

Gender: The Pain and Pleasure of Difference by **Betsy Wearing**.
Melbourne: Longman, 1996. Pp. xiv + 253; \$29.95 (paper).

Wearing's opening sentence "The concept of difference between the sexes is, perhaps, the most interesting, yet frustrating and enduring division of society" indicates that she, like most of us teaching in universities, is trembling on the frontiers between certainty, uncertainty, pain and pleasure in teaching and

research on gender and difference. This statement also hints at the difference between disciplines which explore analytical categories of sex and gender and multidisciplinary discourses that trace the influence of discourses on the meaning of sex, gender and difference. Wearing argues, in the first three chapters, that gender is not the sign or symptom of a biological origin, a universal order or a false consciousness, but she does not explain that it is precisely this lack of fixed referent or stable foundation for sex and gender that produces difference and hence meaning. Social and cultural meanings of the relationship between sex and gender, power and knowledge, identity and difference become not a goal but a tracing of discursive construction of gender and difference. Meaning is not a closure but a trace in an endless passage that can only aspire to a temporary arrest, to a self-conscious drawing of a limit across diverse possibilities.

There is another paradox in *Gender: The Pain and Pleasure of Difference* because a post-structuralist approach to the production of sociological knowledge does not mean the touch of any one sacred theoretical stone or the turn of the right disciplinary key that will reveal the nature of things as they are, but involves tracing out a recognisable shape on the extensive complexity of possible meanings. In Wearing's interpretations of society, culture, sex, gender, difference, power, knowledge, pain, and pleasures she attempts to "discover" meaning and she does not situate herself as a discursive subject but as a voice, the expression of the inner consciousness of an individual agent (xii).

Wearing adopts the writing strategy of a historical account of the concepts of difference and gender and explains that both have been rendered increasingly problematic in the last two decades by a paradigmatic shift from Sociology to the specialised knowledges produced in Social Studies, Cultural Studies and Critical Psychology. Chapter One of Wearing's history retraces Althusserians and feminists and brings a reconstituted version of the structuralist, functionalist past and its subjects to our notice. However, while in Chapter Two she argues that Foucault shifted her focus away from the individual human subject of Sociology towards the regularities and exclusions that produce specific discursive formations that in turn produce disciplined, gendered, ethnic subjects of knowledge, Wearing, as suggested, situates herself as a voice rather a discursive subject.

In Chapters Five, Seven and Eight of Wearing's history she attempts to re-map the gendered subject of Sociology with reference to Family, Work and Leisure. She explains that her approach opposes Anglo-American historiography and Frankfurt School critical theorists, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, on the grounds that the subject of Sociology, in these modernist approaches, is identified as a reasoned, coherent, unified, asexual, individual agent. Histories, however, including Wearing's, and how they are constructed as questions around a writing subject constituted by discursive formations, need to be addressed.

Histories are on the agenda in many disciplines in the Humanities and

Social Sciences as a result of the poststructuralist shift towards questions of language, rhetoric and discursive formations in the construction of the subjects of knowledges. Meaghan Morris, in a recent conference on Cultural Studies and History, argued in favour of intellectuals making their own concerns central to their writing of histories.

This strategy is not to intrude an autobiographical voice between the subject and the reader, Morris maintains, but rather should be a writing tactic which makes visible the theoretical and political positions from which the history has been composed. Wearing does not attempt to articulate how positions of enunciation are possible for different subjects of gender in the areas of Family, Work, Leisure or State Policies. She trembles between the need for fixed categories of analysis and the desire to trace the different meanings possible for gender, pain, pleasure and difference in disciplinary and multidisciplinary discursive formations.

Histories of theories of gender and difference, like Wearing's, are however, valuable for the introduction of new disciplined places and curriculum possibilities. History in the disciplines of Medicine, Sociology, Religious Studies, History, Education, Psychology and Cultural Studies is categorised differently as case-history, life-history, autobiography, psychobiography and social history. Different disciplines value genres and the enunciative position of the subjects of knowledges differently. Each discipline has established a disciplined, generic place from which aspects of self-knowledge such as the history of a body (medical history), history of the psyche (case study), history of learning behaviour, or history of social experience, to name a few, foster blindness to the rhetorical techniques, the figures and tropes for the subject and the narrative positions for the subjects of knowledges. A chapter on the role of writing in the construction of gendered, ethnic, positions of enunciation for the subjects of histories valued by Social Studies and the different generic construction of histories, social or personal, in Cultural Studies, would have enhanced Wearing's book.

From a poststructuralist perspective, any disciplinary encounter with gendered difference, pleasure and pain, is always also a textual encounter. This at first glance may appear to be a radical statement, if it is assumed that the text of the case study, the psychobiography or the social history is a literal account of a real body, life, or mind. The field of figuration and rhetoric is granted limited discussion within discourses of gender and difference in Wearing's book. The whole question of rhetorical strategies and techniques is set aside when the imperative is to seek truth through the exercise of literal, clear prose.

Wearing's representation of herself as a gendered subject of Sociology emphasises a kind of historicity firmly embedded in historical reference, within a place, an historical context constituted by a number of events as textual features. A genealogy or discourse analysis would have sited her within a signifying space, a texture, an intertext which can include many possible disciplines, discourses from the farthest "past" to the near "present," and

generic forms from the popular to the theoretical .

It is apparent that when, as Wearing does, we articulate a poststructuralist approach to Sociology to the traditional voice of an autonomous rational agent, we are dealing with fluid and often puzzling disciplinary relations. We are dealing less with a settled intellectual map than with various, and at times, intersecting axes of discursive negotiation. There are disagreements between intellectuals of various “disciplines” about the nature and proper scope of their disciplines; there are closely related disagreements (from both “within” and “without”) about the demarcations of the disciplines themselves; and there are disagreements about the forms and sites actual, possible or desirable – of affinity, intersection and even identity between “disciplines.”

Wearing fails to recognise that the opening up of Sociological writing to its own recognition of its “other” – rhetoric – directs us towards that “other,” towards rhetorical analysis of figures in Sociological writing. The “other” is no longer merely rhetoric, the negative pole in the dialectic of European thought and culture. Spivak (1987), Said (1978, 1983), Irigary (1985), Niranjana (1992), and Le Doeuff (1991), expose the motivated rhetoric in metaphors for “other.” Wearing does demonstrate a tactical use of tropes for “othering” which now challenge the way the world is presented and ordered. “Woman,” once thought of as “other,” can now be thought along with differently positioned subjects of enunciation involving innumerable bodies: not anonymous women, black people, not orientals or Moslems in the abstract, but historical, living subjects who experience othering, including gendering in local, institutional, cultural and social differences.

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