02 2007

Women, Friends to the World!

Genealogy or Construction?

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THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL. It feels as though I have been trying to realize this statement throughout my entire feminist life. And also that it was clear from the beginning that this would not be possible on the basis of self-affirmation and self-realization, no matter how disadvantaged and minoritary this self might be. Because the self, that is also always me. And this me is never disadvantaged and minoritary, because every statement plays into its hands. I will never forget my astonishment that I am supposed to be this me. That this me is no other, and every other is this me for themselves. (Eva Meyer)[1]

I am also certain (...) that there is no withdrawal from society and we must test ourselves against one another. (...) In the counterplay of the impossible with the possible we expand our possibilities. (...) that we orient ourselves to a goal that distances itself, of course, as soon as we approach it. (Ingeborg Bachmann)[2]

The particular is for the most part of too trifling value as compared with the general: individuals are sacrificed and abandoned. The

Idea pays the penalty of determinate existence and of corruptibility, not from itself, but from the passions of individuals. (G.W.F. Hegel)[3]

From a prospection that, even after twenty-five years of times and spaces moved by women's politics, will not relinquish – yet cannot take either – not losing the meaning of and in women's politics again and again, the exclamatory form of the title is almost to be taken for granted; specifically because it cannot be taken for granted (anymore). Could it ever be?

Starting with a sentence that has to say "not" four times in order to want to say anything, may convey something of an unsettled affirmation: squaring the circle of a disunited double negation, so to speak, indicated by four motives that are already in a diverging constellation – and cross one another.

For which reason speaking again about friendship to and against world, of genealogy vs. construction, of friendship and/or genealogy, of world and/or construction … is needed? So that these words and phenomena can happen, which are connected with a certain way of thinking, a speaking to make present the present as attending to the "contrary", re-authorizing the political itself. That would be a desire.
What this is about is hence the feminist political. And hence the question of women in the world and their relationships to world; of the relationships among one another and the extent to which frontline battles within post/feminist practices and theories are so indistinct for the world.

From the beginning – the gender difference as value difference. The human was man, mankind, the general, the right, the subject of all production. Women: symbolically killed, "mutilated little

men", sexless mothers, under- and unpaid for re- and producing. Through all the toils of feminist genealogies – equality, difference, deconstruction, construction maxims – there was never one that stood for all; there was a porous consciousness of the paradox of every dogma as being in the shape of the violence of every univers-alienation of the isms of capital, race and sex. A mirror: none of the seeking movements of recent decades has been able to treat itself so relentlessly self-critically as the women's movement. Which is why talking about *the* women's movement is a re-constructed fiction. There were (probably too) many discordant voices; never only one.

The initially liberating euphoria of deconstruction de/generated into a constraining furor of mutual destruction, disempowering one another (even more). This is probably the reason why there is constantly talk of gender mainstreaming now, the veiled disciplinary ideology which takes the breath away from women's liberation. Which is why there is an all the more breathless search for the matter of empowerment – to label the loss of female escapes from the male dominated conventionalisms and circumstances of socialization.
So far, these have generally not set about decoding themselves. (At this point, the famous exception to the rule has to be inserted.) A man remains a man and his thinking is the general. (Which it commonly also often represents; it is hard to take something away from someone that is granted to him; what remains is a self-awareness that is always ahead of the others.) For even in the intoxicating deadly serious discourses on dissolutions and assurances of identity, women are in and on the front-line.

Due to the anathematizing of gender difference and the anemic differentiation of women, insight into the hegemony of homogenizing global reflexivities is lost: because that which really

counts out realities – and melts into a single reality without differences – are the flows of capital. Are postfeminism and late capitalism unwittingly hand in hand?
Is it the subterfuge of a post-instrumental "reason" playing its tricks here, when the analysis of identities is given precedence over the analysis of politics, when the love of the self is preferred over the love of the world? This inductive perspective, so to speak, blocks the view of the necessities of forming always provisional generalities and thus remains monadic, where it is in fact through collective constellations that the distinctive first acquires a shape. The juxtaposition and opposition of singularities yields no power that could lead to changes. Instead it creates individual circumstances of arbitrariness that bind political passions to the inside rather than relinquishing obstinacies and opening up to the world.

"Typically female" – one might think, if this fixation on interiority were not understandable due to the scandal of the historical facticity of the exclusion of women from public space; nevertheless it is not excusable. The way that women therefore had a special penchant for moralizing and that this "virtue" continues to blossom is a story told by every history of women's association. Yet it should not be disregarded that all constriction into small spaces of powerlessness results in strengths becoming innerly consuming. Does not the competition for crumbs that are always too small also block the view of what still indicates that the obligation to women's politics is the premise before the right to gender politics? (And will remain an obligation until ...) Do not the instituted hybrid (Latin: of two different origins / Greek: overreaching) discourses revolving around true political correctness replace the originally and ultimately shared desire for a different civility? And conversely, is it not also much more the case that we (and the "we"

is not to be denied here) have fallen into the comfort zone of the worldly universe, that we can afford sanctified subjectivity, the luxury of the finest differentiations? To everyone her own thing, her small absolute that can only be shared with those enjoying it equally. In this way the perception of the others becomes the signature of one's own incompleteness, which is to be compensated by continuously invoking resentments.

What is to be done with the uncountable articulations of particularities and the uncompletable desire for participation in "everything", with the self-identical, where non-identity must exist as the necessary irrevocability of being and becoming (except in death), if the wholeness aspired to is not to become psychotic and thus totalitarian? It is only in the closed institution and in the ideological immanence of capital that all are equal. As participants (i.e. partaking of something that someone else already has) in this particular universe, we are the preferred comparables in the balance of the total sum game.

Yet how can the incompatibilities be clarified between those who understand themselves as beings born and are conscious of this originary dependency, and those who feel themselves as invalids in an inverted incorporation and believe in their future self-authorization? The others who place themselves recognizingly in relation to the world as given and want to transform it as such; and those who want to newly construct the self – accepting the western paradigm of feasibility as such. Are these merely two sides of a coin of untenable situations in which we exist?

Thus let it be proclaimed: 'oh enemies, women, there is no enemy'! Because the enemy (as a man respected) is a brother (a man despised). And hence we are all in good company. Of 'friends': these men are our friends. (?)

Even if much wit and wisdom has been devoted to the topos 'oh friends, there are no friends', in the western history of philosophy the friend is also regarded as a political figure of respect among men of one another's soul and intellect, whereas women cannot be friends, because they are only considered in the insufficiency of the corporal person.

Thus the voice of the friend can never be the voice of a friend, if it is her voice. And the language she speaks, the language of this friend, can never be that of the friend.

Should we instead proclaim: 'oh women, friends, there are women and they are friends!'?

Because: in the constitution of organizational compatibilities, friends that are men and friends that are women are not constituted in the same way. This is to be taken into consideration in order to grasp any kind of action as an only conditional desire in differing references, but in the one world whose existence is indebted to those who are different. Still. For identity as the concept of identity and non-identity dispenses with the non-identical today – to assert indivisible singularity. This appears as the paradoxical effect of a postfordist universal standardizing machinery that levels out every difference, only to promote it as a countable and payable product. In the artifact differentness vanishes *in actu*, and distinction, seemingly individually selecting, becomes the epitome of self-remuneration in the market place of arrivals and deals.

Unlike the choice. Unlike bearing "being chosen as this woman" and yet being able to choose as this woman. That the world is radically temporal, in the here and now, means having a choice. However, it also means that we are only capable of this as creatures, which means that we always already enter into existence

and thus appear in the preconditioned – that we are dependents, those who come from somewhere.

What was so unbearable was solved with a (phallic) divinity in the hereafter, because this redeems those born of mothers. If there is an immaterial outside, then the material inside congeals into the inferior: it is no wonder that it was specifically monotheism which posited this inside as trivial – at least "ideologically". From this perspective, the world would have become "feminine", since it sank into the dirty business of space become immanent. At the same time, we lost transcendences – as the possibility of transgressing one/self and a system that no longer allows anything outside itself. So where is there still a choice here? Without having to lose oneself – or to create oneself to still have a self – and to still be able to hold a world place beyond the realm of remuneration, so as not to get lost. For self-abandonments are meanwhile achieved technically through the de-archivization of our memory; gene instead of meme would be the most apt label according to a diagnosis of our times. Those who appeal to (decoded) nature always have an excuse at hand and are no longer in need of explanations. On the other hand, one can optionally recode oneself to produce an optimal self. Self-technologization represents the standard of selectable, so-called self-responsibility today, which seeks to leave no uncertainties open, because these could not be paid. "Smoking is deadly" is one of the least of these evils of a proportioned externally and self-caused self-sacrifice on the altars of the shareholders and insurance companies.

What could a choice be, where everything is available to choose from, so that there is no choice left? If you want to choose, you need alternatives/alterities, in other words boundaries, because without them there can be no competency of mental imagination, no capability for distinguishing and deciding, which is the precondition for the capacity of political judgment.

Since women are not integrated in the same "fraternal" formation in the functional structures of the world, they hypothetically have the possibility and the mission to dis-cover the ethical blindness of the system. This requires the talent of being able to revolt as the different and yet together. We need contrasts like familiarity and foreignness to be able to shape our identity with the close and the distant (hence differentiated); indeed identity is the expression of congealed conflicts with differing identification archeologies that cannot be changed like coins. In this way, the imagination of (gender) identity as a construction would be *one* of the many ways of dealing with the separation of the subject, with the tornness between body-soul-other-world – a habituality among other absorptions and distortions to cope with the fissure of lack and abundance.

And an ex-act understanding of these limitations – not merely speculating with phantasms of de-differentiation that epitomize western capital provinciality – requires the differentiation of the/our individual and societized ways of living (and all the ways of conveying them, such as the organization of work, the terrain of knowledge, styles of love, etc.). Classical political theory has differentiated the person into appropriating subjectivity and formal citizenship, into private and public spheres of action; these should be considered as expanded by the political and intimate dimension. Feminist self-reflection could be a model here, like critique to be publicly established, as long as it does not see itself merely as an additive celebration among others, since experiences with delivery and conjoining do exist. To recall: the women's movement uncovered and indicted the brutal connection of the personal and the political of privatized violence, carrying it into the public sphere it belonged to. However, the inseparability between the spheres that became fixed over time also led to disturbing confusions of them, as political stances were identified with the

person. All the way to icy silence, a more congenial form of "not even ignoring". Receiving explicit criticism as symbolic annihilation is ultimately unacceptable – and it happens. (Yet a woman who is a political comrade is not necessarily a private friend, an intimate friend not necessarily a public ally ...).
Which forms reflect which contents – without the former being identical with the latter – that in turn symbolize emotions and span proposals, can be cordially imagined thanks to (on the basis of) dialectical interweavings, the respective potentiality of which correlates with the conditionedness of our becoming: desire, including political desire, arises from and consists in the relative and the relation of correspondence and renunciation. What is missing most of all are gestures of connection, invocations against the division into included and excluded worlds, articulated rejections of self-sufficient apathy in light of one's own and the other's smug barricading against the misery of the other others. Talk of inherent necessities, the dominance of technically clever procedure regulations, autonomized monetary standards – all of this threatens to replace all other realities.
It is the recognition of differences that first allows us to become political actors, when power is materialized through a common weave, thus enabling the transformation of our own contradictions into periods of resistance against smoothed realisms.

A concrete political feminist figure in this – to pick up the beginning of this reflection loop again – is not to be imagined as a player of performative productions, but rather a a person of the desire for lasting formations. A female understanding of political collectivity is not exhausted in neuroticizing sisterhoods; this was a bitter path from initially necessary quasi familiar protection against the still foreign terrain outside domesticity. Nor should it continue to reduce itself to the narcissist accumulation of precarious

identities, because the mirroring erases others/what is other. Nor can it be exhausted in sexualized costumes, whose colorful surplus does not only coincidentally seek acclamation in the mediatized public sphere.
How to give shape to what is fleeting, grant sovereignty to her that is fleeing?

The friend, the woman moving between internal and external conditions, could “resolve” the paradox with/of/in women’s politics:
Conceived along the axis of the genealogical thinking of the beginning, from which someone (prepolitically) comes to take initiative on the basis of similarity and difference, in other words to link together authorized political conjunctions of meaning for herself and other women and to take up residence in the world.
Conceived along the axis of a term of “friendship” that does not refer to sameness/similarity, but rather to differentness, to the possibility of a choice. It is a choice that is not immune to being broken, one that has to be achieved again and again, because there is nothing about it that can be taken for granted.
Conceived along the axis of this mutual interrelatedness through interest in a common third, a worldly reference. This dimension of women’s friendship seems to be the most difficult one, as we are accustomed to relating to the (serial) “best friend”, where there is no room for a third. Conceived along the axis requiring an uncomfortable and inimitable process of communication as a political axis (which presupposes the transgression of the two), in other words the enduring of differences.

Conceived along the axis of this conferring perspective. The mutual preserving of hearing and speaking would be an inclined celebration in the opening up of the world without ending up in a battle of retreat due to becoming emotionally mired or mental

judgments.
Conceived along the axis of overcoming narrow-mindedness: she has, but does not give; she knows, but does not act; she reproaches, but does not yield; she strikes, but does not tender; she wants, but does not wish.
Conceived along the axis of the reciprocal; an assumption of the hospitality of understanding and forgiving; an assumption of the generative or situationally conditioned knowing more and being able to do less and vice versa – without being amenable to the laws of power and impotence.

In this way the world would be opened again: in a previously impossible configuration – of the recognition of women and political friendship among women.

No text fabric can be woven without background threads:

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[1]Eva Meyer, *Tischgesellschaft*, Basel,Frankfurt/Main: Stroemfeld/ Nexus 1995, p. 25.

[2]Ingeborg Bachmann, “Die Wahrheit ist dem Menschen zumutbar”, in: http://www.gedichte.vu/?die_wahrheit.html.

[3]G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, Vol.12, 1970 {1832-45}, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, p. 46. [http://marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/history3.htm#036]