ABSTRACT

ORDERLY BORDERS

Britt-Marie Thurén, Umeå university, Sweden

Presented at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference
August 20-24, 2003 Lund University, Sweden

One theme running through European cultural history for centuries is the disciplining of the body. It continues to be present in current thinking in many ways. For feminist theory, it is important to develop ways to describe how discourses about bodily freedom/ control circulate, and how they are changed/ reproduced. This paper describes how the body was interpreted and handled (dressed, moved, talked about, etc.) at a social club in Madrid, Spain, in the 1990’s. The context was conservative (the club catered to conservative-minded members of the upper middle class) in a wider context where change was held to be a mostly positive word (Spanish big city life). This caused tension and contradictions and meant that the so-called "traditional" discourse on body, gender, family and sexuality was far from traditional in the sense of something old that is unproblematically reproduced. The dominant discourses within the club were implicit arguments against what was going on in the wider society. What happened at the club can be seen as adaptation and reproduction of defensive positions, ideological reinforcements of what used to be dominant (perhaps) but was now insistently questioned by most Spaniards. The club was a sheltered place where conservative persons could reproduce their anti-modern and anti-feminist view of things among each other without having to debate openly with positions they experienced as irritating and dangerous. But since what forced them to do this was a new situation, their interpretations and arguments had to be new, too. Believing they defended something old, they created something new. The purpose of the analysis is to illustrate cultural change in a complex society growing more complex, with special attention to ideas about the body and their significance for processes of power in the gender order.