Doing the Document: Gender Studies at the Corporatized University in Europe: Answering the Sixty-Four Thousand Dollar Question

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Christmas Eve, 2011. 7:30pm. I have been sitting in front of my computer on a phone call with our British consortium partner for more than an hour now. We are in the process of submitting an EU FP7 ITN and I am going through a long e-mail our partner sent earlier that day in which she lists the points we still have to discuss before she will be able to get the signature of her university's officials. Right now she is explaining the complexities of the PhD quality assurances and other requirements in her country. My mobile beeps. Maybe this is a cry from the kitchen; My partner was thinking we'd finally have a proper dinner together. But no, the kitchen is trained to be silent. It is my co-applicant Iris instead, SMSing that she just managed to cut the summary down to the allowed 250 words and will now check the B2 part of the application. That's great. While I am sitting here solving problems larger than life, the application machine keeps running smoothly. I quickly reply with a smiley. In the meantime I get to point 8 of the list with Britain. Our consortium member is explaining that she has been running back and forth that week, cancelled a trip, contacted her head of department, her dean, the doctoral school coordinator and a couple of members of the support staff, even made several phone calls to the national EU contact point herself and is still not sure which route she should take to reconcile local, national and European legislation. The last thing she wants is to blow up a possible consortium agreement in advance, but Britain is not an easy partner when it comes to the development of joint degree programmes.

What do vignettes like these tell us about the environment of gender research in the twentyfirst century? How come that the enterprise of raising money seems to take over our entire lives? Let me unpack my recent experiences with research applications to the European Commission in order to find out what the characteristics of the university are that made me

and my collegues caper about like this on a Christmas Eve. What are the causes and which effects do they have for feminist engagement and solidarity?

1. Mainstreaming

Contemporary gender researchers like all of us here appear to be fully included in the treadmill of academia. On top of our daily responsibilities at work (and in our private lives), we are just as eager to get research funding as our male or mainstream colleagues and work as hard to meet the criteria of quality assessments of research and teaching. And we are successful in many ways: we publish enough articles in peer reviewed journals each year, European Gender Studies has its own European Reference Indexed-list of top journals and we manage to get competitive research monies from our national governments and/or the European Commission. Should we conclude that academia has become more open to critical perspectives? Or did academia's particular norms and values that pass for unbiased universality change in the last couple of years? Does becoming mainstream imply that we are included in the "culture of no culture" (Traweek 1988)? But, then, to what extend are we being the critical researchers we think we are? To what extend has criticality become a false essentialism, an identity that we live by but do not actually perform? Joan Scott has formulated the paradoxes of 'mainstreaming' as follows:

> […] the university into which we have been incorporated is itself undergoing major structural change. Having been critics on the outside, we are now advocates on the inside, looking to preserve the institution – as a faculty-governed, tenure-granting, knowledge-producing space of critical inquiry – from those who would reorganize it according to corporate models […] The need to prevent the "ruin" of the university casts feminists more often as defenders of the status quo than as agents of change. […]Our protectionism sometimes even leads us to collaborate with those administrators who are intent on commodifying the life of the mind. (Scott, 2011: 29)

How to go about all of this is a difficult question. Can we still rely on the established methodologies of feminist engagement with the university?

2. Feminism and the University

Feminism can pride itself on an extensive history of critical and creative engagement with the university. It is not very hard to generate a feminist genealogy of projects of the past for the purposes of understanding the current academic system in Europe and its effects on gender research. For starters, a feminist academic space was first created following the dual-track strategy devised by the earliest academic feminists. Women's studies had to be integrated in the existing disciplinary structure as well as remain autonomous so as to develop a discipline of its own. We are still working in this Janus-headed model, but *what* is the realm in which we seek integration? I am not meaning to be nostalgic about a sacred university system – one that is seemingly unaffected by the market economy. The issue at stake is *this new paradigm of running a university*; the neoliberal or the 'corporatized university' defined by economic determinism and individual excellence, the privatization of responsibility, the maximizing of choices, calculations and interests which generates vehement competition and precarious jobs. Both the competitive mode that tenured staff is entrained in and the flexibility that is asked of the non-tenured are predicated on a running-after-the-money that is mind-boggling.

One goal of the critical and creative engagements of feminist research practitioners within university contexts is giving the culture of no culture a face and resisting the neoliberal reduction of people into capital. Naming the evident as not so evident is part of the feminist project. Let us quickly mention equality projects calculating percentages of women employees in all academic ranks (famously Wennerås and Wold, 1997 and recently Van den Brink, 2010), difference projects working on the embodied nature of the (institutional) life of the mind by 'French feminists', and feminist discourse analyses of, for instance, the very notion of academic excellence as the next speaker Liisa Husu will enlighten us about. I also want to mention briefly the analogy of this kind of work with the continuing tradition of feminists calculating the invisible and often unpaid labor done by women in the household.

Taking a bottom-up approach from my own institutional and personal life, as performed in the opening vignette, I will now try to get a further grip on the changes in academia and on what they mean for feminist research. Where were we when people became commodities? The changes have been implemented in a manner so swift that they are hard to track down. We were complying with them before we knew it. That's why this gathering here today is such a gift and gives us the opportunity to pause and wonder *what it is* that we are engaging in. The operationalization I have chosen for this meditation is Sara Ahmed's work on 'doing the document'. I will try to show how a corporatized university works by allowing gender research to claim a certain space which parameters our research to comply with

economic determinism. This suggests that the university has changed and the field of gender studies has been mainstreamed with it, but the question of the power of definition remains an issue for feminists to take into close consideration. I am still wondering where we were at, when paradigms changed. Now we can only notice that the definition of scholarly excellence has changed and that gender research *is* mainstreamed, but for how long and what is it that we are prompted to do in order to stay on board? And to what extent is the very core of a feminist epistemology being affected? The research project from which I will take my clues and that I have been unsuccesfully seeking funding for, that is, the project that lead me astray in my and my researchteam's attempt at being both critical about and pragmatic towards market-driven mainstream infrastructures, is called INTER(P)LACES.

3. Doing the Document: INTER(P)LACES

In '"You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing:" Diversity, Race Equality and the Politics of Documentation', Ahmed studies the making and circulation of 'diversity documents' in UK Higher Education. In 2000, these documents became required for each institution so as to foster inclusive institutional space. Ahmed claims, however, that the documents rather "[…] create fantasy images of the organizations they apparently describe" (Ahmed, 2007: 607) and therefore "[…] such documents can be used as supportive devises, *by exposing the gap between words, images and deeds*" (Ahmed, 2007: 607; emphasis in original). Ahmed's is an interesting proposition for operationalizing my study of the corporatized university through my own experiences with the development, writing and submission of research applications to the European Commission (EC) within the 7th Framework Programme (FP7). Because, just like the diversity documents that Ahmed has been studying, the applications have only been filed somewhere. We do not see the INTER(P)LACES project that we have been drawing up in minute details around us, just like the UK universities have not become ethnically inclusive. A diversity policy paper is obviously not the same as an application for research, but the analogy is not in their respective identities; the analogy is in their shared non-performative effects. Therefore, we ask: what do EC applications do? Are these documents models that allow for gender research to intervene in the context and content of contemporary academe or do they do nothing but re-instate existing power relations?

The case study that I will be working from has 'INTER(P)LACES' as its acronym. The drafting of the project proposal is led by the Graduate Gender Programme of Utrecht University and Castrum Peregrini, an Amsterdam-based cultural center. INTER(P)LACES is currently a European consortium that aspires to train graduates in Transnational Memory Studies (TMS) and Cultural Heritage Management from a feminist perspective. Starting from the founding assumption within TMS that memories are always mediated and thus subjected to processes of in- and exclusion, we stage the project as a means to educate future scholars and cultural entrepreneurs in the bridging of linguistic, visual, spatial and material turns in the Humanities. We focus on the ways in which buildings (*places*) are *interlaced* with layers of meaning and we focus on the processes of inclusion and exclusion performed linguistically, visually, spatially and materially. We are looking at Europe in its post-WWII, post-colonial and post-Soviet complexities. By now, the consortium consists of 22 academic and non-academic partners from four European countries, plus one university from the USA (notably Harvard University).[1] INTER(P)LACES has been designed to be submitted to FP7 People, a fraction of FP7 as a whole. In this talk, I focus on our 2011-12 experiences which include an application for an MC ITN (Marie Curie Initial Training Network) – an application that entails devising a structure of three mobility periods for each prospective student – and an EMJD (Erasmus Mundus Joint Degree) which has two mobilities. What has been the investments in the doing of these two INTER(P)LACES documents and what do these investments tell us about the state of our academic context?

4. Investments

4.1 Time and Money

The paradoxical situation is that we live in an age of economic determinism, yet it has proved impossible to calculate the price tag of the two INTER(P)LACES applications *for our own institution*. Let me summarize our findings.

The diverse webpages of FP7 tell us that the ITN round of 2011-12 attracted 1,022 applications, of which 12.4% were successful. The call for EMJD proposals generated 133 applications and 6.7% of these have been granted. Both schemes work with 'proportional

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[1] The other universities involved are Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Alpen Adria Universität Klagenfurt and the University of Sussex.

distribution', which means that when 10% of the applicants come from the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), 10% of the money goes to the SSH. This model for budget allocation is framed as 'freedom of research' in the accompanying EC documentation.

If we look at the time spent on the application, we can be sure that in 2011-12 the main applicants – the authors of this piece and Lars Ebert of Castrum Peregrini – have each worked three months full time on INTER(P)LACES. Apart from us, the following categories of people have been working on the files: partners (academic and non-academic); drop outs; consultants for EU applications ('ghostwriters'); administrative staff at all partner institutions including employees of EU Liaison Offices, deans and rectors, directors of research and financial controllers; employees of National Contact Points; the ones handling the document after it has been submitted to the EC; and finally the reviewers (two or three per project). This indicates that the people-hours spent on an application – even if unsuccessful – can be estimated at over 1,000. Let us stress that for the ITN we have to multiply this with 1022 applicants (1,022,000 hours in total) and for the EMJD with 133 (133,000 hours in total). In sum, 1,150,000 hours have been spent on the ITN and EMJD in 2011-12.

4.2 The Body

The gap between the actual time spent so far on INTER(P)LACES and the time we have gotten repaid for by our institution for the writing of the document has severe effects on our academic and personal lives. As good-old Marx has pointed out, the alienation of a capital-driven system is one that cuts workers off from the production process; every worker tightens a screw, but nobody really builds the car. The INTER(P)LACES document has become a product that we can no longer oversee and relate to. We and the consultants have each become the specialist of fragments and, perversely enough, the important content-sections of the PhD projects have become completely deprioritized!. Not only have we lost touch with the concrete product of our intellectual labor (the document), but we have lost a sense of living a productive intellectual life in general. We lost ownership as it were.

The fragmentation of our intellectual life at the institution today can also be understood through the good-old psychoanalytic concept that signifies the perverse pleasure for (illegitimate) (body) parts. The perversion here must be sought on two ends of the research application spectrum: with us and with the evaluators. A focus on the nitty-gritty of the application (numbers, cash flows, consortium agreement, etc.) does not seem to sit well with zooming out to the bigger picture. There always seems to be a flaw in the application that the evaluator can get gratification from, and we recognize this process. To what extent does this

imply: *facilitating* work in academe for applicants and evaluators alike? Applicants need to be able to balance the macro and the micro aspects of the application in order to prove to be worthy of funds and evaluators need to be able to resist the pressure to find flaws in the work of well-meaning applicants that will anyway get the chance to settle (financial) details after the funding has been offered.

Both alienation and perversion surely lead to the compulsions and excesses of working on Xmas Eve or New Year's Eve in order to meet the deadlines set in the first weeks of January. They surely have gotten our partners from Castrum Peregrini to drive through Europe to meet other extra-academic partners in person so as to calm them down and keep them on board after the application has been sent in or rejected. Our obsession with (parts of) the document overtook our investment of the consortium members and our significant others from view……

May 3, 2012. We receive the ITN rejection letter a few weeks after already having gone through the whole circus again for the EMJD application. We recycled parts of the ITN - embracing the motive 'there is triumph in trying' - to enhance our chances to set up the so much wanted PhD training programme in European Transnational Memory Studies and Cultural Heritage Management from a feminist perspective. In the letter, we read that for the ITN we score high on implementation, whereas the evaluators are critical about the theoretical approach and methodology:"This is an interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral project that addresses a number of relevant training needs and research fields. (…)However, there are ambiguities regarding the appropriateness of research methodology and approach, as the proposal does not clearly detail the way in which they complement each other." We have used the same theoretical and methodological tools for the EMJD. We get a bit worried.

July 24, 2012. We receive the feared-for letter from Brussels: "You have submitted a proposal under Action 1 in the framework of the Erasmus Mundus Call for proposals EACEA/42/11. I regret to inform you that your proposal has not been selected. The agency received 133 proposals under Action 1B out of which 9 were selected for funding [...] Sincerely yours, J. Fronia. Head of Unit." What we see next is that we score the highest possible award for our Academic and Research Quality: "The main objectives are clearly described. [...] The innovative aspects concern the methodology and the contents of the programme itself (sic!)as it starts from a spatial angle and puts its scientific focus on the material environment assuring by this way future employability." We also see very good scores for 2. Partnership experience

and composition, 3. Provisions for EMJD candidates and fellowship holders. But we could have done better for the criteria concerning 4. European integration and, yes, 5. Quality assurance. Genderstudies did not help either: "The strong dominance of gender study experts is not well explained, since gender studies are not a focal point of the proposed research." The evaluator is not impressed…

4.3 Politics

We were especially puzzled by the reviewer's report's remark : *The strong dominance of gender studies experts is not well explained, since gender studies are not a focal point of the proposed research.*

Our main investment has been the implementation of feminist thought and practice in TMS. What does it tell us that 'gender', in our complex definition as individual-statistical, social-structural and symbolic variable, does not get through the EU grant process?

Applying for research money as gender researchers situated in the corporate university, arouses from the felt necessity to make sure that Gender Studies and the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) stay on the map of the European Commission's researchpolicy. On this map, SSH is a stable 'rest category,' and in this rest category the Social Sciences usually win. Most of the monies go to the diversified category of Natural, Biomedical and Technical Sciences. For the ITN 8-9% went to SSH projects in 2011 and within the EMJD context we are talking about 6%. This allocation of research money thus leads to inequality, or at least to a stabilization of the power distribution within academia. Overviewing successful projects for SSH, we have found out that key words matter: successful applications have 'Europe' in the project title, its subtitle and its overall rationale. But it is also very clear – when we follow the money – that the question of *whose* Europe is still solidly justified. EC research money appears to flow from center to periphery in time as well as in space. By this, we mean that a comprehensive overview of outcomes of ITN and EMJD applications demonstrates that researchers from countries from the powerful European center have gradually started to invite Eastern of Southern European scholars to join in on their applications. Our project INTER(P)LACES should have done that too in order to be successful, but the questions of inclusion and exclusion that we want to focus on around a network of museum houses do not ask for paying lipservice to the East or the South. This does not mean that power relations within the EU and its neighboring regions are not on the agenda of our project. In fact, they form the very core of our work. But the empirical obsession of our evaluators did not allow for appreciating the decisions we have made on the symbolic level, i.e., on the level of how

stories are being told, whose voices can be heard and whose perspectives remain locked up in the dark corners of history, and/or which instruments we need in order to develop a sensitivity for the until-now undocumented. So our point is: to include the periphery in the center is a process which needs thorough thinking about structures of in- and exclusion instead of just taking empirical equality measures. This is exactly what INTER(P)LACES is about. Which stories can be told and which stories remain unimaginable?

The questions of inclusion and exclusion and of the power of definition are at the heart of our work as well as our working environment. But when we do not comply with the accepted idea of gender as a statistical category for research and policy making which only allows for measuring superficial gender equality or commonplaces such as regional spread, but use gender as an analytical category, we don't get the funding. What does it tell us that 'gender', in our complex definition as individual-statistical, social-structural and symbolic variable, does not get through the grant process? The power of definition within the European arena of Higher Education remains constant, and Gender studies have not been fully integrated. We are not yet part of the power of definition; our definition of in- and exclusion is *not* integrated.

After the rejections we have mentioned so far, we have continued to apply for the INTER(P)LACES project as well as for other projects and under Horizon 2020 finally have been succesfull. Training the next generation of Gender Studies scholars and practicing a certain form of intuited trans-generational justice have been and still are our motor. Our feeling is that *we have to apply.*

Interim Conclusions

Before I'll explain a bit more about the success we finally booked within Horizon 2020 but with a different consortium and a different project by means of Q and A, I'd like to summarize the findings of my analysis of a history of rejections. What does the exercise of looking back at our rejected research applications tell us?

First of all, I have become strongly convinced that the ways in which we are to apply for ITNs and EMJDs reinforce the existing power relations both within Europe itself and in its academia. The model that is built into the document itself as well as what evaluators are to reflect on to measure academic quality reinforces many of the ideals which circle around in our not-so-collective imaginary. The research has to be quantifiable and its effects measurable, i.e., there is a positivist idea about scholarship and management speaking through

accepted projects and rejection letters. Second, the idea of 'representation' that the EC works with is vehemently flat. 'Europe' itself is an empirically defined entity whose borders are not necessarily invested with meanings and stories, but with numbers. The idea of 'difference' that FP7 worked with pertains to numbers too, as it is said that intensive projects that focus on intricate processes of in- and exclusion have to extend to and embrace 'more countries' rather than conduct more complex, multilayered analyses. Thirdly, we can connect to conclusions of other scholars on the effects of all this for the knowledge produced for democracy and freedom. Chandra Mohanty (2003) argued early on, with a reference to Vandana Shiva, that the university has moved from being a public to a private affair, which has severe consequences for the ways in which and for whom knowledges are produced. In addition, a younger feminist scholar, Maria Puíg de la Bellacasa (2001), argued years ago that the university has become a site of immense struggle rather than a space for the free and critical exchange of ideas.

De-Centering Subjectivity

What has struck us most in going through and reflecting on several applications for research is that the world that we run around for; e-mail, talk, phone, negotiate and make budgets for; design consortium agreements and joint degree regulations for, does not and will not come to exist in the current situation. We would like to label this as the far-reaching decentered subjectivity that comes into being at the corporatized university. Whereas we as the UU team wrote and acted as if we were chair of the INTER(P)LACES project or supervisor of a certain amount of funded PhD students, we ended up empty-handed and disillusioned, just like our consortium partners.

Towards Possible Solutions

The question that is on the table right now reads: how *can* academic quality be recognized? We are unwilling to accept the fact that freedom of research leads to a certain form of mainstreaming of critical research, re-establishing the hierarchies we hoped to crumble. The levels we have to take into account are: Europe (empirically and symbolically), academia (what do universities have to be capable of to host projects such as ITN and EMJD?), disciplinarity (the hierarchically ordered tree of academic knowledge production) and difference (how is inclusion into the One, into the drawer of Sameness, as Luce Irigaray

would have it, a form of keeping up the gendered hierarchy?). And here are the strategies that we suggest for feminists in the here and now. We see them as continuous with the double-track strategy that feminists have worked with since its early steps on academic territory. First, we want to argue for installing research applications along the lines of a two-stage rocket. Some funding schemas work like this already[2] and in terms of the intellectual, emotional and physical well being of applicants, we suggest that all EC and national funding agencies decide to work with a pre-application of 5 pages *and feedback*. This way, a certain generosity and co-responsibility is built into the application process; it is simply good manners. Secondly, we advise the members of the gender studies community – including ourselves – to become evaluators and register on the relevant websites of the EC[3] and national governments. This is one attempt at 'integration' and can be a source for a tals or an essay following-up on this one: what happens behind the EC scenes and how to intervene in the current era? Thirdly, and as the counterbalancing gesture of autonomy, we advise the same scholars to connect with feminist PhD students that already research differently along the lines of an affirmative transgenerational politics (Gronold, Hipfl and Lund, Eds., 2009). After all, our desperate attempts at getting a PhD programme sorted out did not stop the inflow to our programme of self-financed PhD students from all over the world! The development and production of gender-sensitive knowledges cannot be halted; these students have already found ways of living liveable lives in the current day academic climate. Fourthly, and in the same light, we advise to continue our feminist networking activities from the bottom-up. Only by investing in feminist initiatives such as ATGENDER: The European Association for Gender Research, Education and Documentation,[4] RINGS and other professional activities, can feminist ways of recognizing academic quality can be sustained.

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[2] See e.g. www.cost.eu
[3] http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/experts
[4] www.atgender.eu