been a resumption of abandoned femaleness in terms of repression and oppression. Else Christensen summarises the last thirty years in three tendencies: *sexuality as body* was the headline during the late sixties and early seventies. It became possible to separate sexuality and reproduction, making room for women's sexual desire. In the seventies, the tendency was *sexuality as relation*. The significance of relation and in fact its superiority coloured also therapeutic interventions. To this I shall return below. The tendency in the eighties can be characterised as *sexuality as expression*. It is this last tendency that has provoked Else Christensen.

Christensen maintains that women's sexuality has become much more evident and powerful in ways of dressing as well as in attitudes; this goes for both lesbian and heterosexual women. This is an argument she finds sustained by the many interviews she has taken. Greater sexual expression is meant to attract others. It is however not to be taken as an invitation to neither sexual activity nor an acceptance of being sexually objectified. Else Christensen interprets this expression as an attempt to conquer back femaleness and sexuality. Is it, she asks, possible to protect oneself against sexuality by expressing more of it? The tendency towards increased sexual expression Christensen sees as connected to the attention given in recent years to the vulnerability of sexuality. It is threatened by a conception of sexuality

combined with power and sexualised needs. Although neither incest nor rape should be termed sexual acts, but rather should be seen as expressions of needs that have been sexualised, insight into these areas, has increased our knowledge about the dark sides of sexual behaviour and about vulnerability.

Christensen's review clarifies why it is difficult for women to administer a sexuality, which reflects their different embodiment and desire. It is still most accurate to describe women's sexuality as relational. Recent research shows how women, generally speaking, *are* their relations more than they are themselves. As sexuality is part of the relation, it is also part of existence. When sexuality is experienced in this way, it becomes subordinate to the relation women live in.

“In this connection it does not suffice to talk about sexuality as need, desire or orgasm. Sexuality becomes inferior to relation and becomes a by-product of how the relation is” (Christensen, 1989: 145).

In couple therapy, the aim is for both man and woman to achieve a better sex life. But according to Else Christensen it most often ends up supporting men's sexuality. Even though Else Christensen admits that there are many other nuances, she maintains that “professional sexology is immensely male dominated and dominated by what we usually understand as men's sexuality and by symbols of male sexuality” (Christensen, 1989: 145). She finds her interpretation sustained by the fact that the symbol of the foremanship in the Union of Nordic Sexologists is an erected penis, carved in wood. When a new chairman is elected, the old chairman to the applause of the assembly presents the symbol to him!

### **phallic sexuality**

On Midsummer Eve in 1993, a phallus figure in marble was ceremoniously moved from Historical Museum in Bergen to its old place at Dønna. The purpose of this reinstallment was to bring new life and recreation to a beleaguered rural area of Norway. The Norwegian theologian Jone Salomonsen takes this event as her point of departure in an article Phallus Cult and Eroticism in Jewish and Christian Tradition, 1994, and analyses the relation between sex and religion in some Biblical texts. Salomonsen concludes that there is a link between symbolical and living sexuality, and that it consequently is important to put the religious symbols on the agenda. They define our

values, including our erotic and sexual values, and they colour the relation between men and women. The problem of the phallus in our religious heritage is, however, that it represents male sexuality and under-communicates female sexuality. Salomonsen has a most adequate -and for this thesis relevant- definition of the difference between phallic and erotic sexuality.

“The phallic in my definition means ‘non-meeting’- penis fixation, omnipotent and that which is self-sufficient. Contrary to erotic sexuality, the phallic does not seek the other in holy ecstasy and amalgamation; it seeks for domination over and obedience from ‘the other’. The term phallic, however, tends towards living male sexuality. It is unavoidable since the phallic in our context originates from a degradation of the position of the female, mythical as well as social” (Salomonsen, 1994: 11).

The Norwegian researcher Eva Lundgren has illuminated the serious consequences of the phallic understanding of sexuality. For years her investigations have portrayed how patriarchy is based on sexual dominance with the degradation of women, how it find its authorisation in the Bible, and how it is still alive in certain Christian milieus in the Nordic countries. Yet another perspective has been given by the Icelandic theologian Sölveig Anna Bòasdòttir in her investigation: Violence, Power, and Justice, 1998. Bòasdòttir maintains that Christian sexual ethics need to address the problem of male’s violence against women in intimate relationships (Bòasdòttir, 1998: 14). To speak of sexuality as naturalised, as a fixed essence, is to link it to power thereby reinforcing existing power relations. One consequence of this conception of sexuality is male violence against women. Bòasdòttir states the need for rejecting the dominant/submissive model of intimate relationships both in Christian sexual ethics as well as in our culture, claiming that “male battering of women is not accidental individual moral wrongs, but linked to male power in patriarchal societies. To understand male battering it must be linked to male power in current societies as well as to the social construction of heterosexuality as male domination and female submission” (Bòasdottir, 1998: 192-193).

These perspectives confirm that the gap between our social expectations and our sexual practises is still reproduced according to how a male norm defines sexuality and knowledge. In order to find ways of overcoming this gap, I find it necessary to understand how it is that sexual inequality is continuously



reproduced in society. In this respect, the Norwegian philosopher K. E. Tranøy has helped me see how sexual inequality in society is intimately connected to whose needs are recognised as vital and legitimate.

## Norm, Needs, and Inequality

Tranøy's analysis of how need, right and justice are linked together according to 'a bridge principle' demonstrates how practise and knowledge production are sustained by means of the norm of the 'healthy white male between 20 and 50'. By maintaining that the needs recognised are set by this norm, inherently present in the concept human being, Tranøy indicates that also men are subjected to this norm. All of them have been younger than 20 and most of them will be older than fifty. By limiting the norm of the human being to a certain span of years, Tranøy's analysis comes to differentiate between the human being *and* the male and the female sex. Both sexes are hostage to the norm of a human being and its embodiment. Hence, both sexes are contributing to upholding sexual inequality.

Tranøy's analysis illuminates how NOU 1991: 20's proposal of a right to a sexual life implies a phallic conception of sexuality. The inequality between human beings and mentally handicapped, based on 'ratio', has been replaced by, or extended with, the inequality based on the body. Or, according to my main thesis, 'ratio' has a body. To be recognised and accepted as a human being, one has to follow the norm, set by the body of the above-mentioned male. In the following I shall argue that Tranøy's analysis from a different perspective clarifies how inequality in society is fundamentally related to sexuality and sexual difference. My presentation of his theory is structured in three points:

- the 'bridge principle' between need, right and justice
- who recognises whose needs?
- sexual inequality

### **the 'bridge principle'**

According to Tranøy, there is a close connection between need and right, and between right and justice. When a need is recognised as vital, it often turns into a right. When a need is established as a right, it means that it has to be justified

for everybody. This he names 'a bridge principle' between need, right and justice. Therefore Tranøy finds it necessary to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate needs; a child's need for milk, love and care is legitimate, while an addict's need for drugs is not. Within the legitimate needs he distinguishes between vital and non-vital needs; a vital need is irreplaceable: "Frustration of a vital need leads to death or serious disability of the individual" (Tranøy, 1981: 3).

Consequently, he suggests that the rights stemming from legitimate non-vital needs are best understood as the right to *seek* satisfaction, while the rights stemming from vital needs are rights to *obtain* satisfaction (Tranøy, 1988: 81). The distinction means that when a need is recognised as legitimate and vital for a human being, it implies an obligation not only to give permission to obtain, but actively to help those who are handicapped in obtaining their different needs and rights. "It might in some cases (the infant's right to food, love and care) entail a duty to make possible achievements for the right-holder which would have been impossible without the active intervention of a more resourceful bystander, be he a parent, a friend or a government agency" (Tranøy, 1981: 9). Tranøy, however, finds it difficult to apply the bridge principle to sexuality. Love, he maintains, is a legitimate and vital need and as such "distinct from sex drive or need", the main reason being that sex drives or need does not last throughout life (Tranøy, 1988: 69).

### **who recognises whose needs?**

The link between needs, rights and justice is a dynamic and complex process in ongoing change. In this process, however, some have more influence and power than others do.

"Those who shape and change our ideas of human needs, scientists not least, have had important norm-giving functions, in spite of avowals of moral and political neutrality" (Tranøy, 1988: 78).

Consequently, Tranøy suggests that we consider the special needs of any group (or individual) that deviate from the normal standard person, the male (Tranøy, 1981: 7).

### **sexual inequality.**

Tranøy maintains that needs which are recognised as legitimate and vital needs for men are not so recognised for women. While women and men to some extent have the same needs, they also differ in needs. This amounts to a denial of equal rights. He argues that it is impossible to determine how the human rights of groups with physical and mental handicaps should be fulfilled in a social and political context without knowledge and recognition of how they differ from other humans with regard to needs “all the way from such “simple “ things as negotiating stairs in a wheelchair, to the more delicate and complex question of the sex life of the physically handicapped” (Tranøy, 1981: 6).

In order to establish equality, Tranøy suggests first of all making distinctions between legitimate/illegitimate and vital/non-vital needs. It is in this light his reluctance to recognise sex as a legitimate and vital need becomes crucial. His distinction between love and sex is not to be mistaken for the classical dualism of mind and body. Rather, it refers to how the meanings of sex in our lives are already dominated by the norm set by the needs of the male. Thereby Tranøy’s analysis confirms that it does not suffice to dissolve or deconstruct the dualism between mind/ratio and body. His use of the concept *needs* confirms that he is referring to the human being in its totality. It is not ratio in opposition to body that is setting the difference. The difference is set by the need of the body which is considered to have/to be ratio.

When Tranøy adds ‘drive’ to sex, and rejects using the bridge principle here, he is underlining that ‘body’ and ‘mind’ are analytical tools and cannot be separated in real life. In practical life, the crucial distinction is established between the body of the male sex and the body that differs from this. This also gives another perspective to why the interpretation of the blue-eyed human being is more ‘human’ than the brown-eyed (above: 122). The norm of the human is male *and* white. Thus, it is not only a question of rational language; it is a question of who is defining and embodying what is rational. In short, the one in power. As I see it, it is this conflation of knowledge and sexuality, which identifies rationality with thinking, and therefore leave us with very little rationality, as Solheim stated above (above: 121).

Tranøy meticulously unravels how inequality in society is established by means of a recognition of the needs of the ‘healthy white male between 20 and 50’. That these needs are recognised as normative is decided in an ever-changing process involving those with power and influence in society. Thus, a

vicious circle upholds inequality in society. The core problem of the production of sexual difference is the circularity that links power to sexuality through the sex of the body whose needs it is important to justify. Moreover, this recognition of needs explains how the norm of sexuality and knowledge production is set by the male embodiment.

According to the bridge principle recognition of a need leads to the assumption of a right. This has far reaching consequences. First of all, a right to get one's need satisfied entails a duty of some active bystander. Secondly, the specific needs of women and other groups such as the mentally and physically handicapped are not recognised. Hence the two intimately connected questions mentioned above (1. when and how can A be said to have a right against B when they both are granted the same right, and 2. what is the content X of this right) has found its answer: as long as sexuality is defined in accordance with a male norm it ends up in *the right* of one sex and *the duty* of the other sex.

## Requirements for Equality

Above I have argued that the intention of NOU 1991: 20's proposal to grant mentally handicapped recognition as sexual beings and thus status as human beings is of crucial importance in order to obtain equality. However, as long as our sexual practises hold us imprisoned in asymmetric positions, laws and rights regarding equality will remain 'paper tigers' (Mao ZeDong). Since deconstructing does not abrogate construction, the question is how to change the ongoing construction of sexual difference, how to implement the intention of NOU 1991:20 without in the same process furthering sexual inequality? Is it possible to recognise the specific needs of individuals and groups when they are valuated as different to one's own?

To this end I have found the theory of the American philosopher Drucilla Cornell helpful. Without attending this specific area, Drucilla Cornell confirms the need of recognising what she calls the 'sexuate bases' of each of us. Sex is, according to Cornell, already in the picture when we imagine ourselves.

"Sex and sexuality are unique and formative to human personality and should be treated as such. Thus, in order to have an adequate feminist theory of legal

equality we must explicitly recognise the sexuate bases of each of us as a human creature. At the very heart of the struggle to work through imposed and assumed personae is the matter of sex and sexuality” (Cornell, 1995: 6).

Even though Cornell refers to the theory of Lacan, knowledge of it is not needed to “adopt the idea that we are profoundly immersed in a sexual identity with our assumed personae, which dictate the way we think of ourselves as having sex and having a sex” (Cornell, 1995: 8). Since homosexuality or heterosexuality implicates an unconscious or at least pre-conscious sexual image, they cannot be called a choice. The engagement that sex and having a sex requires is too fundamental to the person’s identity to be a conscious choice. Therefore, to deny a person a life as a sexuate being is to deny them a fundamental part of their identity. This is, according to Cornell, crucial for ensuring lesbians and gay men and any other form of sexuate being their equality as sexuate beings. Even if Cornell does not mention mentally handicapped people explicitly, I take it that they are included in ‘any other form of sexuate being’. Far from being condescending this notion is used to indicate that every one of us is sexuate, whatever our sexuality or sexual orientation consist in. This is an ongoing process of recognition in which all of us need to partake in order to envision ourselves as different but of equal value.

I shall structure my presentation of Cornell’s theory by following what she maintains is needed in order to obtain legal equality for each of us as a human creature:

- the minimum condition of individuation for equality.
- the importance of imaginary domain for our sexual personhood.
- equality and the law.

### **minimum condition of individuation**

Cornell’s concept of equality requires that certain minimum conditions of individuation have to be protected. In order to transform ourselves into individuated beings that can participate in public and political life, three conditions are necessary: a. bodily integrity, b. access to symbolic forms sufficient to achieve linguistic skills permitting the differentiation of one self from others, c. the protection of the imaginary domain itself.

Without obtaining these minimum conditions of individuation it is impossible to get the project of becoming a person off the ground. Cornell uses

the Latin word *persona* to indicate that a person is what shines through a mask. She states that her use differs from the usual association of the mask with *persona*. To be able to shine through the mask a person will have to be able to see herself as a whole self even if she knows that she will never truly be able to differentiate between the mask and the self. Accordingly, the person is never finally there, but is there as a possibility, an aspiration. Therefore she or he is never fulfilled once and for all.

“Given my understanding of the person as involving an endless process of working through, each of us must have the chance to take on this struggle in his or her own unique way” (Cornell, 1995: 5).

Cornell underlines that the appeal to minimum conditions of individuation is universal. This means that all of us should be equivalently evaluated as worthy of achieving the conditions of personhood.

“The key to resolving the problem of how to think of sexual difference and equality simultaneously is to think through the facts of the *devaluation* or *degradation* of the feminine within our system of sexual difference” (Cornell, 1995: 19).

### **the wound of femininity**

In the case of ‘those of us who are designated as women’ to use the expression of Cornell, the sexual imago is encoded and symbolically enforced to split women off from themselves as sexual objects and instead re-impose the *persona* we associate with conventional femininity. This split hinders the woman in identifying herself as a woman and as a person. The ‘wound of femininity’ can be said to be what prevents her from any affirmation of herself as a person with power and creativity. Consequently, the celebration of the difference is often translated as a masquerade of femininity. This makes it difficult to view women as equal before the law. Psychoanalysis offers an understanding of how the symbolic underpinnings shape our reality to the extent that we cannot envision the feminine as other than this *persona* of femininity.

### **equality and the law**

In order to get women to be equal before the law, the claim has to be that the feminine sex is of equivalent value to the masculine sex. To obtain this, Cornell suggests protecting the minimum conditions of individuation mentioned above. The concept argues for equality for each of us as sexuate and thus as a phenomenal creature. The major ethical and political advantage is that it does not turn on gender comparison between men and women (Cornell, 1995: 20).

However, Cornell finds the flight from the universal towards the subjective misdirected. If the problem is the conflation of the universal with the masculine, the proliferation of standards cannot be the solution. Cornell mentions how women have attacked the masculinity of the reasonable man, and how women of colour have exposed the whiteness of the reasonable woman. Every standard is incapable, as an abstract generalisation, of doing justice to individual persons judged under it. This is not to consider the law as negligent but to understand justice as a limited principle. Substituting subjective standards for universal standards does not make the law more just, but embroils it into a myriad of forms and, in so doing, turns it from justice. Instead of focusing on what is the reasonable woman, black lesbian etc. the debate should rather be over how to transform the significance of general normative standards. Cornell maintains that we have to struggle for the equivalent evaluation of all of us as worthy of personhood (Connell, 1995: 17).

While Tranøy linked inequality to the question of sex, sexuality and sexual difference Cornell suggests achieving equality by recognising each person as a sexuate phenomenological creature. This minimum condition for individuation avoids gender comparison and has accordingly both a political and an ethical advantage. The problem is however that the sexual imago is encoded according to the existing inequality. Symbolic language, as stated above by Solheim, has translated women into a conception of them as sexual object or/and a masquerade of femininity, a 'wound of femininity'. A change relies on a renewal and a revaluation of the symbolic language of sexuality.

As far as I understand Cornell, the minimum condition is required for men as well as for women. The sexual imago is also coded for men. This is in accordance with Tranøy when he points at how also men are imprisoned by the norm of the human being. Thus Cornell and Tranøy seem to agree on how inequality is established and maintained, and even that equality has to come about by recognising the basic existential condition as common to each of us.

However, they recommend opposite means to get there. Tranøy recommends recognising the specific needs of individuals and groups deviating from the norm of the human being in order to obtain equality. This seems to be what Cornell calls a proliferation of standards, which in her opinion leads away from justice. Instead Cornell recommends transforming the significance of general normative standards.

As I see it, the problem is not only that any standard is incapable as an abstract generalisation of doing justice to the individual judged under it, but that a standard itself may be distorted. An example is the standard *human being*. Thus, the crucial question is how to get recognition for the female sex in its difference, which is the precondition for transforming the general normative standard of the human being. How is bodily integrity to be obtained, how is access to symbolic forms to be gained that allow for differentiation of one self from others, and how is the imaginary domain to be protected. The women in the documentary, both the staff and the client, demonstrate that most of us know very little about sexual difference due to our construction into the male norm as *the* norm of sexuality and knowledge production. Hence, as long as we do not know much about sexuality apart from this norm, it is difficult to transform the significance of general normative standards. This is relevant also for men, since they too, as argued above, are included in the norm of the human being

This brings me back to the issue of this chapter. The fundamental asymmetrical position of the sexes influences our conceptions of reality, truth, politics, ethics and consequently our sexual identity. Sex and sexuality are intimately connected. The conflation of sexuality and knowledge is personified in the norm of the human being, 'the healthy white male body between 20 and 50'. This norm maintains and even reproduces the inequality in society. Either one conforms to this norm or one differs. Either one is recognised as the same or one is recognised as different. Since half of the mentally handicapped have the same bodies as the norm, the proposal of a right to a sexual life gives the male mentally handicapped status as human beings at the expense of the female mentally handicapped and other women, for example the staff. Hence, this proposal, even when interpreted as a claimright, comes to sustain the inequality already existing in society.



## Conclusion

The NOU: 1991: 20 is a proposition to the Norwegian Government, and not yet legally authorised. It contains a decent intention of recognising the human rights of the mentally handicapped. This noble purpose, however, illustrates - is in fact saturated with - the norm of the male body that pervades history from Genesis to the end of this millennium. The normalisation and equalisation embedded in the attempt to postulate a right to a sexual life for all human beings becomes a confirmation of our 'eternal' concepts of the two sexual identities *and* their asymmetric position to each other as it is still reflected in our institutions and our society. Consequently, the proposal of a right to a sexual life for all human beings cannot render equality as long as sexuality is understood (in our knowledge production) and maintained (in our sexual practises) as male rights and female duties. In order to reach the equal status intended, the proposal of NOU 1991: 20 has to be understood in the perspective of sexual difference.

In chapter 1, it was apparent that the way of working is an integrated part of our identity, and how subject, body and sexual identity are continuously created and constituted in interdependency. Chapter 2 demonstrated how this could be understood theoretically. Sex and sexual difference are not details of being, or some construction that may easily be changed when de-constructed. They are our embodiment, and as such they have consequences for the way we work, think, and relate.

In the present chapter I hope to have demonstrated how the normative standard of the human being positions and constructs sexes differently through a conflation of knowledge and sexuality. Due to this conflation, it is impossible to get beyond this construction. Throughout the thesis I have argued that mutuality and equality cannot be established before women are valued in their difference. The problem is how to do this when women are constructed into taking care of the needs of the other body as more important than our own *and* as long as we maintain our identity by doing so.



## 4. Ethics of Care

The analysis of the material from practise has illustrated how meanings of sexual embodied difference are created and constituted. The interdefinition, in which both sexes partake, tends to maintain the asymmetric subject/object scheme and to confine female workers to particular ways of thinking and practising ethics. In the analysis of NOU 1991: 20, it emerged that female professionals, due to their construction into sexual difference, tend to accept the (male) clients need for sexuality as a part of their responsibility. Both analyses can be said to pose one main question: how is the female embodiment to be respected and valued in the field of care?

### A Review of Care Ethics

This is not a new question. In 1982, Carol Gilligan put gender and difference in ethical thinking on the agenda. Since then care theory has developed into a major intellectual project. In an article: Ethics of Care and Feminist Ethics, 1998, the British philosopher Diemut Bubeck has given a thorough review of the publications, discussions, problems, perspectives of the last fifteen years leading up to the present discourse. Although not all feminist ethics should to be identified with the ethics of care, it has evolved into a point of reference for most feminist philosophers in the analytic tradition (Bubeck, 1998: 22). Bubeck begins her review by stating the influence of Carol Gilligan's research, published in the book In a Different Voice, 1982. As the title indicates there can be said to be two voices, one speaking more in terms of principles, another more in relationships. The voices have, just or unjust, often been associated with how girls' and boys' moral thinking develops differently due to their different sex. The main aim for Gilligan was, as the title of her book indicates, to recognise the different voice as being as valid as the voice from which it differs. Although Andrea Maihofer considers the debate about an ethic of care to have become so extensive that it is difficult to provide an overview of it, she, like Bubeck, reckons Gilligan to be the one who sparked the discussion, and to whom most of the later attempts refer. For Maihofer, the importance of Gilligan's contribution is that by proving (at least) two moral perspectives she has given a productive critique of traditional universalism. Maihofer argues that such 'plural universalism' could lead to "the development of normative

rules and political practises that are able to guarantee a mutual, non-hierarchical recognition of sociocultural differences, a goal toward which the paradoxical idea of a plural universalism could be a first step” (Maihofer, 1998: 392).

The scholarship on care and care ethics is indeed enormous. Besides Gilligan, Nel Nodding with Caring, 1984 and Sara Ruddick with Maternal thinking, 1989, have, although very differently, gained status as classics in this field. From women’s experience as women, Nodding has developed an ethics of care, which she describes as characteristically and essentially feminine. Her notion of care is broad, covering mothering, friendship and teaching. Her ethics can be seen as a philosophical elaboration of Gilligan’s ‘different voice’. Ruddick is more focused on the description of the practise of ‘mothering’, which can be done by both sexes, although is traditionally done by women. She points out the values and virtues inherent in this practise. While Nodding’s intention is to develop a care-based approach within contemporary moral philosophy, Ruddick’s intention is to develop a feminist approach or ‘standpoint’ in moral and political philosophy (Bubeck, 1998: 23).

These were followed by different positions and lines of argument, which over the last 15 years have brought the discussion into a complex and intricate relation between the social context of care, ethics and feminist theory. The commonality between the feminist writers is according to Bubeck, that care so far has taken place under oppressive conditions.

“Care is probably the most significant and important category of work that is accorded to women via the sexual division of labour, and a lot of it continues to be done unpaid or badly paid – if the latter, then often by women from less privileged class and ethnic background. Care is thus inextricably intertwined with oppressive gender divisions: *care is done by women, it is associated with women, and it expresses and symbolises femininity*” (Bubeck, 1998: 26, my italics).

Not surprisingly, feminists have reacted either by rejecting or by celebrating care ethics. The editors of Explorations in Feminists Ethics, 1992, Eve Browning Cole and Susan Coultrap-McQuin list three significant grounds for caution towards adopting ethics of care:

- Women's traditional care-giving role in history has not been freely chosen as a moral commitment, but has been a response to the need of patriarchal institutions,
- An ethic of care is just what the patriarchal male wants: an angel in the house,
- Ethics of care might not be easily applicable to the public arena of decision-making.

Bubeck, however, maintains that the theory and philosophy of care will remain feministic as long as it is concerned about re-valuing a practise that is still the practise of women. At the same time she is aware of the problems arising from the celebration of care and lists the distortion of care and the oppressive conditions under which care take place as the most important problems today. A lot more critical and reconstructive work from the care theorists is required to realise that their theories so far have been corrupted by this state of affairs. A related problem is the reluctance in recognising differences based on race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and the challenges of these differences to any theorisation.

“The two questions raised by the problems of distortion and difference, therefore, resolve ultimately around the same issue, that is, whether the care theorist should take actual or ideal care as the paradigm for her theory? Whilst the problem of distortion points towards a theorisation of ideal care, the problems of difference, much as the problems of exploitation and oppressive association, highlight the importance of taking actual care into account as well” (Bubeck, 1998: 33).

With reference to the analysis's above, I shall suggest seeing the questions of distortion and difference as mutually interdependent and equally important to attend. Hence, I am hesitant to take either the practise or the ideal of care as paradigms. On the other hand, I agree with Bubeck in how she distinguishes between those problems of care-ethics stemming from the social context in which the care takes place, especially the sexual division of care, and those inherent in care as activity and practise. This amounts to three issues in need of further investigation:

- Theories of justice and care

- Care as human practise
- The moral dangers of care

All regarding, although from various perspective, how to be respected as an ethical agent in the field of care when embodied female, they will structure this chapter.

## Theories of Justice and Care

This problem takes the discussion beyond philosophical boundaries and into the social and political demands for non-exploitative gender and care arrangements. But it also poses theoretical and conceptual questions. “Since the exploitations of women *qua* carers clearly is an issue of distributive justice, can an ethic of care which is defined *in contradiction* to an ethic of justice do justice to the problem?” (Bubeck, 1998: 29). In the discussion around care and justice, Bubeck criticises the debate for having confused the two types of arguments: 1. the formal level: the two perspectives, care and justice, have been set up as fundamentally opposed and mutually excluding each other and 2. the substantial level: it has been far from clear that care and justice are two different values, rather than two aspects which both have to be taken into account when evaluating moral questions. Bubeck recommends that we leave the opposition model, that so far has taken up too much space, and instead investigate how and where care and justice are in conflict at the substantial level. The issue is “not so much whether justice can be integrated into a care perspective, but how it is to be integrated” (Kymblica, 1990: 38). Bubeck argues that only some considerations of justice can be integrated into the ethics of care, while the concern of exploitation itself jars with the basic commitment to a care perspective.

In his book Contemporary Political Philosophy, 1990 the American political philosopher Will Kymblica takes up the opposition model of care and justice on both the formal and the substantial level in his discussion of feminist theories, political as well as those of care. He argues that most contemporary mainstream political theories share a common ‘egalitarian plateau’, a commitment that all members of the community should be treated as equals (Kymblica, 1990: 238). Feminist political theory has, however, criticised the way in which mainstream political theories have failed to attend to interests of

women. Due to the diversity of feminist theory, Kymblica restricts himself to looking at three of these criticisms:

- ‘the gender-neutral’ account of sexual discrimination
- the public-private distinction
- the emphasis on justice reflecting a male bias, as opposed to an emphasis on care as reflecting the interests and experiences of women

I shall discuss his suggestions from the perspectives of the analysis of NOU:1991:20 and the analysis of the narratives supplied by the social educators.

### **sexual equality and discrimination**

First of all Kymblica points out the lack of success in ensuring the equal access of women to education, employment, political office, the military, the public pursuits etc. He refers to the increase of job segregation in the lowest-paid occupations in the United States and Canada, and to the increase in domestic violence and sexual assault and other forms of violence and degradation aimed at women (Kymblica, 1990: 219). Although sex equality legislation has had some success in getting women access to these different areas, its success has been limited. This is due to the ignorance of the gender inequalities built into the very definition of these positions.

“...equality cannot be achieved by allowing men to build social institutions according to their interests, and then ignoring the gender of the candidates when deciding who fills the roles in these institutions. The problem is that the roles may be defined in such a way as to make men more suited to them, even under gender-neutral competition” (Kymblica, 1990: 241).

Although the sex equality law is anxious to take gender into account in selecting candidates, it ignores the fact that they are expected to be free from childcare responsibilities. This again results in men filling the most valued and best-paid jobs in society, while referring women to lower paid, often part-time jobs. The consequence is that women are made dependent on the men, which in case of divorce results in great inequality. In short, the more the social institutions reflect male interest, the less arbitrary the discrimination. From this Kymblica draws the harsh conclusion that the domination of women in society

means there is no need to discriminate against them: women will never be in a position to be arbitrarily discriminated against in employment (Kymblica, 1990: 244). An example is how the professionalisation of medicine meant that women were squeezed out as midwives and healers and relegated to the subservient and less paid roles of nurses. This would not have happened had the women been in an equal position of power (Kymblica, 1990: 245). Hence, the problem is domination and the presence of power rather than irrational differentiation on the basis of sex.

In order to understand this domination, many feminists have pointed to the inequality of the equality principle itself, implying as it does a standard of measurement. With reference to Elizabeth Grosz, who favours autonomy instead of equality, Kymblica maintains that the dominance approach is also an interpretation of equality and that autonomy in that sense becomes a part of the best theory of sexual equality, and not a competing value.

“The argument for women’s autonomy appeals to, rather than conflicts with, the deeper idea of moral equality, for it asserts that women’s interests and experiences should be equally important in shaping social life” (Kymblica, 1990: 246).

When equality means equal value as human being, equality does not mean to be like men or to share equality with the oppressors. Hence, Kymblica argues, there is no reason why gender-bias should not be recognised as a source of injustice in Rawls’ original position<sup>31</sup>. Admitting to the self-interest of male theorists in avoiding the problem of dominance, Kymblica suggests seeing this not as flawed principle but as flawed application.

Kymblica’s description of men building social institutions according to their interests and ignoring the gender of the candidates, who fill the roles, is striking. It depicts the background that allows for a proposal of ‘a right to sexuality’. As shown above this is a right equal to everybody, but when transferred to the public domain it turns out to imply the norm and body of the

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<sup>31</sup> According to Kymblica, the recent rebirth of normative political philosophy began with John Rawl’s book A Theory of Justice, 1971. “His theory dominates contemporary debates, not because everyone accepts it, but because alternative views often are represented as responses to it” (Kymblica, 1990: 9). In order to prevent people from exploiting their arbitrary advantages, Rawls develops the ‘original position’. In this position people are situated behind ‘a veil of ignorance’. In other words, no one knows his place, position or social status, and no one knows his fortune. The advantage being that when all are situated similarly and no one is able to favour his own condition, the principles of justice will be the result of a fair agreement (Kymblica, 1990: 62).



‘white healthy male between 20 and 50’. In public care institutions, the majority of workers are of low income and more or less dependent women. When the problem of sexual discrimination is due not to irrational differentiation on the basis of sex, but to domination, the consequence is that it can only be solved by another policy of sexual equality that places women in an equal position of power. However tempting it is to see the proposal of a right to sexuality as not flawed in principle but in application, I find this less convincing for the following reasons.

The proposal is not only characterised by a gender bias. Women’s dependence and lower position, recognised by Kymblica, is not an external layer concealing their essential sameness with men; these conditions are already part and parcel of the female construction and body image. As I have argued above, this goes deep into the structure of the bodily different identity of the female. It influences her way of thinking and working, and it positions her as the sexual different and compliant body in every aspect of sexuality. Thus, the proposal of a right to a sexual life is not a flawed principle that can be corrected by another application. It is already implicated in the intention of the NOU proposal: it presupposes that equality is defined as an equal right to the same (phallogentric) sexuality.

As I have suggested above, the proposal comes to reflect a society where sexual inequality is disguised as normative equality. Through interdefinition between the sexes the asymmetry is reproduced over and over. On the other hand, I find Kymblica’s suggestion sympathetic in the same way that I sympathise with the theory of Rawls’. It is important and necessary to have imagination and visions that challenge us to think through what the world would look like if we were behind the veil without knowing where we would be placed and positioned in a constructed ideal society. But again my criticism connects to the limits of my imagination. Transcending sexual difference seems to me to be just as impossible as changing the position and power of women within a political theory, which presupposes - and aims at - sexual sameness.

### **the distinction between public – private**

A result of domination and sexual inequality is the unequal distribution of domestic labour. Furthermore, sexism is not only about the distribution of domestic labour, but also about its devaluation. The devaluation of the household is part of the broader general devaluation of women’s work. Thus,

the effort to increase the respect for women has to involve an increased respect for their contribution to the family. This makes the family the locus of the struggle for sexual equality. Kymblica refers to Carole Pateman, saying that the dichotomy between the public and the private is ultimately what the feminist movement is all about (Kymblica, 1990: 249 citing Pateman, 1987: 103). Domestic and family life is often excluded in civil society. According to Kymblica, the most obvious explanation is that male philosophers have had no interest in questioning a sexual division of labour, since they benefit from it (Kymblica, 1990: 253). This was rationalised through an assumption that the domestic role is biologically fixed, either due to woman's inferiority or due to the more recent ideology of what could be called the sentimental family. The sad fact is that

“...almost all political theorists in the Western tradition, whatever their views on the state-society distinction, have accepted one or other of these justifications for separating domestic life from the rest of society, and for relegating women to it” (Kymblica, 1990: 254).

However, the limiting effect of any approach to sex equality that neglects the family has become increasingly clear. A result of liberalism's public-private distinction is the 'right to privacy'. This has been reinforced to exempt family relations from the test of public justice. Modern liberalism is concerned “not only to protect the private sphere of social life, but also to carve out a realm within the private sphere where individuals can have privacy” (Kymblica, 1990: 258). The right to privacy has been interpreted by the American Supreme Court to mean that any outside interference in the family is a violation of privacy. This is a barrier to further reform of women's domestic oppression. The idea of a right to privacy has, as Kymblica underlines, become attached to the family as a unit, not to the individuals in it. Having entered marriage, a woman has no personal privacy, and the right of privacy of the family precludes the state from protecting her. This again shields battering, marital rape and exploitation in general. Thus, women's interests are harmed by the negligence of political theory in investigating the family in its public and private components. The gender-roles associated with the traditional family conflict with both public ideals of equal rights and with the liberal understanding of the conditions and values of private life (Kymblica, 1990: 262).

As mentioned above, Aslak Syse has analysed the proposal of a right to a sexual life from a legal point of view. He concludes that there is no such legal right, and he does not find any basis for legalising such a right. Sexuality belongs to the sphere of private life and is as such protected by the right to privacy. The analysis of Kymblica, on the other hand, demonstrates how the right to privacy offers no protection to women against battering, rape and exploitation in general, linked as it is to the sexual division of labour. The negligence of political theory in investigating the family in its public and private components has contributed to a relegation of women to the private sphere *and* to a general devaluation of women's work.

This lack of recognition has relegated women to do the care work in the family, and to attend to the different needs of the family members. The matter of sexual need is no exception. As shown in the analysis above, the dependent position of the female accompanies her into the working area, especially when she is working professionally as a caregiver. When the state (any committee that draws up NOU reports is appointed by the Government) proposes to extend the care-concept in the public field to include a right to sexuality, it is tempting to see it as an extension of women's obligation to combine care and sexual needs at home.

Thus, I argue, that although care work seems to be separated into two areas, the private and the public, the masters are the same: the patriarch of the private domain is equivalent to the patriarch (y) of the state. No wonder, as the need considered here is also the same phallic one. Violence through sexual assaults, the industry of pornography, the traffic in sex, all bear witness that inequality in society basically has to do with the sexual division of labour and the lack of value of women and their work.

### **emphasis on justice versus emphasis on care**

The public-private distinction, and the relegation of women to the domestic sphere, have contributed to associate women and men with "different modes of thought and feeling", to use Kymblica's language. The history of Western philosophy has most often distinguished between the emotional particularity belonging to the private realm of women and to the rational universality of the public realm of men. According to Carol Gilligan's research, there is a difference between how men and women think morally. A fundamentally incompatible difference normally referred to in terms of ethics of care and

ethics of justice, since women tend to think in relations and men to think in principles.

Kymblica objects to the strict opposition that Gilligan makes between the different approaches of boys and girls. First, appealing to principles does not necessarily imply abstracting from the particularity of the situation and vice versa. Second, even if girls as stated by Gilligan are often able to find a solution that responds to all the needs in the particular situation, he argues “that there will not always be a way to accommodate conflicting demands, and it is not clear that we should always try to accommodate all demands” (Kymblica, 1990: 269). The question is not whether principles are needed, but whether they shall attend to ‘rights and fairness’ or to ‘responsibilities and relationships’ (Kymblica, 1990: 269). To this end Kymblica lists three different ways of constructing the difference between the moral concepts of justice and care. I shall restrict myself to the last.

- universality versus concern for particular relationships.
- respect for common humanity versus respect for distinct individuality.
- claiming rights versus accepting responsibilities.

Gilligan’s distinction between ‘justice’ reasoning that thinks in terms of respecting right-claims and ‘care’ reasoning that thinks in terms of accepting responsibilities only holds for the libertarian theorist, Kymblica argues. The juridical framework as a whole emphasises rights and at the same time imposes the correspondent responsibility. According to Kymblica it is more important to discuss whether there is a difference in the kind of responsibility each ethic imposes on us. Is the fundamental difference between care and justice to be found in the grounds for moral claims: either subjective hurts or objective unfairness (Kymblica, 1990: 276).

This brings Kymblica to discuss the claim from the care theorists that the conflict between autonomy and responsibility for others must be decided contextually. He argues that an abstraction from particularity protects the particularity more fully. “Meaningful autonomy requires predictability and predictability requires some insulation from context-sensitivity” (Kymblica, 1990: 281). The more our claims are dependent on context-sensitive calculations of everyone’s articulated desires, the more vulnerable our personal projects are to the shifting desires of others. To sustain fairness and autonomy,

more abstract and less context-sensitive rules are needed, and this again means that some subjective hurts must be ignored. Moreover, claims of justice are determined by people's rightful expectations rather than their actual expectations, while focusing on subjective hurts often makes oppression harder to see.

On the other hand, Kymblica criticises Rawls' rejection of subjective hurts as standards of moral claims. This rejection is only plausible as long as the sick, helpless, young etc. is kept safely out of view (Kymblica, 1990: 83). This is impossible, Kymblica argues, since subjective hurts are generalised from child caring. They are linked to the dependency of each of us from the beginnings of life to the end. Rejecting subjective hurts implies that care of dependent others are excluded from the scope of justice. Justice "not only presupposes that we are autonomous adults, it seems to presuppose that we are adults *who are not care-givers for dependants*" (Kymblica, 1990: 285). Once people are responsible for the unpredictable demands of dependants, they are no longer able to guarantee their own predictability. Kymblica poses the question in need of further investigation: is it possible to take responsibility for dependent others without giving up the stronger principle of autonomy?

This argumentation reveals that Kymblica becomes locked into the same dilemma as the social educators and for much the same reasons. Let me clarify. Kymblica starts out by arguing the moral need for more abstract and less context-sensitive rules. His argument is that abstraction from particularity protects the particularity more fully in the sense that autonomy requires predictability and that predictability requires some insulation from context-sensibility. Consequently, some subjective hurts have to be ignored. Moreover, subjective hurts make oppression harder to discover. On the other hand, he finds it plausible that the moral claims from subjective hurts stem from child caring. From this insight he realises that subjective hurts should be heard and that the realm of justice only operates with adults who are not caregivers for dependants. This makes Kymblica conclude that the scope of justice applies to autonomous adults. It presupposes that none of us are caregivers for dependants.

Like the social educators, Kymblica cannot manage to free himself of the opposition between being independent and dependent although he recognises the existential condition of interdependency. The problem of justice is not first and foremost that it presupposes that we are adults without any caring responsibilities, but that it does not account for the human condition as

dependency. In short, as long as the strict opposition between dependent (heteronomous) and independent (autonomous) is maintained, the responsibility of care and justice is stuck in the subject/object system and bound to reproduce the oppositional difference.

As for Kymblica's proposal of more abstract and less context-sensitive rules, the narratives from practise confirm it. Grete Jeppesen even uses the same examples as Kymblica when she defends rules and structures by saying that she needs them for vacation, wage etc. And Marie Englund narrates how lack of rules leads to constant negotiation in every different constellation. The problem is not rules as such but the way in which they are practised. In Marie Englund's narrative, the lack of aggression from the client is most probably due to the way in which the staff's succeed in making the rules *more* abstract and *less* context-sensitive. Using their knowledge and experience with the client they are able to do it in a way that benefit both parts involved. A way that is connected to 'nearness' in that it is only possible to find *more* abstract and *less* context-sensitive rules from a near position. I shall return to this in connection with the moral problems of care.

As argued above subjective hurts recognised and turned into rights most often stem from the norm of the male sexual embodiment. Thus, the suggestion of Kymblica can be fruitful in practise only when the question of sexual difference is taken into account. It is only then that the oppression hidden by attending to all subjective hurts may decrease as a result of a certain predictability for both the care-giver and the care- receiver regardless of sexual embodiment. The problem is not the different level of practise and theory as much as it is that the sexually different embodiment is ignored in practise and abstracted in theory. As long as this is the case, the ethics of justice and of care are bound to reproduce an oppositional - and asymmetrical - opposition.

The first six chapters of Kymblica read much like any other male political philosopher. In chapter seven, however, his investigations into feminist criticism of mainstream political philosophy seem to alter his conception. "To decide whether to take gender into account, we need to know how it has already been taken into account", Kymblica says in the beginning of chapter 7, and goes on stating that "almost all important roles and positions have been structured in gender-biased ways" (Kymblica, 1990: 242). In the introduction to the book, he argues that "An adequate theory of sexual equality will involve considerations that simply are not addressed in the tradition left-right debates". Therefore "...we cannot begin to understand feminism or

communitarism if we insist on locating them somewhere on a single left-right continuum” (Kymblica, 1990: 2). Even when accepting that there can be no Tiresian position i.e. no position outside of or midway between the two sexes, from which to objectively analyse them, the way Kymblica uses ‘we’ is part of the problem he describes. In the chapter on feminism he seems to use ‘we’ to include all human beings, men and women, while the ‘we’ he uses in the six first chapters and the introduction represent the mainstream. Here the criticism of feminism remains something ‘we’ have to take into account. Though Kymblica’s book is a step forward from all the books on mainstream philosophy, political as moral, that do not mention feminism or refer to it in a footnote, it is in itself a sign of the asymmetric split between the mainstream and feminism.

## Care as Human Practise

Is the celebration of care as the moral voice of women a reinforcement of the oppressive identification of women and care? This is, according to Bubeck, a minor problem that cannot form a valid argument against theorising care. Care is an important human practise, whoever cares; therefore it is worth theorising. As for the social context in which care takes place, one of the most interesting questions that emerged for the discussion of care ethics is the possibility of using the care perspective to rethink the values that should govern the public sphere, its institutions and politics.

The Dutch political theorist Selma Sevenhuijsen in her book Citizenship and the Ethics of Care, 1998, makes a plea to regard care and the ethics of care as a social practise of responsibility within citizenship. In order to give the political dimension in care priority over moral female reasoning Sevenhuijsen has developed a gender methodology. Sevenhuijsen begins by stating that the political dimension of moral reasoning is often marginalised in the ethics of care. The relationship between gender, power and care is too complex to be solved by voting for or against the idea of a ‘female’ morality. There is little point in giving motherhood a privileged status in arguments about women’s moral or political identity (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 13). In recent years feminist scholarship has brought alternative perspectives into the discussion, ranging from lesbian to Afro-American and Mestizo forms of ethics. While this has been important in putting the issue of difference among

women on the agenda, the relationship between identity and normativity has, according to Sevenhuijsen, received scant attention and had little influence.

“If we accept that diversity of identities, both between and within persons, can provide an adequate basis for making judgements, we are confronted with the question of whether it is still possible to arrive at forms of common judgement and reach decisions about shared values, and if so, how this should take place” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 14).

In other words, the diversity of identities makes it difficult to reach decisions. Accordingly, Sevenhuijsen argues against seeing ‘the personal as the political’. It may lead to a politics of indignation, allowing for all manners of claims to moral truth. Instead, Sevenhuijsen introduces a neo-republican idea of active citizenship, which includes seeing the public sphere as a meeting ground. Here people shape identities through action and interaction, through debate and exchange of narratives, and in so doing they can revise and transcend their image of self and other. Within this frame, identities are not fixed, but able to change; identities are more dependent on doing than being. This should make it possible to take different positions and decide on new collective aims (Kymblica, 1990: 14).

In such a conception of citizenship, Sevenhuijsen argues, a feministic ethics of care can have a place with its dual commitment as it assumes: a. that people recognise and treat each other as different in their view of the world and their place in it; b. that needs and narratives are not taken as absolute, but interpreted and judged in specific contexts of action. Sevenhuijsen’s aim is to let the values of the two spheres inspire each other. The values of care and ethics such as attentiveness, responsiveness and responsibility will enrich the concept of citizenship and enable it to cope with diversity and plurality. On the other hand, care will be de-romanticised and its values will be seen as political virtues (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 15).

Although I agree with Sevenhuijsen in her overall perspective that the relationship of gender, power and care is too complex to be solved by voting for or against the idea of a ‘female’ morality, I find her arguments at odds with her conclusion. Sevenhuijsen reaches her conclusion by operating with two opposing concepts of identity: an identity that in its diversity remains fixed, and on the other hand an identity that changes through interaction and dialogue. The moral and political identity as developed in feminist scholarship



has been important putting the diversity between and within women on the agenda. This diversity has, however, made it difficult to reach common decisions, which, according to Sevenhuijsen, is the reason why it has had little influence and received scant attention in the societal and political agenda. Instead Sevenhuijsen suggests seeing identities as something which change due to action and interaction in a public meeting place of debates and narratives. The latter understanding of identity is, however, not at odds with feminist scholarship; this is how identity is mostly conceived.

Thus, the major problem in Sevenhuijsen's analysis is not so much her concept of identity as it is the lack of the perspective of power. She seems to overlook the fact that the public meeting place is filled with power. It has always been a problem to arrive at forms of common judgement and to reach decisions from the perspective of different identities in order to find a suitable basis for political action. It is what politics is about; it is also what care is about. In short, it is what life is about. In other words, this is not something invented by feminist scholarship. It has simply pointed at how a diversity of identities so far have been ignored when political decisions are taken. In this, as Sevenhuijsen rightly states, feminist scholarship has not had great effect. The question is, however, whether this is due to feminist scholarship being for or against a female morality or whether it is due to how power follows the needs and norms of the 'white healthy male', also in public meeting places. To reject diversity, which the feminist scholarship has put on the map in order to avoid the normativity of the 'white healthy woman', leaves the agenda once again to a normative sameness of the sex in power.

The work of the social educators is not only influenced by, but also inseparable from their bodies and their sexed identity. Their identities are fixed and not fixed at the same time, depending on relation and situation, action and interaction. At the level of practise as well as at the level of knowledge production and politics, gender identity, or preferably sexual difference, is part of an ongoing negotiation and definition. Here power is always in the picture, and plays a major role. The intriguing question is not whether, but how the asymmetrical position of the different sex has affected the female identity. I shall return to that question in the next chapter.

In defining care as a social practise Sevenhuijsen rejects the diversity and plurality, which she on the other hand considers to be a quality of feminist care ethics. Thus, by maintaining that a feminist ethics of care with its assumption of individual differences can inspire the realm of politics, she is

contradicting herself. As for the hope that politics will de-romanticise care, I shall suggest that this romanticisation of care not only stem from women themselves but also from the political framework. Moreover, it seems to me that Sevenhuijsen herself is romanticising citizenship, seeing it as a blissful conversation among equal partners, all willing to change position and identity in order to decide on collective aims. Although I admit to a need not only for deconstructing but also for a vision of a sexually equal society, such a vision needs to include awareness of the power structures that become ever more refined.

### **postmodernism, political agency and self-proclaimed identities**

Sevenhuijsen reproaches the post-modern turn in feminist studies for having obscured and marginalized “one of the classic aims of politics, the taking of binding decisions and the bearing of responsibility for these”(Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 29). The post-modern influence has often lead to an excess of attention to the construction of identity by outside forces. Sevenhuijsen favours instead the active dimension of gender and argues that in political contexts the question of agency far outweighs that of identity.

“Politics after all is concerned with the shaping of collective responsibility and productive use of the tension between difference and equality. This raises the question of when gender identity is actually relevant for the network in which we live our lives and for the contexts in which we express our political involvement. In politics we have to judge between good and evil” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 30).

In the realm of postmodernity there is no solid foundation for making these decisions. We are, says Sevenhuijsen, left with “no other option than to trust a will to be ‘truly moral’, to be found in a human ability for autonomous judgement based on our being-in-the-world with others” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 30). This raises the question of the relevance of gender identity in a postmodernity that has left us without any other option than to trust a will to be moral. In order to practise such forms of political judgement we have to be able to separate ourselves from self-proclaimed identities and to meet the other in ourselves.

As Sevenhuijsen presents it, a will to be moral requires that the gender identity is denied or relegated to play a lesser role. If I have understood

Sevenhuijsen correctly, I disagree with her. It is not possible to have a moral will that is not bound up with one's sex, position, age etc, which again is what we live and act upon. The challenge has always been to trust the moral will in everybody regardless of difference in colour, sex, age etc. Just as the problem always has been that some have more power behind their will than others do. This does not mean that their will is more moral. Furthermore Svenhuijsen argues that in order to judge between good and evil, a separation from self-proclaimed identities is required. As I have argued above, Tranøy's theory of the bridge principle points at how inequality in society is established in connection with the recognition of the needs of the 'healthy white male between 20 and 50'. Consequently, I tend to see the problem in reverse: what is regarded as good and evil in the political area is determined by whose needs are recognised as vital and legitimate. And this is linked to the question of sexual difference.

Regarding the question of the 'other' in ourselves, I find it necessary to discuss who this 'other' is before celebrating her *or* him. As I hope to have established above, the 'other' in the female self is often constituted by the gaze that has 'othered' her in the first place. Sevenhuijsen is critical to the plea of Zygmunt Bauman when he suggests basing a renewed concept of moral responsibility on 'being with' and 'being for the other'.

“For women it is certainly hard to identify with the idea of a subject striving after 'being with and for the Other', since it is *she* who has been - and still is - continuously pushed into the position of a voiceless Other, who is supposed to take care about and take care of the One” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 18).

It is an important point Sevenhuijsen makes here. It should have made her discuss or at least define what 'other' she thinks it is important to meet in ourselves.

### **ethical and moral reasoning as everyday social and textual practises**

The main argument of Sevenhuijsen is that ethics and moral reasoning are to be studied as everyday social and textual practises. Moral practises are forms of communication and interpretation rather than elevated academic activities in ivory towers. Her intention is not to develop a grand theory about gender, morality and care, nor to reach the best ethics or moral theory, but rather to reflect on different ways to conceptualise care as a socio-political activity in

moral theorising. The aim is to reduce the adverse effects for women of an automatic coupling of care and gender. “Care is a cognitive and moral activity in its own right” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 82). Care is not only about changing nappies, cleaning the house or attending the elderly; it is an activity in which the understanding of needs is central. Thus, the ethics of care is related to the activity of care as a whole and care should accordingly be theorised from a broad conceptualisation of what it is and where it takes place.

Sevenhuijsen then refers to Fisher and Tronto’s four strategies of care in action: caring about, caring for, taking care of and receiving care. All have relational dimensions. It is therefore difficult to separate moral problems in the domain of care from the activity of caring or from the people involved (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 84). Since care deals not only with feelings of love and empathy, but also fear, grief, anger, rejection, guilt, shame and aggression, an ethics of care has to find answers to questions regarding dependency, vulnerability and the vicissitudes of life, Sevenhuijsen argues.

While I agree with Sevenhuijsen that ethics and moral reasoning should be studied in social and contextual practises, I fail to see how this would lead to care as a cognitive and moral activity in its own right. Sexual difference infects all our practises and it seems impossible to reduce the adverse effects for women by isolating “care as a cognitive and moral activity in its own right”. There is no neutral area. To put it in another way: if care is to be seen as a social practise that bridges the private and public sphere, and an activity in which all of us participate, then care is precisely not something in its own right. The wonders and frustrations, the pleasure and conflicts are all parts of life and what it is to be a human being.

To be able to understand this more fully, a further investigation of Sevenhuijsen’s gender methodology in the area of care and ethics is needed. Since the text is dense I have underlined what I see as the different stages in Sevenhuijsen’s argumentation.

### **gender methodology in the area of care and ethics**

Rather than a binary opposition Sevenhuijsen proposes to see the concept of gender as a continuum, a metaphor introduced by, among others, Kathy Davis and Ine Gremmen. Sevenhuijsen uses it to point to the great flexibility and change people often display in the course of their lives; and moreover to suggest gender as one aspect of a person’s character, that in complex ways is interrelated with other aspects. Sevenhuijsen wants to overcome the binary of

the two sexes, seeing sexual difference as a deviation. She proposes instead to see gender as an element within processes of signification, meaning gender as something we *do* rather than what we *are*.

Seeing gender as a continuum opens up for the understanding of the different aspects of gender that can be combined in one person, and the kinds of frictions caused by this, Sevenhuijsen argues, underlining that also men care. Fathers are confronted with a conception that care is not expected from them while mothers often feel guilty that they do not care well enough. Consequently, both women and men have to find a way to deal with the gender symbolism attached to care. Although both are related to their self-image and gender, Sevenhuijsen argues that

“...the ability to display reasoning based on ethic of care might be much less restricted to sexual difference than often is assumed; it may also have to do with the position taken by men in caring processes or with the degree to which people are willing to identify with an ethics of care” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 80).

Secondly, feminist research should abandon the concept of gender as a homogeneous category, and instead promote the idea that different aspects of identity and affinity can be combined within one person or social group. An abstract ideal of sameness often leads to assimilation that “goes hand in hand with marginalization, objectification and exclusion of groups which are perceived as different and deviant ” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 80). The concept of gender should be relieved from the often-false opposition between nature and culture and between equality and difference. The result of seeing gender as product of cultural construction often leads to seeing gender as something wrongly imposed on women from above. Women are not passive victims of their body, Sevenhuijsen argues. Gender, including its embodied aspect, is something women feel and act upon; they are able to employ a whole range of gendered forms of behaviour. Gender constructions will in this way always pervade feelings of identity, and accordingly also individual and collective forms of moral reasoning. Rather than disqualifying voices of women involved in care, it is productive to see where difference does matter and where it does not (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 81).

Gender plays a role at different levels of social structure and individual and collective behaviour. Consequently, gender has to be seen not only as a

continuum but also as a multilayered phenomenon. Sevenhuijsen in this book distinguishes between three of the layers:

- Gender works on the symbolic level, in that images of masculinity and femininity give meaning to phenomena that appear to be gender-neutral, like work, care, citizenship and rationality.
- Gender works on the individual and collective level, in that meanings based on sexual difference have an effect on the way women and men develop their self-image, both how others judge them and how they manifest themselves.
- Gender works on the level of social structure, meaning that the social institutions and positions of power are marked by norms and gender symbols (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 81-82).

The concept of layers allows according to Sevenhuijsen for a more open interpretation than the one based on care as a gender-based dichotomy. This implies that a feminist research of care should not first and foremost be looking at differences in moral reasoning between men and women. Sevenhuijsen's line of argumentation intends to acknowledge care as an ethics in its own right underlining that empirical sexual differences are not the most important issue. If sexual difference is taken as a point of departure, she argues, the argumentation often slips into discussions of individual men and women, and consequently neglects the symbolic binary construction of gender and the effect of the discursive power embedded in them. This again is followed by a tendency to situate ethics of care too much on the level of experience and identity, and too little on the level of the conceptual framework and the images of sexual difference contained within them. Instead ethics of care should be concerned with the deconstruction of the gender load inherent in the conceptual schemes and traditions of thought on morality and care. From my point of view, it is important to do both, to decode both on the level of experience and on the level of conceptual framework. The problem is that a deconstruction or decoding does not make gender load or sexual difference disappear. Sexual difference is there whether wanted or not. I agree, however, that the discussion whether the issue is gender or sexual difference often slips into discussions of

individual men and women. It is therefore, as I have pointed out, important to pose the question of sexual difference in a specific way.

The gender methodology and the suggestions implied, is interesting although difficult to follow, due to Sevenhuijsen's lack of defining gender in relation to sexual difference. Her gender methodology reveals that her intention is to avoid the notion that care is connected to sexual (fixed) difference and to nature, to motherhood. That is why care ethics is to be seen in its own right. This is, however, contradicted by Sevenhuijsen's acknowledgement that the embodiment of gender is something women feel and act upon, something that pervades their identity. This identity consists in "a whole range of gendered forms of behaviour" (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 81). Consequently, when Sevenhuijsen concludes that rather than disqualify women involved in care, it is productive to see where difference does matter and where not, it is difficult to see which identity she is referring to.

In conclusion: although Sevenhuijsen's plea to see care as a social practise freed of gender is interesting, her approach remains flawed. First and foremost because she romanticises both care and political citizenship, and overlooks the power system at work in and between both areas. Secondly, she seems to think that care as social practise, when free of gender, will not only gain reputation but also contribute to the political framework. The problem is, as I hope to have illuminated that care in her description remains filled with gender connotations. It is, however, difficult to get hold of what Sevenhuijsen means since she uses concepts such as identity, gender, sexual difference in different meanings in different paragraphs. To the best of my understanding, Sevenhuijsen is celebrating care - without gender - as an ideal. In so doing, she is falling in the trap of sameness, which the notion gender as opposite to sexual difference, often leads to.

To argue care as a social practise is something with which it is difficult to disagree. The argument becomes however less convincing when identity is understood as result of a process of negotiation. In my perspective, the problem consists in the framework that relegates women to a segregated labour market and, as a consequence, excludes them from vast areas of knowledge production. Both factors are contributing to the different and devaluated position of women. As Kymblica's analysis above reveals, the social institutions already reflect male interest. In combination with women's own compliance in reproducing, it is difficult for women to be accepted as equal autonomous citizens. Therefore I do not think the way to go is to justify care in

its own right. The only way towards an acknowledgement of care as a social practise, in which we regardless of sex partake, is to recognise and critically review the meanings of sexual difference as they are reflected in the public and the private spheres.

## The Moral Dangers of Care

Any theory of care will have to take into account the problem that the practise, values and virtues of care reflect the conditions under which it takes place, otherwise it will paint a distorted picture of care. According to Bubeck, the enthusiasm for theorising care neglects the extent to which theory is corrupted by the oppressive conditions under which care is systematically distorted (Bubeck, 1998: 32). As a result the only areas of distortion discussed by care ethicists are such areas as self-sacrifice and self-denial. To Bubeck, the problem of distortion “implies that there are no pockets of non-distorted caring to be found, and hence that the theorisation of undistorted care can only ever be guesswork” (Bubeck, 1998: 32). With reference to Kierkegaard, she states that self-loss, far from being a risk only in the practise of care, is an existential danger to everyone living in the relation. Consequently, an ethics of care will have to find the balance between caring for others and for one self. Bubeck points at some other areas to which little attention has been paid:

- a. **‘the boundaries between carer and cared-for’.** Here she is referring to the danger of solving the problems of the one in need of care rather than letting him or her find a solution in their own time and on their own conditions.
- b. **the conflict of needs between carer and cared-for.** The care person does not see the other person’s need because they are in conflict with his or her own. Is this a danger inherent in care, and if, how to avoid it, Bubeck asks.
- c. **use and misuse of power in the best intentions.**

These are all questions, which the Danish philosopher K. E. Løgstrup has addressed in his philosophy. In recent years his ethical theory has been



introduced to the field of care in Norway. It is however important to notice that, far from focusing on any specific area such as the field of care<sup>32</sup> his ethical approach connects the personal and the societal areas. I shall look at the advantages and disadvantages of his approach in the light of the social educators' narratives.

**a. 'the boundaries between carer and cared-for'**

According to Løgstrup, the ontological condition of life is interdependency. The ethical demand springs from this, and requires that we care *for* the other without taking responsibility *from* him or her. Whether this other is capable of formulating her want or not, the challenge of the ethical demand is that I know, better than the other, what is best for her, and that I therefore may have to oppose her verbal or non-verbal wishes. If I just do what the other person tells me to do, I am not really concerned about the other. Although I am not supposed to take responsibility from the other person, I am supposed to take the ethical demand seriously. The price of the disagreement may be the loss of a friendship, or some other precious relationship. It is an integral part of the 'demand' that one is prepared to take such a risk for the benefit of the other.

Seen in relation to the question of boundaries, it seems that Løgstrup's theory implies a danger in solving the other person's problems and not leaving time for the other to find her own solution in her own time. According to my analysis of the narratives of the social educators the dilemma of paternalism vs. non-intervention is the superior category. This classical dilemma has already changed the public framework and enacted the subject/object system that divides social institutions into two categories: us and them, subjects and objects, independent (autonomous) and dependent (heteronomous). Within this frame conflicts between nearness and distance, integrity and limits evolve as problems. A philosophy that raises the question of paternalism vs. non-intervention is a philosophy based on the concept of an autonomous, rational, transparent subject. In contrast the social educators confirm with many examples that caregiver and care receiver are interdependent, and that their dilemmas spring from the ethical challenge of interdependency. In spite of this, the social educators conceive the problems as belonging exclusively to them:

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<sup>32</sup> According to the Danish theologian Nils Gunder Hansen it is fair to guess that if Løgstrup would have addressed the issue of caring he would have been concerned about the powerlessness of the patient and the power of the institutional system. Løgstrup would however have protested against any reduction in professional skill in favour of a more ethical but unprofessional i.e. pure human enactment (Gunder Hansen, 1998: 99).

*they* must search for a solution, and *they* are to blame when it is not found. The danger is that they will not give the other opportunity to find his or her own solution.

For a long time I saw Løgstrup's theory as supporting this by underlining the radical responsibility the ethical demand puts upon each of us (Skærbæk, 1998: 101). Slowly, in the process of investigating and analysing from different perspectives, I became aware of how the condition of interdependence offers a fundamentally different framework. Far from supporting the subject/object system, Løgstrup's approach presupposes the interdependence of both parts in the sense that the ethical demand involves all human beings regardless of sex, race, age etc. By taking ontological interdependence as his point of departure, Løgstrup turns the question of paternalism vs. non-intervention into the ongoing responsibility of both 'categories'. The question is no longer whether to interfere or not. Care for the other is inherent in the ontological situation. It is not possible not to intervene. To do nothing is also to intervene. The opposition between ethics stemming from dependence (care reasoning) and independence (justice reasoning) as discussed above, dissolves and is turned into different ways of responding to the ethical demand. The danger of transgressing boundaries is always there because the ethical demand is always there.

This way Løgstrup maintains the interdependence from which the ethical demand springs, while at the same time emphasizing each person's responsibility for him or her self. In the relation of any two human beings, there is a tension between dependence and independence: between the other being totally in my hand and the other being responsible for herself, and vice versa. This is in line with the social educators' struggle to find a way of working that promotes their clients' independence. However, due to the position of the social educators', this turns out to be complicated. The reason is that with no place of their own, they do not really belong in any of the 'categories'. In their concern to give the client good care, the social educators have revealed an identity of limitlessness. Their place is in between, fighting fires and fulfilling needs. Having few or no boundaries themselves, it is hard to identify the boundaries of the other, and it is hard to see when one's own is transgressed. In order to be somebody, somewhere, the social educators try to do the impossible: taking responsibility for the entire relationship. The result is lack of respect for the 'other' as well as for oneself. This raises questions of

how the sovereign life expressions relate to construction and identity. This leads to the next theme.

**b. the conflict of needs between carer and cared-for**

As mentioned above the ethical demand and the ‘sovereign life expressions’ are intimately connected and spring from the same existential status of interdependency. According to Løgstrup, the radicality of these expressions changes when enclosed in the ethical demand. Since the ethical demand inevitably provokes ulterior moral motives its radicality consists in claiming its own superfluency. The ethical demand, in itself mute, has to be reflected, formed, planned and put into action. The sovereignty of the ‘life expressions’ is however so imperative, that they may dismiss or dissolve our plans and reflections.

As argued above, the way the social educators think and work may be seen as efforts to respond to the ethical demand that each and every individual presents. The precondition of good care, according to their letters and our group discussions, is ‘nearness’. When I ask why they have to get that near, they answer unanimously that it is necessary to get near to be able to create a relation of trust with the client. When I am not convinced, they go on saying that a good relation is needed...and then they look at each other and one of them exclaims: “WHUPS: maybe the good relation is needed to make them do what I want them to do”!

In the concrete care relation and situation, the concept or method of nearness is not that easy. For both Liv Fjeldvik and Marie Englund, the situation and relation in question gets too close, and they have to withdraw, each in her own way. Marie Englund clearly defines and acknowledges the problems this particular client presents, sets her limits accordingly, but also she ends up too close. Liv Fjeldvik labels nearness as her method, and the only way she is capable of working. But in the end she reluctantly has to realise that this method not only has its flaws, but it does not give her the respect she originally thought it would. Susanne Bjørnson’s descriptions of how women at her institution work as chameleons and ‘fire fighters’ point at yet other dangers of nearness. And Grete Jeppesen’s story tells about how she is socialised into the culture of her working place. Their stories confirm Liv Fjeldvik’s postulate that she cannot work otherwise. Even the authority of their position that allows them to withdraw, reflect and even act upon their experiences, does not solve their problems regarding nearness. My provocation makes them wonder

whether their insistence on 'nearness' has something to do with a need for compliant patients.

Thus there seem to be three different perspectives or layers of nearness: 1: nearness as theory, 2: nearness as practise, and 3. nearness as reflected practise. Whereas 1 and 3 are theoretical and unsituational, 2 is practical and situated. The line of argument in 1 is that by means of nearness it is possible to create trust, the precondition of good care. In their reflection they concede that nearness may be a means of achieving compliance in their clients. This seems to confirm Løgstrup's theory that interaction is perverted when trust is conceived a personal ability. The question is whether this is correct. Is their practise perverted or do they, in Bartky's vocabulary 'suffer from a double ontological shock' (above: 59-62).

The analysis above leaves no doubt that the social educators, struggling to find ways of working that address and redress the dignity of their clients, take the ethical demand seriously. In this process they far from getting compliant clients, tend to lose whatever is left of their professional respect when they get near. Let me unfold my line of argument. The 'sovereign life-expressions' are situational; thereby they form my identity by the enactments to which they empower me. Although they are not mine, I embody them, which makes me responsible. In other words, there is an ambiguity: the way in which I embody the sovereign life expressions express my identity at the same time as it shapes my identity. Life expressions thus become embodied sexually. In the vocabulary of Løgstrup the sovereign life expressions are not only personal but also anonymous. The latter I interpret to say that the realm of the sovereign life expressions is coloured with the symbolic power of the embodiments of the concrete relation and situation.

To understand the complex entanglement of the social educators Løgstrup's distinction between life expression and conduct is productive. The life expression, he says, is as unconditional as conduct is conditional. While the conduct can be discussed, the life expression can not. To my understanding the social educators confirm this distinction when they demonstrate how difficult it is to distinguish between conduct and sovereign life expressions. The reason is that they consider 'nearness' to be conduct, a professional method. They do not identify nearness as an enactment of the way they embody sovereign life expression. In other words, they confuse their embodied nearness with professional consideration that good care presupposes trust. While they are able to reflect upon and discuss their conditional conduct i.e. the way they

perform nearness in the situation, they cannot discuss the unconditionality of 'nearness', why it is so necessary (above: 86). The reason is their female embodiment. They are caught up in the female syndrome. They end up taking the blame because they confuse their embodied nearness with their professional consideration that good care presupposes trust. This hinders them in recognising their practise as professional reasoning that only from a near position is it possible to find more abstract and less context-sensitive rules (above: 168). In other words, it seems impossible to have a theory about nearness when embodied female.

Although Løgstrup rarely mentions or elaborates on the issue of the body, he has a phenomenological understanding of it. "We are not our body as if it were a tool. We *are* our body. I am not within my body as if my body is the periphery of my personality, I am my body. Everything our body is, we are; we can not escape it. Everything we have experienced we have experienced with our person in its totality" (Løgstrup, 1972: 142). Like Merleau-Ponty Løgstrup does not recognise the difference that the sexual embodiment makes. This hinders him in seeing how power directly and indirectly, privately and publicly, personally and politically, upholds inequality.

### **c. use and misuse of power in the best intentions**

According to Løgstrup, there is always power at stake in our relationships. This is due to the fact that we are interdependent, being life and destiny of each other. He differentiates between this interdependency *and* the individuality and will of each person. There is a contrast between the independence of each person, and interdependence as an ontological condition. Power is neither personalised nor de-personalised in Løgstrup's theory. Due to the ontological condition of interdependence, power is always already there in any relationship. No one is excluded or excused, regardless of sex, age, or status. The persistent question is with what intention it is used, to the best of the other or myself. Power can take on many shapes and voices according to Løgstrup. It can be used and misused, but it is always there and should be identified and acknowledged. The important and ongoing decision is whether to use power for the benefit or to the detriment of the other.

The social educators know that their position gives them power, but they do not conceive of their way of working as power. In Liv Fjeldvik's narrative, the staff is divided into two groups, of which the dominant one prefers structure and rules. This way of working requires force, and therefore,

as in the case-story mentioned above, a shift of sex; in other words, power is connected to force, and 'a male way' of working, even if women perform it. Thus, the coaxing as well as the 'disciplinary practices', as Bartky calls the smile, the forward posture, the soft and kind voice, into which the female bodies are trained, are not considered as force or power. These postures are part of the female construction required in order to manage in a subordinate position. Thus one of the informants said in a group session that it was great to work, because it gave her the appreciation she lacked at home. Remembering Frye's description of the arrogant perceiver and her power (above: 93-96), it does not take much imagination to see the consequences of being on the receiving end of nearness. The social educators, however, fail to recognise how their own ways of working express power. This unawareness I see as connected to their lack of position, which again is connected to how their embodiment is signalling unlimited caring femininity.

Inherently Løgstrup's philosophy presupposes either that there is no difference or that equality policy has erased the difference or that gender makes no difference in ethics. Practise, however, indicates that sex makes a difference. Women are 'othered' *and* 'other' themselves. Through symbols, language and knowledge production, woman is the other of less value. When she tries to value others, she is bound to fail, since she cannot give more than she herself has and is. In other words, while sovereign life expressions surprise us, reassuring us that life is not our creation and does not follow our plans, they do not eliminate the already existing asymmetry of interdependency. Although the ethical demand requires each of us to use whatever we have of competence and imagination, women cannot be valued equally by working in accordance with them selves. By not taking the sexually different embodiment into account, Løgstrup overlooks fundamental structures of power. When introduced into the field of care, his ethics unintendedly comes to sustain the subject/object structure.

## Conclusion

I hope to have established that it is difficult to overcome the split between public and private, between subject and object, between 'we' and 'them'. To do this, we need to leave the opposition model. In other words, both care reasoning and justice reasoning has to be challenged. In the perspective of

Løgstrup's ethic, the opposition between the ethics stemming from dependent (care reasoning) and the ethics of independent (justice reasoning) becomes irrelevant. Life is not to be seen and evaluated in the perspective of care. It is the other way around. From birth to death we are all dependent as well as independent. This goes beyond the 'we' of Kymblica, whose task it is to take into account the problems of women or other marginal groups. It also goes beyond care in its own right, as proposed by Sevenhuijsen. If the commonality of interdependency is not recognised by the state, it fails to realise the condition of life itself. My point is that it makes a difference whether care is considered an inherent part of the interdependency of all human beings as human beings, or whether care is limited to a common social practise. The latter view overlooks the position of care in our society. Only when care is considered as an existential condition of life, will it be possible to see care as something beyond the constraints of one right way to respond, one right way to live, as there is no age or colour or sex that is the right one.

The ethical approach of Løgstrup has helped me to understand the problems raised by the analysis in chapter 1. The claim of interdependence as an ontological condition offers a more productive framework than the classical philosophy in that it is open to different ways of answering the 'ethical demand' of the other. No one approach to such a request is ethical or unethical per se. The problem is, however, that as long as knowledge, including ethics, is defined and embodied in the neutral human being, the interaction is distorted to the detriment of the parts involved and the society that we construct together. A society that recognises equally the difference of the other and the other 'other' will remain a dream as long as the social institutions reflect male interests and needs. In the next chapter I shall present some ethical approaches that takes body and sexual difference into account and discuss them with one that argues that gender makes no difference in ethics.





## 5. Sexually Different Embodied Ethics

The previous chapter demonstrated how an ethics of care has become cornered in the opposition between care and justice. To get out of the dialectic logic of opposition, an ethical framework that takes sexual difference into account is needed. In this chapter I shall argue that Beauvoir has offered the outlines to such ethical approach in Pour une Morale de L'Ambiguïté, 1947. In combining a philosophy of history with a phenomenological description of the individual experience Beauvoir presents an ethical approach that rests on the complex interaction and mutual implication between the spheres of subjectivity and sociality<sup>33</sup>. By means of the ambiguous condition of life this approach points at ways to understand how inequality is produced, and how it at the same time opens up for change, not only as a possibility but as a responsibility.

Inspired by the phenomenological framework of Beauvoir, the Australian philosopher Rosalyn Diprose has endeavoured to show how the injustices promoted by traditional ethics, among which also many care ethicists belong, can only be met by an ethics which take sexually different embodiment into account. Lastly, I present and discuss an ethical perspective, which aims at equality of the sexes but maintains that gender difference makes no difference in ethics.

### An Ethics of Ambiguity

Ambiguity is a Latin word, usually defined as the quality of having more than one meaning. Ambiguity means that the existential condition of being thrown into a world already there is common for all human beings. A human being is both free and not free, both a separate consciousness and a social being. The human condition is ambiguous, as it is *both and*, not *either or*. The philosophers of all times have felt this ambiguity, Beauvoir postulates, and most of them have tried to mask it.

“They have striven to reduce mind to matter, or to reabsorb matter into mind, or to merge them within a single substance. Those who have accepted the

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<sup>33</sup> Teresa De Lauretis has in Alice does – N'T, 1982 convincingly argued the need for an ethical approach that combines both the complex interaction between and the mutual implication of the spheres of subjectivity and sociability.

dualism have established a hierarchy between body and soul that permits of considering as negligible the part of the self that cannot be saved.... And the ethics that they have proposed to their disciples has always pursued the same goal. It has been a matter of eliminating the ambiguity by making oneself pure inwardness or pure externality, by escaping from the sensible world or by being engulfed by it, by yielding to eternity or enclosing oneself in the pure moment” (Beauvoir, 1948: 7-8).

Contrary to this, Beauvoir places her ethical understanding as ambiguous among the unambiguous philosophies. Existentialism has from its beginning, and here she mentions Kierkegaard and Sartre, defined itself as a philosophy of ambiguity arguing that the subject can only be (come) itself when accepting to be at a distance to itself. With reference to Montaigne, Beauvoir describes the tragic ambiguity of man: he<sup>34</sup> can think over his own existence but he cannot escape this condition. The subject is part of the condition of nature without being able to liberate him from it. The facticity of life and death means that everyone has to take over responsibility for what he already is while in a process of becoming. This unavoidable condition means that life is *becoming* all the time on the condition of death. Life has to be conquered, won again and again. If not, death is ever present as a possibility. In other words, life and death are facticities in a double sense: ambiguous.

The Ethics of Ambiguity was edited in 1948, (in French 1947) some years before the edition of the Second Sex, 1949. To read it is somehow to partake in Beauvoir’s workshop and follow how the epistemological and philosophical basis of the Second Sex develops as a consequence of her work to formulate an ethical approach on the basis of phenomenology and existentialism. When Beauvoir wrote about the existential condition of interdependency as common to all of us regardless of sex, she comes to wonder why and how this interdependency works out differently for the sexes. As a result of this process Beauvoir reluctantly had to realise that one is not born as

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<sup>34</sup> *l’enfant* and *l’homme* are both masculine in the French language. And Beauvoir does not question that by putting an *elle* next to *il*. First I read An Ethics of Ambiguity in a Swedish translation, where these words are feminine. Next I read it in English in order to make references to the English edition. In English, *child* is neuter or masculine, and *human being* is masculine. When Beauvoir in the same paragraph mentions how the child discovers the human character in the reality surrounding her: language, habits, moral, and values, one might wonder what difference it makes to be raised into a culture where the human being and the child is feminine in language.

a woman, one *becomes* a woman. Thus, the Second Sex can be said to be a further development of an ethics of ambiguity.

The unequal historical situation, into which children of both sexes are born, is intimately connected to the body. This body can be a living body or a life-less body. Whatever it is, it is already and always there and colours everything. Thus, the sex of the body is as fundamental as death and birth. As already indicated, my argument is that the common condition of existence does not exclude or precede sexual difference. Both are already and always there. Life is, however, more than a limiting difference of two sexes: it is uniqueness. Thrown into the world, every one of us creates our own specific melody of sexed embodiment. Each person has a responsibility to fight for the freedom of the others as well as of himself.

“An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny *a priori* that separate existents can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedom can forge laws valid for all” (Beauvoir, 1948, 1976: 18).

As I find this phrase dense but crucial I will quote it also in French:

“Une morale de l’ambiguïté, ce sera une morale qui refusera de nier à priori que des existants séparés puissent en même temps être liés entre eux, que leurs libertés singulières puissent forger des lois valables pour tous” (Beauvoir 1947: 26).

In my understanding, this paragraph indicates that an ethics of ambiguity by definition is transcendent in its hope that some day it will be possible for free subjects to be separate (independent) and bound (dependent) without subordination. Thus their individual freedom will create a precedent for all. This vision or imagination, I argue, allows Beauvoir to maintain that women and men are two variations of human embodiment while at the same time being totally different. The paragraph also states that an ethics of ambiguity first of all concerns every singular human being in its existential condition of freedom and interdependency. Secondly, and only as a stumbling block or hindrance for achieving free, separate personhood, it concerns the question of sexual difference.

### **interdependency, morality and subjectivity**

Beauvoir refers to Descartes who says that the unhappiness of man is due to his having first been a child. Most of the unhappy choices a human being makes have taken place on the basis of childhood. With this starting point she characterises a child's situation as thrown into a world that has been formed without the child and in which he has to live.

“The child's situation is characterised by his finding himself cast into a universe, which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit. In his eyes, human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and the trees” (Beauvoir, 1976: 35).

The condition of the child is, even if unhappy in other respects, metaphysically privileged; a privileged but not a free status. Normally, it escapes the anguish of freedom. The child is “in a state of security by virtue of his very insignificance. He can do with impunity whatever he likes. He knows that nothing can ever happen through him; everything is already given; his acts engage nothing, not even himself” (Beauvoir, 1976: 37). There are beings whose life slips into this infantile world. They may, like children, exercise their freedom, but only within the universe set up for them, without them. In this category Beauvoir puts slaves and women in many civilisations. The difference between the child and the woman is that “the child's situation is imposed upon him, whereas the woman (I mean the Western woman of today) chooses it or at least consents to it” (Beauvoir, 1976: 38). As long as women do not learn their freedom through work, they come with charming attitudes and childless irresponsibility to sustain deep compliance with the world of men (Beauvoir, 1976: 44). Beauvoir seems to indicate that liberation is possible to obtain for most Western women, whereas the slaves of the seventeen-century and the Muslim harem woman did not have any possibility of attacking the civilisation that suppressed them. Their behaviour can only be judged within the situation.

When the child grows older, it discovers the weaknesses of human nature and the adults surrounding it: language, habits, morality and values, all of them originate from insecure beings. Hence, the child begins to ask: “ ‘Why must I act that way? What good is it? And what will happen if I act in another way?’ He discovers his subjectivity; he discovers that of others” (Beauvoir, 1976: 39). The crisis of these years is that he finds he is cast into a world no

longer ready made, which has to be made. The individual has to take on subjectivity. Freedom is disclosed and he must decide.

“Doubtless, this decision can always be reconsidered, but the fact is that conversions are difficult because the world reflects back a choice which is confirmed through this world which it has fashioned. Thus, a more and more rigorous circle is formed from which one is more and more unlikely to escape. Therefore, this misfortune which comes to man as a result of the fact that he was a child is that his freedom was first concealed from him and all his life he will be nostalgic for the time when he did not know its exigencies.

This misfortune has still another aspect. Moral choice is free, and therefore unforeseeable. The child does not contain the man he will become. Yet, it is always on the basis of what he has been that a man decides upon what he wants to be. He draws the motivations of his moral attitude from within the character he has given himself and from within the universe which is its correlative. Now, the child set up this character and this universe little by little, without foreseeing its development” (Beauvoir, 1976: 40).

Hence, the human being is already and always in a situation, in a cultural, historical and social context. The possibilities, presented by the world and the choices taken by the child without knowing the consequences, have together already formed a limitation of change. Beauvoir links the situation of the adult to the existential condition of life i.e. how all of us come into the world as children. The child is seen as a something in himself. The existential condition of being thrown into the world already there and the responsibility of taking over subjectivity are common for both sexes. It is in this moment that he is situated morally.

Common to the parent and the child is that, in order to have their existence justified; both need a recognition that comes from an independent subject. Thus, in the ongoing interdependence, the parent has to fight for independence, not only for the child but also for her and himself. By recognising the existential condition of life as asymmetrical, Beauvoir underlines the responsibility given with the position and situation of the parent at the same time as she underlines that the child has to take over responsibility for what he has become in order to be a subject. “...the child needs to be taken in hand, he invites authority.... on the other hand, even in this situation the child has a right to his freedom and must be respected as a human person”

(Beauvoir, 1976: 141). In the rearing of a child, as in any relationship with others, the ambiguity of freedom implies a risk of domination, even of violence.

Gothlin-Lundgren argues that Beauvoir's philosophy focuses on the meeting between two adults and refers to the Swedish philosopher Ulla Holm who maintains that this makes Beauvoir's model inapplicable for the mother/child relationship. In her thesis Mothering and Praxis, 1993, Holm argues that the goal of good mothering, which she defines as a certain social practise that also fathers can do, is slowly and carefully to turn the child into a socially capable and independent adult (Gothlin-Lundgren, 1995b: 10). To my understanding the dissent between Holm and Beauvoir reflects their departure from different philosophies. Holm's ethics is rooted in Aristotelian philosophy<sup>35</sup>. She describes an independent parent whose task it is to turn a dependent child into an independent adult. This is a description of a subject/object relationship. In contrast, Beauvoir maintains a phenomenological approach that abolishes the opposition between subject and object by claiming that the existential conditions is ambiguous. As demonstrated above it is with inspiration from Beauvoir that Jessica Benjamin developed her theory of intersubjectivity. Like Holm I regard good parenting as a pedagogical project. I maintain, however, that it is necessary to establish intersubjectivity in this relation to prevent reproducing the pattern of domination and suppression developing later on.

In my opinion the *core* of Beauvoir's ethical approach is its applicability for the parent/child relationship as well as for the relationship between adults. It underlines what Gothlin-Lundgren herself has pointed to, the *both and* (Gothlin-Lundgren, 1995b: 6). Both dependent and independent, both subject and object. The difficulty of the child is the difficulty of the adult, in two interrelated ways. The first is that we from the very beginning of our lives *always* are engaged in the world and have to accept what we *already* have become. This influence the way in which we engage with the world, which again contributes to who we are and become and so on. The second is that, due to this limitation, we are continuously tempted not to choose, which means

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<sup>35</sup> In an article about the absent child in the European philosophical tradition, the Norwegian philosopher Vigdis Songe-Møller refers Plato who sees the child as an adult-to-be and Aristotle who considers the child as a potential human being. This includes however only the male sexed child (Songe-Møller, 1992: 141).

remaining in the status of a child: dependent and without freedom and responsibility.

### **interdependence and freedom**

Interdependency is the basic condition of existence. The child as well as the grown up needs confirmation and justification from others and vice versa. Since the precondition for a reciprocal recognition between subjects is freedom, this involves fighting for the freedom of both oneself and the other. Independence and interdependence is thus not contradictory for Beauvoir. Rather they presuppose each other:

“...every man needs the freedom of other men and, in a sense, always wants it, even though he may be a tyrant; the only thing he fails to do is to assume honestly the consequences of such a wish. Only the freedom of others keeps each of us from hardening in the absurdity of facticity. And if we are to believe the Christian myth of creation, God himself was in agreement on this point with the existentialist doctrine since, in the words of an anti-fascist priest, ‘He had such respect for man that He created him free’ ”

(Beauvoir 1976: 71).

While Sartre pleaded for the absolute freedom of the individual to interpret his or her own situation, Beauvoir on her side maintains that not everyone has the same amount of freedom, due to differences in situations. The disagreement stems from the different point of departure. While Sartre’s point of reference is the *universal* man, Beauvoir’s is the *situated* man and woman. The historical situation is one of inequality, and the reciprocal recognition between subjects presupposes freedom and independence. Since these are not something given, they will have to be conquered. The remaining question is how to change a situation of dependency.

To be free (independent) one has to live with other free (independent) people; otherwise one gets locked in the dialectic of the master-slave relation. The absurdity is that the tyrant does not see the paradox that the recognition he needs has to be given him by other free beings. To prevent domination, interdependent beings have to fight for freedom and independence for both themselves and the other. This means that subjectivity is not something achieved once and for all. It is part of the existential condition of interdependent beings.

“The drama of original choice is that it goes on moment by moment for an entire lifetime, that it occurs without reason, before any reason, that freedom is there as if it were present only in the form of contingency” (Beauvoir, 1976: 40-41).

The analysis material indicated that the dilemmas in the care relation and situation are related to the difficult balance between independence and dependence. The practice of social educators confirms that interdependency is the basic premise for this balance. Their intention is to fight for the freedom (independence/autonomy/integrity) of the other. As demonstrated above, they are compelled to work in accordance with their sexual and different embodiment. This is why they maintain ‘nearness’ as necessary. And this is why they work in no-mans land. So far the social educators way of working can be said to follow the philosophy of Løgstrup. However, in so doing, their practise reveals that interdependency is twisted with asymmetry, overruled as it is by the subject/object system, or with domination as Benjamin says. They cannot get respect for the way they work, they cannot work differently, and they cannot make themselves heard, as they have no position or place from which to speak. The narratives of the social educators demonstrate that women, even when working, are dependent women. And in this they confirm the need for and the actuality of Beauvoir’s approach. While Løgstrup presupposes that equality between the sexes is already obtained, Beauvoir through her questioning woman’s ways of being discovered the fundamental asymmetrical position of woman.

### **situation, position and responsibility**

Beauvoir’s ethical approach follows Kant and Kierkegaard in the sense that the human being ought to be treated as an end and not as a mean. They differ however in that Beauvoir considers freedom to be the main value. To want the other to be free is not an abstract directive; it points to concrete acts for each person (Beauvoir, 1948: 73). Seeing dependence and independence as integral parts of interdependency, Beauvoir underlines the need to act. The choice of action is always taken in a particular situation, which is crucial for the decisions and acts. She illustrates this by saying that to discuss whether or not to rescue a person throwing himself into the Seine is too abstract. If I am not in



any way connected to him, the rescue will only be a coincidence. And he will have the right to come and ask me for means and reasons for living.

“If I find myself in a position to do violence to a child, or to a melancholic, sick, or distraught person the reason is that I also find myself charged with his upbringing, his happiness and his health: I am a parent, a teacher, a nurse, a doctor, or a friend... So by a tacit agreement, by the very fact that I am solicited, the strictness of my decision is accepted or even desired; the more seriously I accept my responsibilities, the more justified it is. This is why love authorises a severness which are not granted to indifference” (Beauvoir, 1976: 137).

The superior value is, however, still the freedom of both involved parts. It is just as wrong to serve an abstract ethical rule as it is to follow impulses of pity or generosity. This is how Beauvoir’s ethics differs from the ethics of Aristotle. This is not an effort to find the middle way or to seek support in experience, in the good example. It is an effort to try to find the right way of acting in a particular situation, following the principle of freedom, one’s own and the other’s (Gothlin-Lundgren, 1991b: 21). The basic difference, as I shall elaborate below, lies in how we understand ethics and the human being.

At present the practise of care as well as the ideal of care illustrates how people in need of care are often treated as dependent, as children, most often in the best intention of helping them to (re-) gain independence. The people receiving this care, however, often fail to see it in the same way. An example may better illustrate what I mean. An elderly medical practitioner became ill with Parkinson’s Disease. After years of struggling, she consulting different experts at last developed a combination of medicine that enabled her to live fairly comfortably with the severe disease. Due to a virus infection, she had to be hospitalised for a period. Her meticulously balanced medication was reduced, and she had a relapse in terms of pain and loss of control over her body. On top of the worsening of her sickness, she felt oppressed and ignored as a subject, both in her medical capacity and as a human being. The professor in charge listened to her but held to his opinion that she was in danger of being overmedicated. In order to be accepted as a patient in the hospital she had to depend on him. The patient saw the dilemma differently from the professor. Dependent on her own line of medication she could live an independent life. The professor’s perspective was dominated of the risk of addiction. In my line

of argument, the ethical dilemma is not necessarily the same as the medical problem.

A female student of around forty had a practise period at an institution for old dementia patients. She decided to focus on how to activate an old female patient. The student managed to get the old woman to set the table for breakfast. When the student described the situation, her voice changed. It got a soothing, condescending tone, and in this tone (repeated unconsciously in my office) she reported how she praised the old woman for doing so well in setting the table. It took me some time to define the problem and attend to it. The problem was in my view twofold: the content and the tone of voice. In praising the woman for being able to set a table, the student had ignored that this woman most probably had been setting tables for over fifty or sixty years. The student maintained a sweet praising tone as to a child eager to please the senior. The student, however, was reluctant to accept my interpretation and became rather offended. As stated above by bel hooks, we do not hear ourselves until we listen to a tape or video recording. And maybe I too, in my counselling, became condescending!

In my view, the above-mentioned examples are characteristic of a system in which dependency signifies the client and independence signifies the professional, a division that comes to overrule the interdependency of the people involved in the interaction of care. Thus, to be categorised as a client, is to be conceived as dependent, which in turn means to be of less authority and worth. This causes major damage to all involved. In the example above, the professor uses his position of responsibility to enforce his opinion. In so doing he undermines the independence of the patient, neglecting the alliance he needs in order to help her. His way of treating the patient is in line with his understanding of knowledge. He knows what is wrong with her. He does not need her opinion. In other words, his ethical act is connected to how he has been trained to conceive his knowledge to be scientific and indisputable. This empowers him to objectify the patient, revealing how even long training often is followed by 'arrogant perception' (above: 93 - 96, below: 223 - 227).

### **freedom, error and body**

Acting includes the possibility of errors. It is through accepting the possibility of errors that the human being affirms his freedom. To deny him to rely on his experience is to bereave him of his existence: "To want to prohibit a man from error is to forbid him to fulfil his own existence, it is to deprive him of life"

(Beauvoir, 1976: 138). Freedom, life and errors are intimately connected with the body. The moral questions do not come from within and without. The human being is himself this urgent interrogation and cannot run away without running away from himself. When *be*-ing and becoming, the human being himself answers the question:

“I concern others, and they concern me. There we have an irreducible truth. The me-others relationship is as insoluble as the subject/object relationship” (Beauvoir, 1976: 72).

To will oneself free is to will others free. This involves actions. The link to the framework of phenomenology is obvious. Merleau-Ponty’s abolishment of the opposition between subject and object means that abilities such as vitality, sensibility or intelligence are not to be seen as static qualities; it is a question of throwing oneself out into the world and discovering what it means to *be*. In this act of being, everyone has to take their physiology into account, but the body itself is not something given. It expresses our relation to the world, which explains why at the same time it is an object of approval and disapproval. Thus, the doubleness of the human being is exposed: always already involved as both subject and object to others as well as to oneself. In this conflation of subject and object, it is no longer possible to talk about vitality or intelligence as static qualities. In other words: I can not accredit myself of these qualities. They are not *mine*. They are part of life, of interdependency, part of being and becoming. As also errors are part of what it means to *be*. This is not to be misunderstood as lack of responsibility, as it is in fact to take responsibility realising the conditions of life. This has consequences for the conception, production and administration of knowledge. According to this understanding, no knowledge can in itself be indisputable and scientific; no single person is authorised to overrule another person.

The celebration of care - and of the sex performing it - has in theory and practise meant taking on an overwhelming responsibility, damaging for both parts in the caring interaction. Most often it is connected to an understanding of knowledge as scientific and indisputable. As stated above, one of the important things maintaining the subject/object scheme is that the responsibility for the other is overtaken by the professional. With the best intentions. The professional has to learn more, to reflect more, and she is trapped in frustration to the point of flagellation over never being able to do the right thing. This is

due to a conception of vitality, empathy, and sensitivity as qualities I can learn and accredit as mine. It is an integral part of the subject/object system, based as it is on a conception of the individual and independent being. Blaming the other, the methods or oneself are some of the consequences of this conception.

Meeting needs has in the field of caring been overemphasised. This in turn has led to intense focus upon how to understand the other. The stories of the social educators taken as a whole tell how difficult this work is. The burnout syndrome in this field is most prevalent. In this state of affairs, Beauvoir's argument that without errors there can be no morality is important. Subjectivity is deeply connected to deciding and acting. Over and over, in ever changing situations and conditions, subjectivity has to be conquered, a process in which both partakers of the relation are responsible for the freedom of the other.

That generating subjectivity in the meaning of change is possible, is illustrated when Susanne Bjørnson decides to give a young man an extra permission of leave. In the situation she finds herself working differently from how she and her female colleagues normally work, 'fighting fires in no-mans-land'. Here, she is working according to her philosophy of the superior value of freedom, or integrity as she calls it. According to Beauvoir, this involves the possibility of failing. It might turn out that she is wrong in her judgement or that he is wrong in his judgement. Seen in the perspective of an ethics of ambiguity, Susanne Bjørnson is acting morally.

This again has to do with the body in its sexed embodiment. The individual narrative of the social educator tells how she as an embodied person affects the other as an embodied person and vice versa. Each in their way, the social educators confirm that their body is not something given once and for all, but rather is how they relate in the world. The embodied interaction varies in intensity and in communication according to relation, situation, position etc. The interacting bodies may at the same time be objects of approval and disapproval. When Grete Jeppesen discovers that she (her body) works according to the culture she despises, she is disgusted. When she tells how she, when working in her own way, achieves a co-operation with the client, it is an approval of herself. It is as Jorun Solheims says in the meeting of these two positions - as subject and as object for each other and ourselves - that new knowledge is developed (above: 38). I shall return to this in the following chapter.

The ethics of ambiguity points to the necessary and ever changing choices that every human being as embodied persons has to make to be a subject. To refrain from making a decision, or to conform to regulations governing, for example, clients' leave of absence, is to decide not to be a subject. This again presents an alternative framework for the work of care. The needs of both persons interacting have to be seen in the light of freedom. This means that the staff's responsibility must be to call upon the responsibility of the client in order to promote the subjectivity of both parts involved in the relation. Whether the other part is mentally, physically or in other ways dependent on help does not exclude him/her from being met as a free unique subject. When responsibility is placed on the professional alone, it leads to a reluctance to acknowledge failings. Or a tendency to apportion blame. When Liv Fjeldvik decides to change, the reason is the lack of intersubjectivity in the relation and situation of care. She *is* not a 'softie' but she is in a position that leaves her no or little respect. What I suggest is that this happens when we forget basic conditions as interdependence, embodiment and 'perceptio' i.e. involvement in the situation and relation.

#### **uniqueness, freedom and change**

Beauvoir concludes that an ethics of ambiguity is individualistic in the sense that it ascribes to the individual absolute worth, and that it does not authorise any other person to legitimise its existence. Like the individualism of Christianity it resists any form of totalitarian thinking that praises Humanity over the individual (Beauvoir, 1948,76: 123). This may appear as solipsism, but it is not.

“And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom“ (Beauvoir, 1976: 91).

In other words, the human being's freedom can only be fulfilled by means of other free persons. By stressing freedom as a crucial condition in order to avoid the master-slave relation, Beauvoir underlines that the dependent status and identity is twofold. It is at the same time imposed upon women *and* sustained by them. Therefore it does not suffice to describe woman in her difference. The

analysis of only five informants demonstrates a variety in practise and ways of reflecting, requiring a continuous critical analysis to reveal how meanings of sexual difference are produced and carried on and how the majority of current ethical understandings contribute to these injustices.

My point is that the common condition of existence does not precede nor exclude sexual difference. Both are already and always there. Sexual difference exists and tends to keep us in an ongoing comparison of the two sexes. This we need to overcome in order to value differences and to be treated as individuals of worth and freedom. Beauvoir's ethics underlines the possibility of change. Life is more than this limited difference of two sexes: it is uniqueness. Thrown into the world, every one of us creates our own specific melody of sexed embodiment. The difference between us is not only between men and women, but also between women. Thus, the ambiguity in Beauvoir's ethical approach contains the possibility of - a priori - imagining that the separate existences unite in a mutual respect of freedom for each. A freedom, valid for all, to differ in every way without being excluded, marginalised or subordinated. This vision or hope I find to be crucial for change and dialogue across differences. In fact, I think that this is what makes us get up in the morning and try once again to build bridges: we cannot exclude the possibility that today we will succeed.

Beauvoir has a wonderful story about reading Hegel in Bibliotheque Nationale's impersonal environment. "As soon as one considers a system abstractly and theoretically, one puts himself, in effect on the plane of the universal, thus of the infinite" (Beauvoir, 1976: 158). This is why it is so comforting to read the Hegelian system. As she came out into the street again, to her life outside the system of Hegel, the system was however of no use. "...what it had offered me, under a show of the infinite, was the consolation of death; and I again wanted to live in the midst of living men" (Beauvoir, 1976: 158). Choosing our existence in its limitation, we are really free, Beauvoir says. In my interpretation, this means that there is not one system that matches real life, there is not one answer to the question of sexual difference. It is as ambiguous as ethics and as life.

## An Ethics of Embodiment and Sexual Difference.

Therefore, the Australian philosopher Rosalyn Diprose argues, the genealogy of sexual difference has perpetuatedly to be investigated. In her book: bodies of women, 1994, she claims that ethics, embodiment and sexual difference need to be thought together. Basically influenced by Beauvoir, as I hope to establish below, Diprose elucidates how such an ethics comes to criticise traditional normative ethics, including many ethicists of care for having overlooked the implication of the social context for the constitution of identity.

In order to establish the genealogy of sexual difference Diprose unfolds the etymology of the word ethics. The origin is the Greek word *Ethos* that means character and dwelling. Dwelling is both a noun and a verb; my habitual way of life, including sets of habits, determines my specific character. These habits are not just given, but constituted through the repetitions of bodily acts that again are governed by the habitat I occupy.

*“From this understanding of ethos, ethics can be defined as the study and practise of that which constitutes one’s habitat, or as the problematic of the constitution of one’s embodied place in the world” (Diprose, 1994: 19).*

By connecting her definition with etymology, Diprose consolidates her understanding at the same time as she achieves to bend it. The discrepancy between this approach to understanding ethic and the one based on universal principles is not just a question of etymology. The difference pertains in

*“...whether we think our ‘being’ is composed primarily of mind or matter; to what we understand by the relation between mind and matter; and to whether we think the world we inhabit is homogenous or fragmented” (Diprose, 1994: 19).*

Underlying these questions is an assumption about the meaning of the word ‘in’. Diprose is arguing an understanding of the human being as composed of primarily matter, of body.

*“...the understanding of ethics I am evoking recognises a constitutive relation between one’s world (habitat) and one’s embodied character (ethos) ” (Diprose, 1994: 19).*

Such an ethical approach problematises the site or place and claims that our being in the world is constituted on the relation 'in', Diprose argues, referring to Heidegger's concept 'in-the world' (Diprose, 1994: 133). In contrast, an ethic built on moral principles and moral judgement understands being as composed primarily of mind. This is linked to a different interpretation of 'in' in the world. When human beings are composed primarily of mind, individuals are conceived as isolated, self-transparent, rational minds. An ethic based on universal and rational principles assumes that our being is separate from the world, meaning that the world and beings are seen as isolated insulas, that meet first when both are fully developed. As a consequence we are 'in' the world after the advent of both. In other words, they neither have nor ever have had any constitutive influence on each other.

The problem of constitution is already present in Beauvoir's approach. As children we are always already embodied; we cannot choose, and yet we have to take over the character already made, which again is part of an ongoing construction. The character is from the very beginning constituted in a relation. I have described this theme in detail above. Although Beauvoir also claimed ethics to be about location, position and place, and consequently about embodiment in relation, Diprose by defining 'ethics as the problematic of that which constitute one's embodied place in the world' (Diprose, 1994: 19) takes the phenomenological approach a step further.

Diprose elaborates what she means by 'dwelling' and 'in' the world referring to Merleau-Ponty. According to him the child does not initially carry a distinction between the inside and outside of itself. As the mobility of the child develops, it picks up the corporeal schemas and incorporates gestures and habits of those within its immediate body-space. The distinction between self and other arises gradually when the child experiences its own body as different to how it experiences the bodies of others. Consequently, the child's own corporeal schema occurs relating and interacting in reciprocal relation with others. One's lived body can be said to be socially constituted in the sense that a child's corporeal schema, which is itself, is organised through mimesis and transitivity.

“...it is built on the invasion of the self by the gestures of others who, by referring to other others, are already social beings. The kinds of conducts incorporated into the lived body, as well as their social significance, and hence



the limit to your potential modes of being will vary depending on with whom you associate and under what circumstances” (Diprose, 1994: 120).

The differences that the society and culture expects and encourages will be incorporated into the corporeal schemas of the children - and as the analysis of the five informants confirms - this corporeal schema is pre-personal in that it cannot be pinned down, it is ambiguous. The lived body is constituted in a sort of ‘interworld’ with other lived bodies. The structure of language allows us to say ‘I’. Yet it at the same time reveals that the ‘I’ is a ‘you’ for others. This corporeal constitution means that when I separate myself from my body or the body of the other and attempt to know it, the lived relation is lost.

“I can only *live* my relations with others, and in this familiar dwelling with others I ‘lose myself’: the self-conscious self, the singular ‘I’ who attempts to know, is dispersed. So what the self is in relation to others cannot be calculated” (Diprose, 1994: 122).

To belong to and project out from an ethos, Diprose argues, is to take up a position in relation to others (Diprose, 1994: 18). The point of reference for temporality and spatiality, and consequently for difference, is one’s own body. Thus, ethics has to do with the constitutive relation between one’s identity and embodiment and difference. The presence of sex in this constitution will influence position as well as relation. Diprose argues accordingly that the fundamental misunderstanding in most traditional ethics is that it has overlooked the embodied materiality in the concept of ethics itself. Or put in another way, an ethics that celebrates sameness, has to deny the relevance of sexual differences. The result is that the female embodiment is excluded from knowledge production and moreover from seeing their practise as knowledge. This again influences the social position of women.

“Insofar as women accrue social value as women, it is through an ethos which upholds an ethic of sameness among men. While the effect of women’s work is on display, the labour of women itself is unseen, unrepresented in the pattern of social life ” (Diprose, 1994: 34).

Moreover, Diprose continues, if a ‘male’ ethics is upheld only by means of women’s silence, then this ethos is not self-contained. In fact, it gets its value

from the relation to the different others, who are excluded. Hence, the inclusion of others does not solve the problem. The radicality of Diprose's argument is not only that she, from an analysis of the etymology of ethics, criticises the traditional ethical understanding for having misunderstood the whole business. She also maintains that this understanding only can be upheld on the premises of excluding and marginalising other and different bodies and minds. In short, it is not that the traditional philosophy has left out the body; it, or rather the sex representing the human being, has ignored the sexually different body when interpreting character and dwelling. I find her argument confirmed by the analysis of the empirical material and of the juridical proposal above. As argued, they reveal from different perspectives that the male mind/body is still the norm, both in the practice, in the culture and in the juridical framework. Even if the sexually different body is included in the 'all human being', whether in the definition of a (neutral) worker, or the neutrality of knowledge production, or in the same right to sexuality, it does not jeopardise the norm.

While the different sexual embodiment may help the female to find other ways of working, it also works against her. This results, as we have seen, in an ambiguity: partly working as the culture demands, partly working in her own way. Without a place of her own, she is occupied with fighting fires in the 'no-mans-land'. Language, the world and even her own identity, her very sexuality, is inhabited by the gaze of the normative male body. This makes her, just as Diprose says, silent. The vicious circle is that not contributing to knowledge production she is unable to see her practise as knowledge and consequently has no words for it, which again hinders her in producing knowledge. Her silence is the precondition for upholding the definition and the norm as it is, whether the discourse is ethics, sexuality, knowledge production, or way of working. In other words, inclusion does not solve the problem because the ethics of sameness is constituted and upheld by the exclusion and marginalisation of sexually different embodiments. This understanding of ethics leaves many care ethicists as unwilling supporters of traditional philosophy.

### **identity and difference, static or in process**

While Diprose recognises the importance of the work of among others Gilligan, Benhabib, Pateman, in developing an ethics of care, she is also critical. She respects them for having put the self-other relation on the ethical map by legitimising the kinds of moral values relevant to its maintenance. On

the other hand, she criticises this focus for its assumption that the self-other relation is already in place, and that the identity and difference of the parts involved is given prior to care. When identity and difference are given, the central theme in an ethics of care is how the other's difference can be considered in one's resolution of moral dilemmas.

In Situating the Self, 1992, Seyla Benhabib thus attends the problem of how to "conceptualize our moral obligations towards those kinds of being who are either not fully or not at all capable of speech and action?" (Benhabib, 1993: 58). Modern ethical theories are distinguished from premodern ethical theories in that the former assumes the moral community to be coextensive with all of humanity and not only my tribe, my nation, my co-religionists. Communicative ethics, Benhabib argues, sets up a model of moral conversation in such modern community. Referring to infants and young children, handicapped, mute and deaf, mentally handicapped she suggests that

"...if the principle of embodiedness is emphasized, and if an adequate distinction is made between ethical cognitivism and ethical rationalism, then the way is opened for a communicative but non-rationalistic formulation of the relation to the body, the emotions and nature. If communication is not understood narrowly and exclusively as language, if body gestures, facial expressions, mimics and sounds are viewed as non-linguistic, but linguistically articulable modes of communication, then the "ideal communications community" extends well beyond the adult person capable of full speech and accountable action" (Benhabib, 1992: 58).

Paralels can be drawn to the parental experience of communicating with and relating to a being not yet capable of speech and action.

"In mothering, nursing, caring and in education we are always counterfactually presupposing the equality and autonomy of the beings whose needs we are satisfying or whose body and mind we are caring for, curing or training. When this counterfactual presupposition of equality, certainly not an equality of ability but one of claims, fails then we have poor pedagogics just as we have stifling, overprotective or punitive care, mothering or nursing" (Benhabib, 1992: 59).

Hereby Benhabib illuminates how she puts the self-other relation on the map recognising the equality of the other, an equality not of ability but of claims. This is both crucial and important. However, when Benhabib refers to the principle of embodiedness, it is an embodiedness within the traditional philosophical understanding. She makes the distinction between ethical cognitivism and ethical rationalism a presupposition for a dialogue that includes all of humanity. In other words, she is arguing for an ethical understanding that sees individuals as isolated, composed primarily of mind and without any constitutiveness between them. This uphold the subject/object, preventing the ideal intention of equality from becoming reality. Although the other is valued as an equally important part of the moral community, the difference of the other is stated and given. It is the subject's task to listen, treat and nurse the other.

According to Diprose such conception stems from having not given enough attention to the implications of two important claims:

“The first is that the self develops an embodied and sexed identity within and as an effect of a specific social context. The second is that one's identity is constituted in the context of and through relations with others” (Diprose, 1994: 16).

Feminism, Diprose argues, cannot afford to separate the ethical relation from the operation of social structures onto the self. She refers Merleau-Ponty for maintaining two general ways of effacing the other. Either the other's difference is treated as an absolute difference or it is assumed to be identical with mine. Both however conceive the other's identity as fixed, natural, given and knowable apart from, and unaffected by, my embodied dwelling with them. To reduce the other's corporeal difference to an absolute difference is to place the other at a distance and attribute to her/him the characteristics that the self does not want. According to Diprose, care ethics does this by assuming that identity and difference is already in place. The focus on how to understand the difference of the other leads to celebration of women's relatedness and women's apparently shared moral perspective. “Such an ethos is based on the same process of alienation - on women's representation of, and duty to, a body other than our own” (Diprose, 1994: 64).

Thus, care ethics seem to hold the same understanding of 'in' the world as traditional philosophy: the world and the being are already there and have no

constitutive influence on each other. In contrast, the ethical approach of Beauvoir and Diprose maintains that identity and difference are not given once and for all. Together they produce a framework that enables us to reach beyond the opposition of care and justice, emotionality and rationality. Woman's specific ethos, no less than a man's, is constituted in a social context as well as in relation to others. This context is, as the analysis' above confirms, deeply intertwined with meanings of sexual difference. This is, however, rarely acknowledged in the ethical literature within this field.

### The 'Neutrality' of Ethics

Thus the Norwegian philosopher Arne Johan Vetlesen, author of several books, states that "gender difference is a non-starter in ethics... gender difference makes no difference in ethics" (Vetlesen, 1996: 99). Vetlesen's position entails both a normative and conceptual part. The normative is that "gender is to make no *morally relevant* difference. In short, the moral status of a person is not dependent on the gender of that person... it has to do with the status of the moral *addressee*..." (Vetlesen, 1996: 100). The second part has to do with the moral *agent* (Vetlesen's italics). He finds that "emotional capacities are crucial for moral agency, irrespective of whether the empirical agent is a man or a woman" (Vetlesen, 1996: 100). Vetlesen then puts forward some general propositions about ethics in the hope that they may help to articulate an alternative framework for reflecting about the connection - or lack of such connection - between ethics and gender differences. I have abbreviated them by taking some sentences out, but has otherwise been faithful to the content.

1. To be a moral being is part and parcel of the human condition. Morality *is*, prior to reflection and discourse.
2. Morality is not an accomplishment of the individual nor of the society as an organised collective, morality is a product of living with (close, significant) others. Living-with-others is instrumental for fostering morally indispensable abilities in the human person.
3. Responsibility for the other is assumed regardless of reciprocation. Moral relationship is not dependent on anything outside itself. We are ineluctably born into moral relationships with others. Morality is part of the human condition.

4. All human beings are to be treated equally as far as their fundamental moral standing is concerned.
5. Gender differences should make no normative and no systematically preformatted difference in morality: responsibility for the other obtains irrespective of whether the other is a male or a female.
6. Ethics deals with matters that could be otherwise. Ethical deliberation has to address what is particular (singular, unique), what is novel, and what is contingent, thus what is not fully knowable, predictable, controllable, regardless of the richness of our previous experience as moral agents.
7. There is no end to the variety of morally relevant situations. Different situations call upon different faculties and abilities in the moral agent, regardless of gender.
8. The difference crucial to moral agency is not the difference between philosophically, socially or culturally construed gender prototypes, but the differences which involve an interplay between sensuous, and intellectual capacities in the individual agent (Vetlesen, 1996: 101).

Vetlesen's standpoint is that emotional capacities are as crucial as they are purely cognitive. In the opinion of Vetlesen, Carol Gilligan has not established that moral agency is one thing for a female agent and another for a male agent. According to Vetlesen, normatively speaking gender 'is to make no morally relevant difference'. To this I can agree. It differs, however, from his other statement that 'the moral status of a person is not dependent on the gender of that person'. Whereas the first statement concedes that there *should not* be, which is the formulation used in point 5, the latter states that there *is not*. Vetlesen declares himself open to be convinced by 'empirical counterevidence'.

The analysis of the public memorandum's proposal of a right to a sexual life revealed that the neutral notion 'human being' in practise includes a norm of the male embodied human being. This norm tends to reproduce itself either by inclusion or exclusion. As long as sexuality is defined in accordance with a male norm it ends up in the right of one sex and the duty of the other sex (above: 128ff). Together these analyses point at a difference in evaluation of the sexes which unavoidably influences "the living with others and the fostering of morally indispensable abilities in the human being" (Vetlesen nr. 2 above). My concept of sexual difference is different from the conception of gender that Vetlesen opposes, it maintains that sexual difference is a bodily

difference which affects the female agent's way of thinking, acting and working, and thus her moral agency. In order to fight for a *should not be* (going on) I find it necessary to identify what *is* (going on).

Vetlesen maintains that to be a moral being is both part and parcel of the human condition and a product of living with others. The human condition of interdependency is the same for both sexes and thus they are equally moral. This far I agree with Vetlesen. Moral agency and moral performance are however not neutral to gender (Vetlesen, 1996: 100). The relationships, into which we are born and raised morally, are already and always marked by asymmetry. This asymmetry consists of a difference in position, recognition, valuation of the sexes, which influences their thinking, acting, relating, in short their living with others. Both have rationality and emotionality, but they are not only cognitive and neutral to gender. They are incarnated, embodied and thus sexually different. The difference crucial to moral agency is, according to Vetlesen, not the difference between philosophically, socially or culturally construed gender prototypes. The crucial difference is to be found in the interplay between the sensuous, emotional, and intellectual capacities in the individual agent. The intra-personal diversity is understood as something 'inside' the individual agent, needed in order to meet the many different situations with different responses. The point of reference for Vetlesen's conception of ethics is the maintenance of emotional capacities as purely cognitive.

So far I can see this means that Vetlesen, in the same way as the care ethicists criticised by Diprose, see the individual agent and the world as isolated insula, that meet after both are grown up and thus have no constitutive influence on each other. This ethics comes to promote the self/other position as static, as already given and in place, thereby ignoring the mutually dynamic constitutiveness that happens when involved in relations and interactions. By analysing the social educators' way of working, it has been demonstrated that this is not so. The scene is set, and even when dependent on care and help, subjectivity is interactively produced in a continuous process. At present there is a common understanding that clients in general profit from a staff that is uniform in ways of relating and interacting. This understanding stems from a philosophy, which focuses all attention on the other. It tends to uphold the other in his/her difference promoting static identities and underestimating the need for different recognition by means of which our different identities are upheld. Therefore it is important to allow or even encourage staffmembers to

have and to hold their different perception of a client and to interact differently with him/her. As also the opposite has to be accepted.

Although Vetlesen's intention is the same as mine: to secure that there is to be no morally relevant difference of gender just as of race, age, mentally handicap, there is a basic disagreement at issue. Vetlesen maintains an understanding of the human being as a neutral being which differs from the other due to inherent diversities, whereas I maintain an understanding in which the sex of the human being is imprinted inside and outside its body. It has in this thesis from various perspectives been demonstrated how a conception of the human being as neutral overlooks the inherent male norm that upholds the subject/object system, with far reaching consequences for care work. Even if the sexually different body is included in 'all human beings' it does not jeopardise this norm. Consequently, this conception comes to sustain the above-mentioned problem of discrepancy in knowledge production. I am aware of the difficulty that an acknowledgement of sexual difference implies: how is it to be evaluated as long as the measurement that sets the difference in the first place coincides with the norm? This problem or challenge is, however, not solved by declaring it for non-existent or by abolishing it into neutrality. When gender neutrality is upheld, the myth of a neutral abstract subject of science is also upheld. Women's specific ethical practise is thereby excluded from knowledge production, as they have no language i.e. legitimate vocabulary to describe this in. I shall return to this in the following chapter.

## Conclusion

The ethical understanding I have argued must be based on an analysis of the constitutive and dynamic relation between one's identity, embodiment and difference. The analysis of the five social educators pointed at the need to give more attention to how identity and difference is constituted socially as well as contextually. It revealed that the subject/object scheme sets the scene and thereby the task of the professional to consist in how to understand the difference of the other. However, interdependence is what is going on. Unanimously the social educators tell how they experience themselves and others differently in different situations and constellations; they constitute - and are constituted - in interaction and relation. These again are influenced of a broader social context.



Beauvoir's phenomenological way of doing ethics matches this analysis. The ambiguous condition of life on which she bases her ethical understanding is a common existential condition of existence. It does not exclude or precede sexual difference. Both are already and always there due to the complex interaction and mutual implications of subjectivity and sociality. Accordingly, women and men are two variations of human embodiments and at the same time totally different. In clarifying this ambiguity, I argue, Beauvoir's philosophy has laid the foundation of an ethics of sexual difference that abolishes the dialectic logic of opposition between care and justice. This leads to a different understanding of alterity altogether. Accordingly, the difference each of us represents and creates does not need to be or stay subordinated or to subordinate others. The ambiguity of life is that in order to live while *being* one has to fight for the freedom of others. To accept the common condition of existence as a continuous process of becoming means that it is possible to uphold both that one's ethos is embodied and socially constituted *and* that there is a remainder providing a space for agency. In other words, it is possible to be at the same time an embodied, socially constituted and a loving perceiver.

In order to make change happen it is important to distinguish between an ethical approach that fixes the other in her/his difference and an approach that takes into consideration that we develop our identity within and as an effect of a specific social context and through relations with others. In contrast to Vetlesen I consequently maintain that in order to struggle towards a perspective that there 'should not be' a morally relevant difference, it is necessary to acknowledge what is going on. And this is a dynamic interdependency of sexual difference and subjectivity. An acknowledgement of sexual difference therefore leads to a redefinition of subjectivity and thinking. This is the issue of the following chapter.



## 6. Sexual Difference, Subjectivity and Knowledge Production

From various perspectives and theories it has been demonstrated how a norm of *the* human (male embodied) being sets the frame of reference. It upholds its superiority to any embodiment that differs in being, thinking, sexuality and working either by imposing the norm on them or by excluding them from it. In other words, the question of sexual difference is bound up with the question of subjectivity and ethical agency. In this situation the challenge is how to maintain a female subject while criticising this universalistic and normative subject. How is a female subject to be acknowledged without ending in yet another hierarchical norm? How to evaluate different ways of thinking, working and living without ending in relativism? In this chapter I intend to demonstrate how recognition of sexual difference leads to a redefinition not only of the female subject but also of subjectivity in general. Such redefining recognition is a precondition for intersubjectivity, for new knowledge and for ethical interactions all requiring that the partakers value equally the contribution of the other(s) regardless of position, race, sex, age etc.

### Sexual Difference, Diagnose and Strategy

Within feminist thinking and practise, difference is a site of conceptual tension. It is therefore vital that the diagnostic function of sexual difference is not confused with its strategic aims. Historically and philosophically the notion of 'difference' has been predicated on relations of domination and exclusion, so that to be 'different-from' came to mean 'to be of less worth than'. Sexual difference is thus a fact and sign of a history in which difference has been seen as a lack. According to Rosi Braidotti the notion of difference is too important to be left to these 'knots of power' (Braidotti, 1994: 147). Wanting to be accountable for this aspect of culture and history Braidotti suggests reclaiming the notion of difference so that it "through a strategy of creative mimetic repetition (it) can be cleansed of its links with power, domination, and exclusion. Difference becomes a project, a process" (Braidotti and Butler, 1994: 45).

The starting point for the project of sexual difference is the political will to acknowledge the specificity of the lived, female bodily experience. This

involves reconnecting the debate on difference to the bodily existence and experience of women. Sexual difference rests according to Braidotti on a post-phenomenological notion of sexuality as reducible neither to biologism or sociologism. Accordingly she proposes to think it through, arguing that “the difference that women embody provides positive foundational grounds for the redefinition of female subjectivity in all of its complexity” (Braidotti, 1994: 149). The first step is to acknowledge that one is born and constructed as Woman/women. To be a woman is neither merely biological nor solely historical.

“My “being-a-woman”, just like my “being-in-language” and “being-mortal” is one of the constitutive elements of my subjectivity. Sexual difference is ontological, not accidental, peripheral, or contingent upon socio-economic conditions; that one is socially constructed as a female is evident, that the recognition of the fact may take place in language is clear, but that the process of construction of femininity fastens and builds upon anatomical realities is equally true” (Braidotti, 1994: 186).

The emphasis is to implicate the recognition of the asymmetrical position between the sexes so that reversibility is not an option, neither conceptually nor politically (Braidotti and Butler, 1994: 39). To avoid reversibility requires a conscious awareness of the complexity of the concrete other and thus also of myself. In other words, to recognise sexual difference is bound up with an awareness of how each of us develops an embodied sexual identity within a specific context and how this is continuously constituted in and through relations with others. Consequently recognition of sexual difference leads to a redefinition not only of the female subject but also of subjectivity in general.

Although it is important to distinguish between the strategic aims and the diagnostic function, they are intimately intertwined. I hope to make this clearer through reference to Rosi Braidotti’s theory of nomadism. ‘Nomadism’ indicates that feminist theory not only is a critical opposition to the false universality of the subject but also a positive affirmation of women’s desire to affirm and enact different forms of subjectivity. The challenge is thus not so much causality, but how to turn difference into a strength, how to affirm it positively.

While the first step in the epistemological project of nomadism is an acknowledgement of sexual difference, the next step is to rethink the bodily

roots of subjectivity. In Nomadic subjects, 1994, Braidotti's concern is the embodied, and thereby the sexually differentiated, culture of the speaking subject. To find alternative accounts of subjectivity and to learn to think differently about the subject, and thereby to invent new frameworks, new images and new modes of thought it is necessary to investigate the roots of the thinking process. In this thesis it has been done by analysing five social educators' ways of working and thinking.

## Nomadism and Subjectivity

In the following I will present Braidotti's working scheme of feminist nomadic thinking. It has helped me to identify how the central ethical dilemmas in practise present 'the thinking roots of the sexual different embodied subject'. By means of the nomadic scheme it shows how, with no place of their own, the social educators work in no-mans land, transiting like nomads between the categories 'we' and 'them'. This ability is a sign of weakness in that they, as women, do not belong in either group. It is however also a strength. It enables them to struggle to uphold the integrity of the other. With point of departure in Liv Fjelvik's narrative I shall demonstrate how a new ethical framework is already processing due to another definition of subjectivity. Braidotti distinguishes between:

- differences between men and women,
- differences among women
- differences within each woman

Braidotti underlines that these three distinctions are made for the sake of clarity and are not to be taken as a categorical distinction but rather as an exercise in naming different facets of a single complex phenomenon. These layers occur simultaneously and are in daily life difficult to distinguish. When the difference is not only between men and women, but also between women and women, and in the woman herself, not only the constraints but also the possibilities become visible. The challenge is to think and work through the stock of images, concepts, and representations of women and of female identity such as they are codified in the culture in which we live (Braidotti, 1994: 169).

### **differences between men and women**

The struggle for equality and the affirmation of difference is to be seen as part of a continuous historical evolution. According to Braidotti, it is the definition of woman as ‘other-than a non-man’ that is at stake“ (Braidotti, 1994: 161). The starting point is the political will to assert the specificity of the lived, female bodily experience. The central issue is the critique of a male-identified universalism. How is the loss of the classical paradigm of subjectivity to be combined with the specificity of an alternative female subject?

“How to recode the female feminist subject not as yet another sovereign, hierarchical, and exclusionary subject but as a multiple, open-ended, interconnected entity” (Braidotti, 1994: 158).

The previous chapter maintains a philosophy in which all human beings are and *become* throughout life. In short, there is a constitutive relation between one’s world and ones embodied character. Accordingly ‘near’ is what each of us has experienced as ‘near’. It is engraved into ‘my’ body and as such part of how ‘I’ recognise the world. To this process of construction we have no privileged access. According to Maturana and Varela this is based in biology:

“Biologically there is no way we can put in front of us what happened to us in obtaining the regularities we have grown accustomed to: from values or preferences to colour, qualities and smells. The biological mechanism does not embody the manner in which it originated. The business of living keeps no record concerning origins” (Maturana and Varela, 1993: 242).

Experiences of language(s) and the world are deeply engraved in the body that functions as the basic structure of recognition. “To the child there is no difference between getting to know the world and learning to speak for it is by way of the latter that the former is accomplished” (Sløk, 1996: 67). The world is revealed in language and it is and becomes ‘truth’ because it is ‘my’ world. This condition of interdependency is existential, i.e. the same for everybody, and yet it works out differently. A difference that according to Braidotti concerns three layers, noticeable for both sexes.

When Liv Fjeldvik learns that her way of working as a ‘near’ caring person is experienced by her client as intimate and sexual, she is deeply shaken

and cannot express herself. Since she does not find any other way of working possible, it is also herself that is contested. The reason why the social educators do not reflect upon the concept 'nearness' is because it is not a concept. It is more or less their identity, which makes them struggle to find a way of working that matches who and what they are. The question is, as Liv Fjeldvik formulates her dilemma: "How to create good relations without these getting too 'near' for the weaker part in the relation". Unaware of how her conception of 'nearness', and consequently her method, is part of her identity construction, her 'truth', Liv Fjeldvik experiences that her way of being and working does not work out. Instead of establishing a good relation, which according to her is necessary in order to give good care, her 'near' method is interpreted sexually; she is seen as a woman and not as a professional. It does not give her any consolation that she is in a position to change the particular situation, presumably since it is this position that has made it possible for her to introduce her 'near' method in the first place. Although she does not want to be yet another sovereign, hierarchical and excluding subject, her experience shows that she has been acting like one, although in a different way. Her intention to abolish the subject/object position in order to establish a good relation, the prerequisite for good care, has not succeeded. Maybe it is this defeat that is reflected in her formulation. It is not easy to identify who is the weaker of them. Each may in fact feel objectified by the other.

Thus, Liv Fjeldvik comes to confirm that to obtain intersubjectivity there have to be two subjects, both striving towards the integrity, the freedom of the other. The paradox is thus that as long as she is not seen nor sees herself as a subject, she has to stay in the system of subject/object in order to make the particular situation tolerable for herself. On the other hand Liv Fjeldvik uses her experience not to give up her method but to adjust it by trying to balance different conceptions of 'near'. In terms of Braidotti's scheme she works as a nomadic subject in order to find an alternative way to function so that both parts are respected. In this light Liv Fjeldvik's formulation "How to create good relations without it getting too 'near' for the weaker part in the relation" indicates her experience that the subject/object system does not work in that it leaves the parts with no other option than to objectify each other. In fact, she has framed her work experience, that working as woman just as working as a man tend to uphold the subject/object system, into an ethical understanding that requires both participants to be continuously cautious and attentive to the weaker part. This exemplifies that both parts, whether man or woman,

professional or client, stand to loose in the present system of subject/object. To be a nomadic subject means therefore to struggle to work neither as woman nor as man, but as ‘other-than a nonman’. Accordingly, Liv Fjeldvik has turned her experience into an understanding of ethics in which identity and subject positions are continuously constructed when living and interacting.

### **differences among women**

Woman is a general umbrella term bringing together different levels of experience and different identities. The central issue is how to create and legitimate alternative forms of feminist subjectivity without falling into either a new essentialism or a new relativism. A feminist subject is historical, although involved only negatively by patriarchy, and it is personal, linked to female identity. With reference to de Lauretiis’s distinction between woman as representation (‘Woman’ as cultural imago) and woman as experience (real women as agents of change), Braidotti suggests a nomadic flexibility in order to assert the common condition as the ‘second sex’ and at the same time avoid the division between women due to situational differences (Braidotti, 1994: 165).

In the analysis of the narratives above I hope I have described how each informant differs from the other as well as from their colleagues of both sexes. At the same time all five share the general umbrella Woman. As representation, as cultural imago, Woman makes it difficult for them to get respect. As experience, as agent of change, Woman makes them continue. The ambivalence or split between Woman as cultural imago and Woman as agent of change, as all five informants demonstrate, is connected to the third category of nomadism, differences within each subject.

### **differences within each woman**

This level concerns the complexity of the embodied structure of the subject.

“The real-life women who undertake the feminist subject-position as a part of the social and symbolic reconstruction of what I call female subjectivity are a multiplicity in themselves: split, fractured, and constituted across intersecting levels of experience” (Braidotti and Butler, 1994: 40).

The crucial starting point is that multiple identity does not coincide with the conventional Cartesian idea of consciousness. Braidotti implies the post-



psychoanalytic vision of the corporeal subject, that it cannot be fully apprehended or represented. Identity consists of multiple aspects of the self; it is relational, it is retrospective, in that it is fixed through memories and recollection, in a genealogical process and last, but not least, identity is made of successive identifications, that is to say unconscious internalised images that escape rational control (Braidotti, 1994: 166). Therefore it is necessary to distinguish between identity and subjectivity. Whereas identity bears a privileged bond to unconscious processes, political subjectivity is a conscious and wilful position. “Unconscious desire and wilful choice are of different registers” (Braidotti and Butler, 1994: 40).

As demonstrated above, identity consists of a complexity of layers of both an unconscious and conscious nature. Identity cannot be fully apprehended; it escapes rational control and language. Maybe Liv Fjeldvik is speechless also because she does not know where to point her finger. Is it her fault, is it the client's, or is it due to their interdefiniton? From the point of view of a phenomenological way of doing philosophy, this is impossible to say. It is important to remind ourselves that we have no privileged access neither to our own nor to the construction of the other. Although each of us has to take responsibility for the person we are and for what we do – our subjectivity - we shall never know the impact our words and actions have on the other or how this reflects back upon ourselves. Errors are integral parts of life and accordingly of ethical acts and decisions. Liv Fjeldvik takes responsibility for the situation as also Susanne Bjørnson takes responsibility for the situation. She has solid arguments for her decision to give the young man an extra leave of absence. This does not imply that her decision is the one and only true alternative or that she can explain the background for her decision fully. Not to make a decision or to unreflectedly refer to rules and routines, is, however, to abstain from the responsibility of the specific situation, and in a way to resign from being an ethical subject.

## Practising Nomadic Consciousness

In order to reconnect theory to practise, this thesis has given priority to an analysis of five social educators' ways of working and thinking. The process of analysis confirms that the scheme of nomadism is not only an intellectual mode of being. It is also an art of existence in which five informants and also the

researcher herself partake, both parts continuously challenged to think through the many layers of female identity construction. In other words, practise and experience together form the roots of the thinking process. The way they formulate their dilemmas underlines not only their different way of working but also how this way of working is a result of a different way of thinking.

The informants can thus be said to practise nomadism, transgressing borders and limits, using different passports, by which I mean that they use both the system of subject/object and their own method. At the same time as their way of working can be said to reflect the different layers of the scheme of a nomadic subject, it however also reveals a lack of consciousness of how their own sex influences their thinking, working and relating. Grete Jeppesen recognises that the dominating theory is influenced by male norms and values but not how her way is influenced by her own sex.

The scheme of nomadic thinking links the question of subjectivity to the question of recognition of sexual difference. In the case of Liv Fjeldvik, I suppose it will help her, as it has helped me, to identify how and in which ways her sex is reflected in her ways of working, thinking and relating, in other words her subjectivity. Only when she learns to acknowledge her own subjectivity may it be possible for her to recognise the different subjectivity of the other. Such recognition will allow her to distinguish between the universalistic ethics in its normativity and men's practise and subjectivity. In the case of Grete Jeppesen knowledge of sexual difference, of how her way of working is influenced by her sex, would have helped to reflect and to take into account that her client, like her colleagues, is male and thus influenced by their identity construction. What I mean to say is that as long as sexual difference is not acknowledged the danger for women is that they will continue being either victims of objectification or sovereign exclusionary subjects.

The five informant's practise reveals a continuous reflection on how to find, adjust and readjust an understanding of ethics that matches their dilemmas. This again is linked to the theory into which they have been trained as well as the culture into which they are raised. Inherent in both is a frame of reference that by definition is unable to value equally a different way of thinking and working. This again prevents them - and the researcher for quite some time - from acknowledging their own and different way of theorising. To practise nomadism does in itself not suffice. The question of getting recognition and respect for another way of working and being is intimately connected to a consciousness of nomadism.

## Experience, Language and Theory

Theory is traditionally made and formulated in the language and level of rationality. These informants are making theory at the level of practise. All of them have an ideal of how to work, which they continuously readjust in accordance with their experience. How is it that they do not express or translate their ways of working into the language of theory? Is it a lack of consciousness in combination with a lack of recognition? Or is it that they do not want to make their ways of working into a theory or that the way they work and think protests against being put into a theory? It has been suggested that they have no position or place from which their words will be heard.

Another suggestion is that rational language cannot speak of its origin, meaning situations, relations and involvement that it has extracted in order to generalise and produce theory. This again hinders them from acknowledging their reflections as theory. The silence is especially evident in the narrative of Grete Jeppesen who has a long row of reflections, but who is strikingly silent at seminars and meetings. The American philosopher Richard Schmitt has in his book Beyond Separateness, 1995, contributed to understanding this barrier in language further.

### **the barrier in language**

Schmitt is concerned about 'separateness' in contrast to what he calls 'being-in-relation'. With these concepts he describes the difference between being in the world as separated, transparent, rational minds and being in the world as constitutive relating persons. Although he mentions neither sexual difference nor embodiment, his arguments illustrate the ethical approach of Diprose above (above: 201-207). Schmitt maintains that ordinary meanings of words cannot represent accurately what we want to say when we talk about being-in-relation:

“Ordinary language is itself infected with the assumption of separateness. Language is likely to insinuate traditional perspectives into our efforts to put our understanding of being-in-relation into words. At the very moment we are trying to clarify our understanding of being-in-relation by putting it into words, language will deform that understanding unless we reflect very carefully about the meanings of the words we are using. The words we utter will not express what we set out to say” (Schmitt, 1995: 101).

Feminist theorists, Schmitt says, have tried to explain that 'being-in-relation' is not being remote from the other; that it involved really listening to others, seeing them, rather than imposing stereotypical images on them. 'Being-in-relation' is not oppressive; it respects the other person as a person in his or her own right. Most often however this is not heard.

“A good deal of work in feminist ethics and epistemology about caring, about different ways of being a person, and correspondingly about different ways of thinking about ourselves and doing philosophy is explicitly meant to challenge and eventually replace mainstream modes of thinking and philosophising. But once these insights are expressed in our usual language they are obscured by the inappropriate verbal associations language supplies” (Schmitt, 1995: 102).

According to Schmitt it is crucial to distinguish between a 'separate' and a 'being-in-relation' sense of 'reciprocity'. In 'separateness', he maintains, “all attention is focused on the other. You have the problem, the pain, the passion, or the anger. I am detached, impartially trying to construct what that feels like” (Schmitt, 1995: 101). In such a view, Schmitt continues, my claim of being empathic is never challenged. If the other rejects my attempt, he is to blame. The power belongs to the person with empathy. In the hands of therapist or teacher, Schmitt says, (and I add care workers and teachers) such a viewpoint is bound to be oppressive.

On the other hand, it does not, according to Schmitt, give any meaning to say that language *makes* us think in ways we do not want. Language allows compliance but it also allows us to unmask this compliance. It allows us to talk but it does not put words in our mouths (Schmitt, 1995: 103). This reminds me of the Danish theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig. He is known for his phrase that 'the word creates what it utters'. The word has reference both to the incarnation of God and to the responsibility each living being has to co-create continuously in and with his or her own creation. Grundtvig's own production is enormous and widely varied. He is especially famous for his ability to create new poetic constellation of words, even quite new words, in order to get his meaning expressed. Like some women today, he was accused of being impossible to understand! By this reference I mean to stress how important it is not to comply but instead to struggle to express what seems to be inexpressible. To partake in the nomadic process is to strive towards still more precision, to

transform general normative standards (above: 153) and to find new terms and words to explain how subjectivity is intimately connected to the specificity of the body.

## Identity - Construction and Change

Feminist theorists and female practitioners reflecting over their practise have not been heard. This is, as argued above, not only due to inappropriate verbal association but also due to how language is already part of how identity is constructed. To be specific and precise presupposes an awareness of the fundamental difference between the philosophy of 'separateness' and the philosophy of 'being-in-relation'. An awareness that in this thesis is reached by means of the letters written by the five informants together with my own developing theoretical sensitivity. The dialogue between practise and theory has enabled me to decipher this fundamental difference and how it is part of their construction. Change does not come about by sheer volition alone. A necessary part of the process is to work through the multilayered structures of one's embodied self.

“Like the gradual peeling off old skins, the achievement of change has to be earned by careful working through; it is the metabolic consumption of the old that can engender the new. Difference is not the effect of willpower, but the result of many, of endless repetitions” (Braidotti, 1994: 171).

Liv Fjeldvik thus has to realise that it is not possible to change identity by saying so a hundred times (above: 73). If the essence of difference can be understood as a process of repetition, Braidotti says, then it is false to deny that such essence exists. It is in fact powerful in its ongoing operation. A major hindrance in the work of redefining and reclaiming subjectivity is that most women, raised and constructed into 'arrogant perception', come to reproduce it by repeating it.

### **'arrogant perceiving' and 'loving perceiving'**

To arrogantly perceive is according to Frye never to let the other question or overrule one's perception of right and wrong. Benjamin links this pattern to domination and submission. By mirroring the image of the other, the position

of master and slave is from early on continuously established, privately as well as publicly. This domination is consequently invisible, and seems as time goes by natural, even necessary. Slowly we become afraid of being without domination, without an arrogant perceiver. Tone Isaksen demonstrates that although she protests, she remains under the spell of the arrogant perceiver's expectation and thus reproduces arrogant perceiving, towards others and towards herself (above: 93-96).

The question is how to be a subject without taking over arrogant perception when it is learned from early on and has become an integrated part of one's identity. How to achieve 'loving perceiving'? Described above (above: 93-96), suffice it here to recall that the opposite of perceiving arrogantly is to see with a loving eye. This eye knows the independence of the other; it neither assimilates nor reduces the other; it is not unselfish and has not forgotten its own interests. In this respect I find the article of the black Chilean philosopher Maria Lugones: Playfulness, "World" Travelling, and Loving Perception, 1987, productive. Lugones describes the damage done by the 'arrogant way of perceiving' and how we all participate. She also maintains that 'arrogant perception' does not help women to be respected and seen but leave them unseen, invisible. To fight 'arrogant perception' she suggests to begin 'world-travelling', thereby bringing about 'loving perception', as recommended by Frye. I shall return to the concept of 'world travelling' below.

Inspired by Frye, Lugones comes to recognise how she, in the very same process of being raised into 'arrogant perception' by her mother, has learned both how to practise enslavement and how to become a slave. Lugones parallels her relation to her mother to the relation between women of colour and white women. "I thought that to love her was consistent with my abusing her...to love her was supposed to be of a piece with both my abusing her and with my being open to being abused" (Lugones, 1987: 5). The process that begins in childhood continues in other relations. Women who are perceived arrogantly are taught to perceive other women arrogantly in their turn. In Lugones's experience the result is that

"...White/Anglo women do one or more of the following to women of colour: they ignore us, ostracize us, render us invisible, stereotype us, leave us completely alone, interpret us as crazy. All of this "*while we are in their midst*. The more independent I am, the more independent I am left to be...White/Anglo women are independent from me, I am independent from

them, I am independent from my mother, she is independent from me, and none of us loves each other in this independence” (Lugones, 1987: 7).

The lack of concern is a harmful failure of love that left her independent of white women in a similar way as mother and daughter were independent of each other. Independence without linkage to dependence leaves both parts ignored, invisible and unloved. Thus independence alone will not help women to break out of the arrogant way of perceiving and enter a loving way of perceiving. On the contrary it will reproduce itself and over and over keep women in the male subject/object frame of reference, repeating the male insistence on autonomy (above: 65 - 67). I suppose that we are many who recognise our own upbringing and development in Lugones’ description. To be raised into independence is to value one’s father, or rather the values he represents, over one’s mother, which for a girl amounts to contempt for and a devaluation of one’s own sex. This way love is fundamentally distorted, a distortion which by means of interdefinition tends to permeate the adult love relation and every other relation as well. For women, independence tends to leave them feeling invisible and bound to repeat the same pattern when raising children. In order to change from ‘arrogant’ to ‘loving perception’ Lugones suggests ‘world-travelling’ in a ‘playful’ way.

#### **‘world’-travelling in a playful way**

Playfulness she defines as

“...a particular metaphysical attitude that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged, ruly. Rules may fail to explain what we are doing. We are not self-important; we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are *open to self-construction*. We may not have rules, and when we do have rules, *there are no rules that are to us sacred* “ (Lugones, 1987: 16).

A ‘world’ is in the definition of Lugones to be inhabited by ‘flesh and blood’ people. A world does not need to be a construction of a whole society.

“In a world some of the inhabitants may not understand or hold that particular construction of them that constructs them in that world. So, there may be worlds that construct me in ways that I do not even understand. Or it may be

that I understand the construction but do not hold it myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself. And yet, I may be *animating* such a construction“ (Lugones, 1987: 10).

Lugones exemplifies her point by telling how she called friends far away and asked them whether she is playful. They confirm that she is playful. The people around her, however, said that she is not playful, but a person that takes everything very seriously (Lugones, 1987: 9). To be serious is the opposite of being playful; it in fact hinders one in being playful in that to be serious in the definition of Lagoons is to be self-important, fixed in a particular construction, and holding rules sacrosanct. Acknowledging these different conceptions of her makes Lugones maintain that it is possible to travel between worlds and to inhabit more than one world at the very same time. When travelling from one ‘world’ to an another, she has through memory an image of her being playful in this other ‘world’. To the extent that she is capable of animating both images at the same time, she is an ambiguous being.

“I am suggesting that I can understand my confusion about whether I am or am not playful by saying that I am both and that I am different persons in different ‘worlds’ and can remember myself in both as I am in the other. I am a plurality of selves” (Lagoons, 1987: 14).

This shift from being one person to being a different person is what Lagoons call ‘travelling’, offering yet a perspective of our many-faceted identity. Even if this shift may be done willingly, it is not a matter of acting. One does not pose or pretend to be someone of a different personality or character. Each of us, as illustrated in the movie ‘You have got mail’ (above: 65), animate constructions we dislike and seek consolations in those we like. The point being that we hold different identities in that we become different persons in different relations in regard to age, sex, position, culture etc. Thereby Lagoons confirms the argument of Gates above that the self only exists in the complex web of its varied relations (above: 63 - 65). At the same time language makes us talk in first person statement:

“I say “That is *me* in that ‘world’ ” not because I recognize myself in that person, rather the first person statement is non-inferential. I may well recognize that that person has abilities that I do not have and yet the having or



not having of the abilities is always an “I have....” and “I do not have...”, i.e. it is always experienced in the first person” (Lugones, 1987: 11).

To get around ‘arrogant perception’ demands an acknowledgement that each of us is composed of many worlds and identities. In some we are ‘playful’, in some we are serious, in yet others we are what we do not want to be. Identities that alternate with age, culture, work, milieu, health, status etc. Lugones illustrates how subjectivity is already redefined in our daily life and experience. Pointing at how ‘arrogant perception’ distorts love and makes women contribute to their own oppression she suggests how to process a change towards ‘loving perception’. Only by travelling to her mother’s world Lugones discovers that her mother (in her ‘worlds’) is much more than a woman oppressed by patriarchy. When subjectivity is understood as consisting of manifold identities it helps to protest when others or I tend to hold rules sacred. Let me illustrate my point by referring to the movie The Rules of Ciderhouse, based on John Irving’s book, directed by Lars Hällstrøm.

## Rules versus Relations

The philosophy of doctor Larck of the orphanage in New Hampshire matches Lugones’ definition of ‘world-travelling in a playful way’. In short, there are no rules, whether it be the law against abortion or the law that requires a formal education to be a doctor, that are so sacred that they cannot be set aside when life and love requires it. Although attached to all the children, Larck grows a fatherly relation to one of the orphans, Homer, whom he teaches to be his assistant and in due time his successor. Homer, however, does not want to stay. Primarily because he does not reckon himself to be a doctor, and secondly because he does not want to perform abortions, perhaps because he and all the other children risked being eliminated before birth. Homer leaves the orphanage and goes to work at a cider farm. Here, in Ciderhouse, he lives throughout the season together with a group of black workers whose leader is Mr. Rose.

Staying over the winter Homer is there when they return for the next season. It turns out that Mr. Rose’s daughter, Rose, is pregnant and depressed. She is unable to see her way out of the dilemma, which is that the father of her child is her own father. Homer confronts Mr. Rose, who tells him to mind his

own business, as also Rose has done previously. When the only possibility left is to help induce an abortion there and then, Homer offers to perform the operation. The abortion takes place in the Ciderhouse with Mr. Rose as a helper, until he gets unwell and joins the other residents sitting outside smoking and waiting as if a birth was going on inside. When everybody has come inside again, Homer is seen looking at the written rules, tagged on the wall in the Ciderhouse. Rose who like the others cannot read, asks him to read them aloud. The residents comment and laugh sarcastically about the rules, made for them by someone that does not have to live in Ciderhouse. On request Homer burns them in the stove where the embryo is already burning. Then Mr. Rose says, looking at Homer: “We do not need these rules. The rules we need we make ourselves, right, Homer?” And Homer nods.

The statement of Mr. Rose is however paradoxical and open to interpretations. The ‘we’ points at the power that has allowed both Mr. Rose and Homer to make rules of their own. However different their rules are from the ones on the wall, their rules have in the same way ruled somebody out, in this case especially Rose. When Homer first realised that she needed an abortion, he recommended her to attend Dr. Larck. But when he realises that it is only if *he* induces an abortion that Rose may be able to get on with her life, he gives up his rule. This, however, also means a change in his way of living; Homer returns to the orphanage and replaces Dr. Larck, who in the meantime has died. Mr. Rose on his part does not realise that the abortion in fact means a change in his life until Rose the next day defends herself by stabbing him. Dying Mr. Rose recognises that Rose will no longer be included in his rule, that he is no ‘we’ anymore.

The movie makes us see how rules are made by a ‘we’ to be obeyed by ‘them’. The essential question is, however, whether rules are sacred or whether they are open for change when they fail their purpose: to shield the weaker one by respecting his/her difference. One of the board members of the orphanage says, “a bit of Christianity might not hurt”. She does not get an answer. However sad it is to admit for a theologian, it does not take much Christianity to hurt. Historically the Church has had, and still has, major difficulties in recognising that no rules are in themselves to be held sacred. The problem is, however, that this is a boomerang. The Church consists of its members, of ‘living stones’ as Grundtvig says in one of his psalms. However, if they are no longer alive but ‘living dead’, the rules tend to become sacred. This is not exclusively so within the Church. It is a well-known pattern and danger to any

revolutionary movement. Not to hold rules sacred does not, however, mean that rules are absent. Lugones is not only playful, she is also serious. She is animating both images and has to accept that she is an ambiguous being, a plurality of selves in different flesh and blood 'worlds'. Each of us consists of such a plurality of selves. It is obvious at funerals that the deceased has animated many images in accordance to situations, relations and social standing throughout her life. The rules we make are, accordingly, different; in one 'world' we belong in the group of 'them', in other 'worlds' we belong in the group of 'we'.

Although Dr. Larck fears that Homer, due to his being raised in the orphanage, will not be able to function in the outside world, this is precisely his strength. In contrast to Lugones Homer has in fact been raised into 'loving perception'. This raising enables Homer to live in the Ciderhouse in the first place and secondly it enables him to address Mr. Rose respectfully while disrespecting his way of living. Although Homer has been raised into the philosophy of Dr. Larck, he has also, like Mr. Rose, been born into a society and a culture where 'arrogant perception' is the norm. I see this situation in terms of power. It is worth noticing that for Mr. Rose it takes "a Homer" to be heard. At first he is met with rejection: 'this is no business of yours', say both Rose and Mr. Rose. Homer achieves, however, what the other residents have not been able to. He makes it his business. He has to. Not to act is also to act. To see clearly is not just a matter of having good eyesight; it is a located activity. Although raised in 'loving perception' it is only when confronted with Rose's 'world' of flesh and blood, that Homer learns to travel 'playfully' and not to hold rules more sacred than living beings. This is also what makes him able to return to the orphanage; he is ready to replace Dr. Larck and to uphold 'loving perception' and thus the core of Christianity.

Homer comes to illustrate Lugones's suggestion of 'playful world travelling'. My point being that whatever way we are constructed, it is necessary to travel to the 'world'(s)' of the other in a playful way in order *see* him/or her. In this light Liv Fjeldvik's method of nearness can be re-evaluated. In both her cases, she arranges a setting in which the clients are seen - and accordingly become - more than dependent clients. An elderly woman becomes a consumer in a beauty parlour. An elderly man falls in love. Years ago an American prison chaplain argued that as long as we do not see a prisoner as having the potential to be someone to fall in love with, all our fine words about equality means nothing. To this there are many counterarguments, of which the

most important is the asymmetrical position. On the other hand it is important that the other is seen as a subject, especially when asymmetrically positioned.

To overcome the subject/object interaction and to establish a relation of intersubjectivity implies seeing the other - and oneself - as consisting of flesh and blood identities. This concrete material interdependency presents other ethical dilemmas than if the participants in the relation are seen as independent versus dependent, one as subject and the other as object, one as belonging to 'us' and the other to 'them'. The way Liv Fjeldvik formulates her dilemma, however, reveals that this is a result of a way of thinking different to the one in which she has been trained. By not treating any rules as sacred, Liv Fjeldvik in practise presents herself as a 'playful' person open to self-construction, thereby demonstrating an understanding of ethics in which, as elaborated in chapter 5, the self in relating with others develops an embodied and sexed identity within and as an effect of a specific social context.

## Power, Ethics and Knowledge Production

The analysis of the five informants confirms how they, born and trained into the system of subject/object, struggle to find other ways of working and being. This splitting, ambiguity, doubleness, interdefinition, I have, inspired by Rosi Braidotti, found productive to understand in the perspective of two dimensions of power: power as potestas and power as potentia. Power as potestas is connected with how one form of knowledge production is valued over another, leading to the systems of subject/object and "we" and "them". Power as potentia, the second dimension of power, intertwined with the first, refers to the possibilities built into life itself. It relates to identity as a mutual and continuous process. The risk by making such distinction is, as Løgstrup says, that, in this case, potestas is seen as black and potentia as white. The advantage is, however, that such distinction helps to critically scrutinise in which ways the sexually different embodiment is part of the system of potestas and how she can develop potentia while living and working.

Braidotti's scheme of nomadism and Lugones's 'world-travelling in a playful way' rest on the same philosophical conception of the human being as Beauvoir and Diprose. Both are productive strategies to bring about the change which is a responsibility - and a possibility - of both sexes, constituted socially and culturally as both ethos' are. To redefine subjectivity means to give up the

idea of a neat ethical system and to accept that ethics is a continuous process in which we all as living beings partake. In order to be respected as an ethical subject it is important to continuously discern between power as potestas and power as potentia. To recognise sexual difference means to recognise the knowledge of various embodiments equally as a presupposition for ethical interaction.

In an article with the telling title: I doubt: I am a man, 1994a, the Norwegian philosopher Kjell Soleim states that only his recognition of sexual difference has made him see his own intellectual activity as the activity, not of thinking in general, nor as the expression of a national mentality or of some other great collective spirit, but simply as that of a thinking entity, a finite thinking being which errs, which doubts and desires. Sexual difference in Soleim definition is “our failure to be whole, our failure to define our own lives completely, our failure to mend the crack that constitutes humans as humans” (Soleim, 1994: 142). Having investigated the question of the male subject of science in his thesis Subject of Science and Sexual Difference, 1994, Soleim claims that our only option is to see other persons as different from ourselves and not as our doubles. As long as we see a person of the other sex as one who has got the properties we lack in order to be whole, we will not succeed. We will only project a negative image of ourselves on to the other (Soleim, 1994a: 144).

“So if it is true that I am aware that I am a finite being because I am a subject exposed to sexual difference, it must be equally true that if I doubt, I do not represent humanity as a whole, but can be no more than a man... At least, on Cartesian roads, I am convinced that man is no humanity” (Soleim, 1994: 146).

Far from restraining knowledgeproduction this recognition offers new possibilities. This is beautifully illustrated in Descartes’ correspondence with Elisabeth, the Princess of Bohemia.

## Wonders of Sexual Difference

Elisabeth of Bohemia writes to Descartes, asking him to explain his philosophy to her, especially “how the soul of man (since it is but a thinking substance)

can determine the spirits of the body to produce voluntary actions” (Correspondance with Elisabeth, Blom 1978: 106). The reason is that although Elisabeth sincerely wants to live in accordance with his philosophy, she has been unable to do so. Descartes unfolds his philosophy, explaining how “I conceive the union of the soul with the body, and how it has the force to move the body” (Blom, 1978: 108). Elisabeth’s health is bad and Descartes pleads her to let go of her involvement and concern for the persons surrounding her since this, in his opinion and philosophy, is what makes her ill. Elisabeth writes back that she agrees to the role her mind plays in the matter of her bodily disorder. “I have a body filled with a great many of the weaknesses of my sex; it very easily feels the affliction of the souls...”(Blom, 1978: 121). Descartes replies that he “realize that it is not so much the theory as the practise that is difficult in this matter” (Blom, 1978: 123). Due to the great favour Elisabeth shows him by listening to his opinions, he has taken “the liberty of writing them such as they are, and of adding here that in regard to myself I have experienced that a sickness nearly similar, and even more dangerous, has been cured by the remedy of which I spoke”. The remedy that helped Descartes, and which he recommends Elisabeth, is to arrange her life so that her principal contentment depends only on herself (Blom, 1978: 124). Elisabeth’s replies that her problem is that although she is not without reason, she is not so reasonable as Descartes, in which case she would cure herself as he has done. Several letters later Elisabeth asks Descartes to inform her about the maxims of civil life, since she until now has found herself doing better using experience rather than reason in such matters (Blom, 1978: 179).

To my reading the correspondence between Descartes and Elisabeth shows that they share the same existential condition of interdependence and yet they meet it differently. Descartes compares Elisabeth’s sickness with his own, and since he has been able to cure himself he expects her to do the same. When she is unable to do so, she blames her body. It is filled with the weaknesses of her sex. She is not as reasonable as Descartes is. According to Descartes, this is a question of *her* practise and not of *his* theory. It does not occur to any of them to doubt that philosophy is neutral, that Descartes’ philosophy matches his way of living and that Elisabeth’s way of living reflects her thinking.

Although coloured by this asymmetry their dialogue, permeated by a mutual respect, creates new insights. In The Passions of the Soul, 1649, 1989 (§53), Descartes describes how wonder happens, when the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new or very different from what

we knew. 'Cogito, ergo sum' was his point of departure. Corresponding with Elisabeth brought him to wonder. Their dialogue thereby can be read as an illustration that there is no Tiresian position, no midway, between the two sexes from where it is possible to objectively analyse them. The sexes differ in thinking, acting, living and ways of working; their existential conditions are of sameness, and their difference is absolute; it is however not fixated; it is becoming, created as it is in interdependence.

The experience of Elisabeth and Descartes corresponds with an experience most of us have had and continuously pursue. There is - and has always been - ways of relating and interacting that maintains subjectivity without subordination or domination. Wonder happens. Beyond our control it takes us by surprise. This is why Descartes called it a passion. Although Descartes was able to cure himself by reason, he was unable to free himself from the difference that Elisabeth presented and made to his life and thinking. Not concerned with sexual difference Descartes acknowledges Elisabeth's way of living and thinking as an extension of the 'other'. In other words, Elisabeth comes to represent other 'others', in Descartes' vocabulary 'some object'.

To Irigaray, wonder is the passion that inaugurates love and art and thought. If we are faithful to the perpetual newness of the self, the other, the world, wonder may be a third dimension, an intermediary, inaugurating a second birth of man and woman (Irigaray 1993a: 82). Agreeing with Irigaray's poetical words I want to add, though, that wonder is not dependent on our faithfulness. If so, wonder would indeed be rarely found. To my reading, wonder beyond our control enforces upon us the experience that differences, whether between man and woman, between women and women, between men and men together with the differences within each person, create new knowledges, and consequently new possibilities. Wonder is the passionate experience that makes us struggle to be free subjects hoping that some day it will be possible to live independently and dependently without subordination - and to interact accordingly.





## 7. Assessing Remarks

Already in 1984 Luce Irigaray held sexual difference to be one of the major philosophical issues, if not *the* issue of our age. According to Irigaray the issue of sexual difference cries in vain for our attention, whether it is in philosophy, science or religion. My investigation confirms that this is still the case. It is in itself a demonstration of how complex the question of sexual difference is. Part of the reason is the resistance that theory, language, and the construction of the researcher herself produces against seeing how meanings of sexual difference are constituted in our practises. Hopefully my thesis also confirms Irigaray's vision that sexual difference constitutes an enrichment of human existence (Irigaray, 1993a: 5).

### Norm and Sexual Difference

To recognise sexual difference implies an acceptance that both sexes are objects as well as subjects in this continuous construction, in interactions as well as in symbolic and imaginary language. As interdependent beings we partake in - and are also exposed to - a continuous mutual process of social and cultural construction. We are *in* the world and *of* the world at the same time. The interdependency between the two editions of human beings is however an asymmetric one. The ways the female edition thinks, acts, works and expresses herself are considered of lesser worth, also by herself.

In the long story of Christianity and Western culture, the human being has been synonymous with Adam, the male sex. The consequence has been that 'the healthy white male between 20 and 50' became the norm according to which those differing from this norm have been and still are measured, not only as different but of lesser worth and intelligence. This has positioned and influenced the construction of women, coloured, handicapped and young and elderly people of both sexes. More or less invisibly this norm permeates our history and our present by means of defining knowledge, ethics and sexuality. It is a major responsibility to continuously illuminate the dynamics by which each of us participates as bearers as well as victims of this norm.

As mentioned in the introduction, to be productive the question of sexual difference has to be phrased in a specific way. The question is not *what* is the difference or variations of the difference, but rather *how* do we

understand the difference and the ways in which it is performed. In other words, a shift from *what* to *how* is needed, a shift in focus from things and entities to activities. Processing this shift from *what* to *how*, this thesis has demonstrated that meanings of sexual difference in the field of caring are part of the broader political and societal context, and that they consequently affect the male as well as the female subject in social status, recognition and health. Moreover, sexual difference is affecting the life of all of us in that it hinders us in seeing how we by reproducing sexual inequality are upholding other inequalities as well.

## Work and Equality

The point of departure for Beauvoir was a historical situation of inequality. In order to change this situation and obtain equality, women had to work. Fifty years later, the situation of women has changed. Although the percentage of women on the labour market varies between countries, and I restrict myself to Europe, the majority is employed in paid work. This does not seem to have affected gender inequality as much as Beauvoir along with most of us expected<sup>36</sup>. In this thesis I hope to have established that inequality in the public sphere reflects sexual inequality in the private sphere and vice versa.

It is worth noticing that work to Beauvoir was synonymous with traditional male work. Her critical attitude to the traditional role of women, including marriage and children, is well known and led to harsh criticism. It seems, however, that history has justified her point of view. I have been among those who, in line with Beauvoir believed that work and my own paycheque would in itself render me the sexual equality that my home-working mother did not have. Although my work as a priest was that of a man's, I have reluctantly had to realise that it did not work out that way. The problem is not confined to whether the work is 'male' or 'female'. Bound up with dependence and independence the question is how to obtain equality as long as women are, or

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<sup>36</sup> With point of departure in the anniversary celebration of an woman of 80 year in a caring home, the Danish journalist Ulrik Høy in a full page article sarcastically describes the equal status that women have acquired in the last 30 years. In Denmark we have, he says, inequality in the most crucial arenas. It is still women that do the caring, both privately and publicly. Although assisted by men, especially in taking the honour and the money, women's benefit of the struggle for equality is that they have acquired double duties. "I cannot see it differently. They (women) got work outside as well as inside the home. Am I suppose to congratulate or to condole?" (Weekend Berlingeren 15/9 2000).

find themselves, connected to care and dependency. A case story told by Hochschild and Machung as part of their research in the area of working parents will illustrate my point.

### **love, work and care**

Nancy is a social worker and married to Evan Holt, a salesman of furniture. Together they have a son. The problem is that Evan does not see why he has to change *his own* life, because Nancy has chosen this demanding career as a social worker. She on her side does not want to give it up because she loves it. “She couldn’t see it Evan’s way, and Evan couldn’t see it her way” (Hochschild and Machung, 1997: 42). In short, he wants to *help with, not share* the care and housework. At last, when their marriage is at stake, Nancy decides to keep a stable marriage and give up on equality. For this purpose, they reach an agreement. First of all, Nancy begins to work half time, and secondly when at home she does the ‘upstairs’ and Evan the ‘downstairs’. ‘Downstairs’ means Evan’s own room for his tools, the dog and the garage. The rest of the house, including laundry, shopping, dinner, taking care of their son is part of Nancy’s ‘upstairs’. Both cling to the notion that they enjoy an equal marriage. As a social worker, the authors say, Nancy can demand no less.

The story of the Holt’s is not unique. According to the authors, lots of women through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s entered the labour market. They aimed for equal marriages, but mostly they married men who wanted or allowed them to work but who did not want to share the extra month a year at home. In the confusion of identity of working women in the 1970s and 1980s, the image of ‘supermom’ emerged. However, the authors conclude, “beneath the happy image of the woman with hair flying loose are modern marriages like the Holt’s, reflecting intricate webs of tension, and the huge, hidden emotional cost to women, men and children of having to “manage” inequality” (Hochschild and Machung, 1997: 57-58). Inequality is paradoxically produced to meet the need of both the Holts’ to keep up the idea that they enjoy an equal marriage. This shapes the new Holt generation and makes sexual inequality difficult to pinpoint.

In my opinion the problem is neither the work in itself, nor that Nancy, in order to keep her marriage, has to change *her* life, since Evan refuses to change *his*. Basically, the problem stems from the lesser worth Evan attributes to her work and her time. She feels that Evan’s time and work is worth more than hers. “Evan and I look for different signs of love. Evan feels loved when

we make love. Sexual expression is very important to him. I feel loved when he makes dinner for me or cleans up. He knows I like that, and he does it sometimes” (Hochschild and Machung, 1997: 49). Notice the way in which Nancy connects the lack of worth Evan gives to her work and time with the matter of love. Sometimes Evan makes dinner, and Nancy feels loved. This *sometimes*, together with the lack of worth Nancy feels that Evan gives her work and time, indicates that *most of the time* Evan’s definition of love wins. When Nancy adds ‘sexual expression’ to the lovemaking so important to Evan, it is for obvious reasons tempting to see this difference between Nancy and Evan in line with men’s socialisation into the belief that sex is their right and women’s socialisation into believing that sex is their duty (above: 142).

At any rate it is evident that Evan’s definition of work, life, time and love is the dominant one. Nancy’s definition of work, life, time and love is less valid due to her dependent position as described by Kymblica above. The socialisation of love and sexuality may have more to do with the dependent situation of women than with a fundamental biological difference in needs. This again affects her subjectivity confirming the theory of Jessica Benjamin in which autonomy and dependency underlies the gender polarity of masculinity and femininity, forming the postures of master and slave (above: 68 - 71). It is quite possible that Evan slowly will stop making dinners, and that Nancy will begin getting headaches or other cultural illnesses that prevent her from lovemaking with Evan.

The narrative of the Holts' reflects the many layers of how sexual inequality is produced today. The historical situation, the labour market, the structure of the institutions, including the family, has changed in the past fifty years. And so has the appearance of sexual inequality. It is still embedded, however, in the cultural norms of work, love, knowledge, power and care. The Danish psychologist Dorte Marie Søndergaard focuses in her thesis The Sign on the Body, 1996, on codes and constructions of gender. Her investigation involves 29 male and female students at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark where equality supposedly is since long established. It demonstrates a great variety of differences among young students due to the sexually different sign on their bodies. Gender, she concludes, should be seen as a phenomenon within, among and outside agents.

Søndergaard’s investigation indicates that young people in heterosexual relations over and over again find themselves acknowledged differently. The ones with the female sign on their body are acknowledged as more passive,

dependent and devoted, and the ones with a male sign on their body are confirmed as more in control, with a broader view and with more defined limits. Stating that sexuality is something by which one's inner self is acknowledged, Søndergaard wonders what affect this difference of acknowledgement will have when these young people later appear on the professional arena, where they are supposed to be equal agents, capable of managing demands of a formal and informal nature in the same way (Søndergaard, 1996: 189).

Thus, although Søndergaard's investigation reveals a flourishing variety in how gender is constructed and lived among young people to day, it also, like my own investigation, points at a basic asymmetry. Far from being a male conspiracy, I suggest the present situation be seen as a construction into asymmetry in which both sexes contribute with consequences for the position we have and get, the work and education we choose, and the society we form together. When it is difficult to be a (neutral-equal) worker in a woman's body and get respect for the work done, it is intimately connected to an understanding of knowledge as abstract and neutral.

## Sexed Knowledge Production

"Dare we remind you that men too have a sex?" the editors of Gender Perspectives on the History and Philosophy, 1999, ask rhetorically. The intention of their book is to make available material for a syllabus on the gender question, recently put on the agenda of universities and colleges in Norway. Female philosophers in Norway and Sweden present various perspectives on how this question has been treated since Plato. The question is provocative. It indicates a connection between sex and science. If the female researcher is influenced by her sex, what about her male colleague? Is *he* gender - neutral?

According to the Norwegian psychologist Hanne Haavind, evaluating the results of fifteen years of women's research, most often men do not recognise that their sex has anything to do with their ways of thinking. Since abstract masculinity was not visible before femininity turned up as concrete women, women become bearers of the problem (Haavind, 1989: 255). The answer to her rhetorical question 'How is it that a male researcher that knows nothing about women's research so bluntly admits that he has not made any

effort to find out' is simple. He knows that his superficial knowledge, or even ignorance, will not weaken his reputation as a competent and knowledgeable professional. It does not occur to him that women's research might concern or question what he is arguing as central to his profession<sup>37</sup>. Consequently, Haavind states, there is a discrepancy between women's ambition to represent a scientific renewal and men's registration of women's research as a specific field parallel to so many others. The discrepancy is a result of regarding epistemology as gender-neutral when it is an abstract 'man'. Hence, when men participate in discussions about the importance of gender in research they automatically refer to women and not to themselves (Haavind, 1989: 249).

Haavind's argument is confirmed as soon as one takes a look into the bibliography of a book or thesis. Most often a male researcher or author has no or very few references to women. If there are more than a few references to women, the author is most certain to be a female. While a male researcher can write a thesis without any reference to female scientists, it is an unwritten rule that a female researcher has to have at least as many references to male as to female scientists. The latter I find not only acceptable but also necessary, since the aim of women's research is to contribute to and participate in a critical dialogue. The problem is, however, that as long as women's contribution is not acknowledged as equally important as men's, it is not read. Thus, mainstream will remain mainstream, and women's studies will continue to be some appendix, important to women and maybe to other marginal groups. Female scholarship is, however, not itself blameless in this matter. A parallel discussion was raised by women of colour against the mainstream of white women pretending to represent all women. If the great diversity of women is rejected, as I argued above, then the agenda is left once more to the normative sameness of the sex in power whether it is white men or white women (above: 171)

It is important to realise that women in this matter act far from unanimously. Although the ability to split oneself into one identity as woman and another as researcher is considered an illusion by Haavind, this has been the pattern in women's participation in the society of researchers. Either they

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<sup>37</sup> In his book "Og eg ser på deg...", 1997, about scientific theory (vitenskapsteori) the Norwegian theologian Einar Aadland confirms Haavinds statement. In a paragraph about women's research he says that, 'tired' of male dominance in modern science, women have begun investigating questions of women's life and situation. In spite of all discussion, he concludes, women's research has "contributed to a consciousness about gender roles and equality in school and society" (Aadland, 1997: 232).

do as men and confirm the system by stating that science is gender-neutral, or they try to reveal the power inherent in the science paradigm by referring not only to their own sex but also to that of men (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 257). Whatever alternative they choose, they have to relate to the abstract gendered distinction between relevant and irrelevant, that in reality makes their feelings and interests inferior to men's. It is not difficult to be rational when one's interest is embedded in the power that follows rationality. It is easier to separate feelings from rationality, and gain influence by means of rational arguments alone, when one's feelings are taken into account without being mentioned. Haavind concludes her review by saying that the crucial condition for women's equal participation in science is that the idea of irrationality as analogous to femininity has to be removed. It is therefore of fundamental importance to investigate the difference in women's and men's experiences in order to understand the preconditions for how we construct our conception of the world and ourselves (Haavind, 1989: 260).

This thesis represents such an investigation. Giving priority to practise this investigation has made it possible to identify a difference in the roots of the thinking process. It concurs with Haavind in the view that epistemology is far from abstract. It is embodied and different. Modern culture has cultivated an understanding of rationality as thinking itself by relegating the symbolic to the department of irrelevant and irregular entities. This has led to a symbolic coupling of the concept of rationality to maleness and irrationality to femaleness. This coupling is intimately linked to the many ways in which the 'abstract' male frame of reference in its sexual bodylines still *is*, and reproduces, the norm for what can be defined as knowledge, sexuality and ethics. The lack of recognition hinders the female maybe not so much from seeing and listening but from taking responsibility for what she observes. This again is preventing her from being seen - and seeing herself - as an equal subject. In a vicious circle this upholds sexual inequality in that it prevents both sexes from living and loving without domination and subordination.

However, while Haavind advocates abolishing the idea of irrationality as analogous to femininity by investigating the difference in women's and men's experiences, I find it problematic to proceed to measure women - and men - in terms of rationality. In my opinion there is no other way than to recognise sexual difference. Referring to the enclosed redefinition of subjectivity and knowledge production there is no longer one norm of rationality according to which men are rational and women irrational or one

norm of sensitivity according to which women are sensitive and men are insensitive. There is, however, the norm referred to several times above, that discriminates all human beings whose needs differ from the ones set by 'the healthy white male embodiment between 20 and 50'.

## Needs of 'Differing' Bodies

A current problem in Northern Europe is how to make institutions of health and welfare better and more effective. Clients and patients claim that they are not heard and not seen. The staff responds by claiming that there is no time left in which to hear and see. For a couple of decades the dilemma of quality versus effectivity has tormented politicians as well as administrators, professionals and every ward with its caring staff. In Norway organisational arrangements and attitudinal slogans has shifted over the years to accommodate this dilemma. The conclusion drawn from various investigations into how to make institutions of health better and at the same time more effective is that the client has to be put in the centre by means of increasing the competence of the staff.

In terms of one of the principal themes of this thesis, the uniqueness of the individual and her/his relations, this 'centring' development should be welcomed as progress. And it definitely has produced an increase in professional competence and technically helpful devices. In terms, however, of another principal theme, the prerequisite of ethical interaction, this development of competence and its devices seems to reproduce the subject/object pattern of relationship. In this line of argument, training the staff (subject) in the latest techniques in the art of understanding the patient/client (object) cannot solve the staff's deficient listening. It only repeats the prescription: more of the same. Whether the latest issue is ethical training, 'secrets of communication', empathic or bodily training, it tends to produce the subject/object system once more.

This is the inherent message of a new initiative to make the client heard. It is called 'User-determined Personal Assistance' (Brukerstyrt Personlig Assistanse: BPA). The user (the new euphemism for client) is granted a certain amount of hours and she is defined as employer or work-leader. Putting her in charge of hiring, i.e. choosing her own assistants and of deciding if, what and when something is to be done centres her. The conditions are that the 'user' is over 18 and well under 65 years of age. BPA is primarily intended for the



physically handicapped, who have been campaigning for the initiative through their organisation.

These ‘users’ deliberately hire assistants with no training, or students from fields preferably with no connection to health and care, thereby pointing at a paradox in the official policy of professional care. Improving the service to the client by increasing professionals’ competence has failed. The clients do not want or appreciate this competence. Or rather, their experience is that, far from helping the staff improves their listening, more training empowers them in their ideas of what is best for the client. At a conference in the late spring of this year some ‘users’ unanimously told what a strain it is over years to be exposed to help, given on conditions other than their own. In sum, their experience with professional helpers was “that ‘they’ decide what I need and when I need it without listening to my whether’s, what’s and when’s”. A woman, aged 55, added: “To have been in need of help since the age of five broke down all my self-confidence. Only in the last couple of years have I regained my confidence”.

Recently, the experience of a medical professor, Per Hjortdal, covered the FrontPage of the Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten. He claims that many mistakes are made at Norwegian hospitals due to the staff’s poor ability to listen. He became victim to this when undergoing a minor surgery in which something went seriously wrong. He says: “Who is going to be heard in the Norwegian health system when we do not even listen to our own? Or maybe they thought that I, being a doctor, took responsibility for myself?”

In the perspective of sexual difference and ethical interaction Hjortdal criticises the health system for working on the premise of ‘arrogant perception’. He demonstrates that the male norm of the ‘healthy white embodiment between 20 and 50’ not only discriminates women but also men. As a professor, male and middle-aged, Hjortdal is at the top of the medical, and thereby, the social, hierarchy and is undoubtedly used being listened to. How come that this is no longer the case? Hjortdal wonders whether the staff thought that he being a doctor took responsibility for himself. I suggest the opposite. Hjortdal is no longer seen or heard as a doctor, because he is a patient. Why is it then that a staff trained into centring the patient is unable to hear? Maybe because along with the shift in position there has been a shift in status. He is no longer seen as in charge of himself. The staff did not hear an independent man taking responsibility for himself. They heard a difficult patient depending on their attention and interaction.

It is a characteristic of human beings that, although reflective, we have no privileged insight in our own personal presentation and how this is perceived and interpreted by the other. We are not able to hear ourselves and thus we are unable to perceive how our own voice, face and body posture change according to situation, position, relation, age, power etc. of the partakers. Hjortdal's different position most probably permeated his voice, way of speaking and bodily posture. If this had not changed he might have been heard. On the other hand he cannot have changed totally, or he would never have been heard.

The problem is not that the staff is unable to listen to one of their own but that the interdefinition between Hjortdal and them has changed. Hjortdal is neither considered, nor considers himself, among the 'we'. By talking about his own body, about himself he can no longer be considered a rational person. When a person talks about his own body he is emotionally engaged, he can have no distance and therefore no rationality. He has to respect that decisions, made by professionals with distance, are more rational and competent, and consequently will overrule his own judgement in regard to his own body. Hjortdal has changed from *having* a body (being in control i.e. rational) into *being* a body (without rationality). Less than a man, he has become a dependent person, belonging to 'them', and the responsibility has shifted accordingly. This affects the situation and the relation, and the way the participants talk, listen and see, and where the responsibility is placed.

The Hjortdal example illustrates that basically there is no difference between a doctor and a mentally or physically handicapped person. Both have needs that differ from the norm of the 'healthy white male embodiment between 20 and 50'. Part of the norm's power is its invisibility. While the needs of the normative body are transformed into rationality by means of being fulfilled, the needs of the bodies that differ from this norm, women, children, elderly and handicapped, are visible. When needs are visible, they indicate that the bodies are dependent on their needs and thus not independent, not in control. These bodies bear witness to irrationality and therefore to marginality.

In the fields of health, welfare and education we, often unknowingly, act as 'agents of change'. We are professionalised into the task of bringing 'deviants' back into the established rank and file. The Norwegian psychiatrist Tom Andersen is one among many to describe the 'change agency' that he and his colleagues represent. It was, Tom Andersen said, his own bodily pain that at last left him with no other option than to change his way of working and stop

being an agent of change. This is confirmed by the analysis of the five informants. It is their embodied experience that makes them react, reflect and struggle to find ways of working that respect bodies that differ. Their experiences describe in various ways how ethics is neither abstract nor neutral, but embodied and intertwined with identity and subjectivity. In this reality of sexually embodied difference, other dilemmas, such as the balance between 'nearness' and distance, limits and integrity, are exposed. Their narratives and reflections illustrate how their theoretical training does not match their experience. It sets the stage of subject/object, the 'we' and 'them', but gives no indication of how to handle the complex interdependency and interaction in which both groups partake.

## Embodied Knowledge

This raises several ethical questions of relevance to health institutions and to schools that educate health staff and welfare professionals. As long as the same pattern is reflected in educational institutions for health and welfare, additional training of the staff will not basically change this pattern of interaction. The 'production' of these institutions is to reproduce rational knowledge. When this is seen as *the* concept of knowledge, it idealises neutrality above sex, race, age, etc<sup>38</sup>. The particularities that both teacher and student embody are neutralised and considered irrelevant. The result is that the better the student is trained, the better she or he is empowered to work 'body-less' i.e. professionally on the body of the other<sup>39</sup>. That this is done with the best ethical intentions does not stop it from reproducing the subject/object pattern of our health-care interaction.

This neutral and abstract knowledge rests upon an understanding of the human being as a rational being that ignores that no human being is neutral or bodiless. It is reflected in the use of concepts like acceptance, respect, honesty, worthiness, trust etc. Recently I was asked to help with references by a

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<sup>38</sup> In Scandinavian languages it is possible to play a meaningful, but intranslatable, pun on this point: Kundskab kan sproglig set forstås som et skab fyldt med kunnen eller det kan forstås som det at skabe kunnen. (Our word for knowledge may, literally, mean 'a cupboard of knowing' or it may literally mean 'to create knowing'. While we enjoy praising the latter, the first meaning of the word is the base of curricula, exams and other educational practises).

<sup>39</sup> In her thesis as well as in articles the Norwegian physiotherapist Gunn Engelsrud has demonstrated the difference between a 'body-less' and an 'embodied' way of working in the field of physiotherapy.

neighbour working in practise. Her reading group had decided to discuss 'honesty'. Listening to my argument that without context such discussion would end up unproductively, she finally said that the context of their discussion was AIDS, but that they had decided to take it out of this context to be able to discuss it in a productive way! Rational language thus reflects our practise. We are convinced that the context is muddling things up. In this thesis I have argued that it is the other way around. Knowledge and ethics are not objective and abstract, but situated and embodied. It may however be difficult to realise the implication of this.

In a teaching session at my college's Advanced Course in Mental Health Work all agreed that it is important to show the client respect. Asking a 'student' to elaborate on *how* she showed a client respect, she answered hesitatingly that she smiled warmly and includingly, asked the necessary questions in a gentle, comforting way, and if they sat down talking, she lit a candle. Another student reacted that he did not want to be met smilingly and over a candle. Instead of recognising her way of showing respect he conceived it as disrespectful to the seriousness of the situation, as if a smile and candlelight would help. Is this difference due to the different sex of the students, is it due to their upbringing, education, position, or is it due to how these two students conceive their respective identity? Whatever the reason, these students show how respect is differently embodied and practised, which is why different persons require different forms of attending.

In the case of 'respect', awareness that 'my' understanding is neither superior nor inferior to 'yours' is a presupposition of relating and interacting ethically. This can not be learnt only by discussing concepts; it has to be learnt by experience. It may sound trivial, but practise reveals that it is not. In fact, interaction in practice reveals that neither of us do what we set out to do. When the female student is hesitating it is not only because she has not reflected *how* she is embodying respect, it is also because she most probably would not lit a candle in any situation with any client. And vice versa, her male colleague may like to have a candle lit in some situation and relation.

As I hope to have demonstrated the problem is how we, trained and raised in a philosophy and culture that value neutral abstract knowledge, devalue other knowledges. This makes us mistake and confuse bodily i.e. personal knowledge for what I call 'the tyranny of intimacy'. The result is either repudiation or replacement. In my opinion training into acknowledging bodily knowledge will at the same time diminish this 'tyranny of intimacy'.

Ideally the situation between teacher and student reflects the situation between the professional and the client. If the teacher cannot see and recognise the student and his/her knowledge, there is a fairly low chance that the student in his/her turn will see the client/patient. In that sense, learning may take place only if both teacher and student are willing to see learning as a journey in which the partaking subjects are eager to explore various embodiments' 'knowledge'. Knowledge in this definition is seeing and hearing from different points of view while taking responsibility for what I see and hear, and in fact also for my unawareness. This is not to be misunderstood as a suggestion of role changing or of suspension of responsibility. As a teacher I will have to accept opposition to my knowledge and to the way I teach. One student is unable to listen out of sheer irritation, another is listening but disagrees intensely to the content or argument or conclusion. To some extent I may be able and willing to change my way of being or my position on a topic. To some extent this is impossible. This is due to how 'my' knowledge, my professionalism is inextricably intertwined with who I am, the way I move, talk, think, conceive, relate etc. It is, accordingly, important to arrange for teaching situations that allow the students to critically acknowledge how their experience and knowledge is 'theirs'. In other words, only if the participants in educational interaction are willing to let their situated and embodied knowledge challenge that of the other can common knowledge be developed.<sup>40</sup>

## Power and Ethics

Woman's as well as man's ethos is created interacting with others. Power is an essential ingredient in this process. I have suggested understanding power as potestas when one form of knowledge production is evaluated as superior to

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<sup>40</sup> In order to reestablish practical education in a new form, my colleague Roar Pettersen suggests organising theoretical teaching less as a transmittence of knowledge and more as a field of practise (Pettersen, 1997: 210). The model of problem-based learning (PBL), of which I have been most inspired, maintains that practise comes first thereby rejecting the epistemological principle that action is based on theoretical knowledge. "Theoresing is something we *do*. This is a certain form of human action and practise, connected always to concrete situations. Theoresing in other words is a form of *practising*" (Pettersen, 1997: 223-224). It is based on the understanding that knowledge has its roots in practical and social phenomena and processes. We have however not yet obtained a pedagogic and practical grip on the paradox that practical competence both presupposes and refers to theoretical competence.

another. This results in a subject/object system that works within and outside the social institutions and leads to the structuring of institutional systems in 'we' and 'them'. Ethics as normative belongs to the level of theory and knowledge production. It is intertwined with potestas in that it values one norm over the other. Power as potentia, the second dimension of power, underlines that identity is mutually co-created in interaction. Ethics understood as creative and interactive is intertwined with potentia. These dimensions of power are displayed and incorporated by both sexes.

The metaprocess of educational interaction parallels the clinical interaction in the field of care. Both processes are under the spell of power in that potestas and potentia are always present. These processes can be satisfactory only when each part struggles to acknowledge the other as an equal subject, if not in position then certainly in value. This requires tolerating, even welcoming as part of the process, the many different expressions and experiences: gratitude and disappointment, frustration and acclaim, etc. The point is to realise that no matter how much competence we require we do not understand the other better than the other understands him/herself. To generations of Scandinavian caring and educational professionals the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's concept of understanding has been the ideal: the only decent understanding of the other is to understand what the other him/herself understands. This has been presented as the ultimate position regarding understanding. From a phenomenological point of view this is not possible. It may even be seen as yet another subtle way of patro/matronising the other by fixating him/her in his/her difference.

This thesis argues that ethics is part of a process of constitutive bodily interdependency. Only by means of 'playfully travelling' to the world of the other may we *see* the other. Seeing the other – and oneself – as consisting of flesh and blood identities is a continuous challenge to both sexes. It requires recognition of interdependency: that the self only exists in the complex web of its varied relations. Epistemology, ontology and language presuppose each other. Neglecting this we reduce the world to objects left to our analysis and forget how differentiated the world, the language and the bodies in it are. The world is always 'my' world. 'My' knowledge is not a privileged knowledge, neither is 'yours' - and definitely not 'ours'.

Teacher and student, staff-member and client have a responsibility to fight the ever threatening and tempting retreat into the system of subject and object, and to engage in the more promising struggle of creating a relation of

intersubjectivity. Within the frame of intersubjectivity various challenges appear. At the 4<sup>th</sup> European Feminist Research Conference in Bologna October 2000, Prof. Luisa Passerini maintained in her keynote lecture that becoming a subject cannot be conceptualised without intersubjectivity. The subject is incomplete, as it is always in a series of changes. Subjectivity is a struggle for identity in which claims about sovereignty and subjectivity are in tension. This antagonism between subjectivity and different levels of power is, she argued, important for creating identity and subjectivity since to be able to stand in a conflict is necessary to live up with democracy. The challenge is how to be a collective and at the same time an individual subject.

Under the premises that the social and sexual position of the parts in the relation is influencing our interactions, it is not the patient, the client, the student, the woman or the child that needs to be placed in the centre. In any relation both parts have to be 'centred', indicating that, as it is the dignity of both part that is at stake, both parts are equally responsible. To be responsible requires that one is seen - and sees oneself and the other - as subjects. This is a precondition for establishing a situation in which a dialogue can take place. A dialogue requires that each part in the interaction consider the other's existence and knowledge as relevant as one's own<sup>41</sup>. Together these 'knowledges' may contribute to each part remaining subject in charge of his or her own life<sup>42</sup>. Such dialogue develops nomadic consciousness and protests against 'change agency' whether coming from oneself or another.

From childhood to old age we live our private lives in a continuous challenge to balance difference and sameness, independence and dependence. One of the most challenging dilemmas of professional life is the same: to live this balance in interactions like the ones between staff and clients, teachers and students. When care is defined as an existential condition of life, it requires various ways of answering the 'ethical demand' of the other. As illustrated above in the *The Rules of Ciderhouse* it may be necessary to bend or even disobey rules when they become more sacrosanct than the person or situation they were intended to serve. It is through experience or, in the vocabulary of Lugones, by means of playfully 'world-travelling', seeing the other - and

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<sup>41</sup> The Norwegian general practitioner John Nessa investigates in his thesis how to establish a dialogue between doctor and patient, in which each part respects the knowledge of the other.

<sup>42</sup> My Danish colleague Susanne Worm has kindly given me encouraging examples from practise of how such dialogue may help clients to stay in charge of their own life. In one case, the staff invented to a disabled client a pill distributor, which made it possible for her to take her medication and thus to go on living in her own home.

oneself - as consisting of flesh and blood identities, that ethical thinking and practise is developed. An ethics of ambiguity and sexual difference points to the necessary choices that each of us has to make to be (-come) a subject. In this understanding of ethics the risk of error is a crucial part of existing. Ethics is in other words also a lonesome responsibility of each human being.

## Knowing and Doing

In The Tree of Knowledge, 1992 Maturana and Varela say:

“...to disregard the identity between cognition and action, not to see that knowing is doing, and not to see that every human act takes place in language, and, as such, has ethical implications because it entails humanness, is not to see human beings as living entities. To do that - now that we know how we know - would bespeak self-deception. Whatever we do in every domain, whether concrete (walking) or abstract (philosophical reflection) involves us totally in the body, for it takes place through our structural dynamics and through our structural interactions. Everything we do, is a structural dance in the choreography of co-existence... we have only the world we bring forth with others, and only love helps us bring it forth. We affirm that the core of all troubles we face today is our very ignorance of knowing” (Maturana and Varela, 1992: 248).

At the last session with the five informants I told them how I in the process of supervising them had had my doubts about whether I was able to help all of them, and how I realised that although this might be true, my uncertainty came from a conviction contradicting my conception. While my conception is that every relationship differs, at the same time I disparaged my supervision for being different between the five of them. Hearing this, they marvelled: but *you are* the same. We thought that you were the same towards all of us. And they were right. In some way I was the same, and in some way not.

The implication of the understanding of the self in this thesis is that the self only exists in its complex web of varied relations. The mutual consitutiveness of identity and embodiment means that when involved in relation and interaction I behave, talk and act in one way in one relation and another way in another. Although a redefinition of identity and subjectivity had



been an important part of the supervision, it did not become an integrated part of our knowledge until the end of supervision. This is an example of how knowledge is produced in a context of intersubjectivity and of how much it takes to free oneself from the traditional understanding of knowledge and subjectivity or, in the terminology of Maturana and Varela, 'to know what we know'.

Based on my investigation I maintain that supervision in the first year of working is necessary 1. when theories about ethical competence are to be translated into practical work with human beings, and 2. when experiences from practise are to revise the content and form of teaching at college. Such supervision would provide the college with an excellent opportunity to follow up the individual student after examination. I consider this to be more or less a must since the number of students in each class has increased by approximately 100 percent in the seven years I have been teaching in Norway. This would be both an economic and productive way of continuously increasing the competence of health and social staff. And it would provide invaluable feedback from 'reality'. To quote Grete Jeppesen: "It is not easy to be aware of the dilemmas of everyday life if it is not acknowledged that they are in fact dilemmas"(above: 47). A precondition is - as this thesis has demonstrated - that teaching institutions and supervisors are willing to

- acquire critical awareness of sexual difference
- redefine subjectivity and knowledge production
- acknowledge the way this influences ethical interaction

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