ABSTRACT

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE?
SWEDISH WOMEN NEGOTIATING FAMILY LIFE.

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Presented at Gender and Power in the New Europé, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference.
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Marriage isn’t an obligation in Sweden today and divorce is very common. A lot of women wish to stay unmarried and the feminist movement has made that a possible solution. For some, to stay unmarried is the ultimate way to express the independence of the typical Swedish woman. But still, is there a way to really qualify or understand kinship without the recognisable family form, the nuclear family?

At the same time as Swedish heterosexual couples make the highest divorce rate in the world gay people are still struggling to get the same rights as heterosexuals. Polyamorous relationships aren’t even close to getting their families confirmed by the Swedish state.

The thesis I am working on is about contemporary Swedish notions of “the family”, and of so to speak “marry and settle down”. I want to argue that the image of the normal family, distributed through media, magazines, and authorities is based on a logic where gender and sexuality are symmetrical bricks in a system of binary opposition. The monogamous marriage is still the ideal symbol of forming a recognisable family form and therefor an important dividing line. There are also specific ideas about age, class and ethnicity, which organise both cultural representations of Swedish families as well as peoples possibilities to make own families.

The empirical data will also tell us something about the Swedish, contemporary cultural image of “The Normal Family” and which possibilities there are to cross the borders between normal and deviant behaviour regarding to class, ethnicity, age and sexual practises.

My paper is a work-in-progress and will include thoughts and experiences from the empirical data I’ve collected so far. I am interviewing Swedish women of different age and ethnicity with a range of sexual and relational practises who have in common that they don’t wish to get married. I’m interested in their views about family life and possibilities of making kinship and family relations without the supervision of the institution of marriage.
In an ongoing study the aim is to understand how individuals, close related to transsexuals are forced to adapt to an altered view of their relative. The sex change process for the transsexual person is often described as both a positive but also a negative process. It is positive in the sense of ‘coming out’ with a feeling of who I am, and negative when relations to friends, family, society and the medical investigation do not work in such a way that is comfortable or acceptable. The point of departure of the study is that the process can affect people in the immediate surroundings in different ways. In this paper it is discussed how a sister of a person who has identified himself as transsexual (ftm), constructs normalcy in an interview, primarily in relation to established norms in the society by identifying her concept of continuity, consistency and change. In this the gender issue is absent and a genderless personality is emphasised. An image of continuity arises. However, gender is in the same time ubiquitous, a problem for the sister is described in relation to the demand for authenticity and gender. Finally, to know about the transsexualism, the problem is solved and she constructs an image of consistency.
Abstract for Theme IV:
Normativity and Hegemony

Intimate Counter-Normativities:
A Queer Analysis of Intimacy in the 21st Century

Sasha Roseneil, University of Leeds

Amid all the social scientific, political and popular discussion of the re-patterning of gender and familial relations in western societies in recent years, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to transformations in cultures of intimacy beyond that which is conventionally defined as “the family”. This paper seeks to develop a queer analysis of intimacy in the 21st century, which is grounded in an appreciation of the variety of ways a growing number of people live their lives outside the heteronorm. It offers a critique of the limitations of the disciplines of sociology and social policy for their failure to move beyond analyses of the hetero-relational, and for their on-going fixation on monogamous, dyadic, co-resident (and primarily hetero) sexual relationships, and changes within these. It argues that in the context of processes of individualization and within increasingly reflexive cultures, sexual relationships are openly lived in an increasing variety of ways. The boundaries between sexual/love relationships and friendships are becoming more fluid, and sexual partnerships are, for a significant group of the population, becoming de-centred in people’s day-to-day lives. It further suggests that there are transformations in the realm of the sexual in train, which I call “queer tendencies”, which are producing a fracturing of the homosexual/heterosexual binary, such that ways of life that might previously have been regarded as distinctively “homosexual” are becoming more widespread. In this context friendship is acquiring an increasing significance in people’s everyday affective lives and in terms of the provision of practical and emotional care at times of crisis. The paper draws on data from a longitudinal research project investigating the friendships and relationships of those not living with a partner (The Friendships and Non-Conventional Partnerships Project, part of the ESRC Research Group for the Study of Care, Values and the Future of Welfare).

Biographical Note

Sasha Roseneil is Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies and Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Leeds. She is the author of Disarming Patriarchy (Open University Press, 1995) and Common Women, Uncommon Practices: The Queer Feminisms of Greenham (Cassell, 2000), and co-editor of Stirring It: Challenges for Feminism (Taylor and Francis, 1994), Practising Identities (Macmillan, 1999), Consuming Cultures (Macmillan, 1999) and Globalization and Social Movements (Palgrave, 2001). She is currently engaged in research on “friendship and non-conventional partnership” and “collective interventions on the terrain of care and intimacy” under the auspices of the ESRC Research Group for the Study of Care, Values and the Future of Welfare.
In contrast to the integrationist imperative articulated in the “families of choice”
terminology, Berlant and Warner’s queer approach emphasizes the radically
alternative aspects of non-heteronormative lives:
“Queer and other insurgents have long striven, often dangerously or scandalously, to
cultivate what good folks used to call criminal intimacies. We have developed
relations and narratives that are only recognized as intimate in queer culture:
girlfriends, gal pals, fuckbuddies, tricks… Making a queer world has required the
development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to
kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation…” (2000:322).
ABSTRACT

THE QUEER-FRIENDLY DANISH WELFARE STATE?
On Heteronormativity and institutionalized, restricted Recognition

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In this paper I discuss the queer-friendliness of the Danish welfare state, and hence the citizenship status of lesbians and gays. Whereas current trends in citizenship studies, concerned with the welfare state’s organization and regulation of citizens’ sexualities, have focused upon equality with heterosexuals and the achievement of rights, the aim of the paper is to contribute to a theoretical turn, focusing instead upon recognition, participation and social justice. The paper enquires for the analytical gains of this turn in studying processes of in- and exclusions of lesbians and gays and in establishing a normative foundation for critique of current laws, as they affect the legal status and political position of lesbians and gays.

In outlining this turn, I try to join, although only in a very tentative way, theories of citizenship, of recognition and finally of justice.

The paper addresses four essential questions:
- What is the role of recognition in citizenship?
- What is recognition analytically understood, and how are we to understand its relation to social justice?
- How do the structures of recognition of the welfare state look like in regard to sexuality?
- And finally, do these structures promote or prevent status equality between lesbians and gays respectively heterosexuals?

Considering these questions, I focus empirically on Danish legislation, concerning family and reproduction issues, including the law on registered partnership, the law on adoption of stepchildren and children from abroad, the law on assisted reproduction, and finally the law on parental leave. All laws reveal restricted recognition, or misrecognition of lesbians and gays due to the institutionalization of heteronormativity. This implies not only denial of full civil rights and welfare services, but also objectification, as this group of nominally equal citizens are treated as objects and subjected to the deliberations and decisions of others, who see them as less than human beings.
ABSTRACT

LEGAL TEXTS AS DISCOURSES: FEMINIST LEGAL STUDIES AS A FORERUNNER

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In this paper on discourse analytic reading of legal texts (cases, law texts, travaux préparatoires, police protocols etc.) we argue that the sociology of law has neglected the potential of discourse analysis and social constructionism as methodological tool. We find that discourse analysis has a potential to reveal implicit meanings that are constructed by legal discourses and to discover hidden assumptions that are accepted by the participants of a particular legal discourse. In feminist legal studies, to the contrary, sex and gender are generally understood as constructed categories. Therefore, we argue that feminist legal theory has significance that goes beyond feminist studies of law. We have been interested in assumptions about sex and gender in legal texts, but also many other legal discourses that construct identities and categories could be analyzed.
ABSTRACT

BODY POLITICS IN SWEDISH GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL REPORTS

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This paper considers conceptions of the human body in four reports from the Swedish government inquiry commissions published between 1968 and 1976. The reports deal with subjects directly connected to the body: legal assignment of sex in cases of transsexualism and intersexuality, abortion, sterilization and sexual abuse. The focus of interest is the manifold and often contradictory conceptions of the relations between body, mind, sex and sexuality in the report on legal assignment of sex (SOU 1968:28). The report asserts four factors essential in assignment of sex: genetic, gonadal, genital and psychosocial. It emphasizes that the juridical sex has to be coherent with the sex the individual identifies as. The Swedish sociologist Ann Kroon has shown that the transsexual’s ability to enact the sex he or she identifies as, in terms of reflecting the gender identity on the body in appearance and behaviour, is crucial. In this interconnection between body and mind, sexuality plays an important role. The authors of the report seem to perceive sexual desire and sexual practice as that which connects the sexed body with the sexed mind. Their reasoning follows what Judith Butler has called the heterosexual matrix. But sexuality might also be that which distinguishes body from mind. Heterosexual desire is an implicit criterion in the diagnosis “transsexualism” (and thus crucial for the outcome of an application for sex change). Transsexuals are being judged on their ability to show off a sexuality that complies with what is expected of person of the sex they feel they belong to. And the future ability to perform heterosexual intercourse is a crucial factor when assigning sex to intersexual children. When the sexed body is incomprehensible, as in the case of intersexuality, or contrary to the sexed mind, as in the case of transsexualism, (hetero)sexuality legitimates the assigned sex.
ABSTRACT

BODIES OUT OF PLACE - on abjection, exclusion, and adaption of intersexed and homosexual bodies within legal and scientific discourses, 1919-1968

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As a part of my dissertation, this paper concerns the definition of the heterosexual matrix, where abjection is a central process of exclusion. By analysing (Swedish) legal investigations on homosexuality (1935, 1941) and intersexuality (1968), the concepts of sex/gender/desire are discussed, as well as the ways in which an ‘impossible’ body is dealt with within this contexts. To be able to carry through such an analysis, it is first of all necessary to differentiate between that which is repressed and that which is foreclosed. The intersexual body, e.g., is not defined or treated as a subject until after a physical change of the body has taken place. This implies a very difficult and dangerous process, where the intersexual body is defined only to be denied an ontology. The homosexual (male), on the other hand, occupies a more ambivalent position, since homosexuality as a category serves an important role of reproducing heterosexual desire. Instead it becomes clear that homosexual bodies have to be defined through heteronormative terms to be adapted and ‘tolerated’, while the homosexual desire per se is declared non-existent, hence excluding a possible ‘same-sex’ desire. Unfortunately the author had no time to include an analysis of the lesbian body, but this will be done in the dissertation, since female homosexuality is defined and treated in much different ways compared to male homosexuality and probably can be said to play a more complex, and marginalised, part in the heterosexual matrix.
ABSTRACT

CONSTRUCTING THE LEGAL SUBJECT

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Abstract will be added.
ABSTRACT

GENDER PLAY: PLAYING MAN AND WOMAN IN ROLE-PLAYING GAMES
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Presented at Gender an Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference August 20-24, 2003 Lund University, Sweden

In role-playing games, the players are taking the roles of their characters and they will try to think as the character would. In tabletop role playing games the whole adventure takes place in the imagination of the playgroup. That makes possible to take many kinds of roles – you can be a halfling or a giant, an elf or an orc, a man or a woman, however you like. In live action role playing games, the real body of the player can make limitations for choosing character, because the player has to look more or less like the character.

Especially the very first tabletop role-playing games have been very masculine. The illustration of older role playing games’ rule-books showed us female characters as curvaceous young women smiling in small bikinis and male characters as active men, often with some weapons, watchful and ready to act fast. The adventures were planned for young men: where was fighting, finding treasures, capturing and conquering with the group of other male characters. Female characters were curiosities in those games. They could be nameless, just be there for male characters to have fun (sometimes even for raping) or they were asking masculine help.

Even now, the majority of the players of tabletop role playing games are male. The adventures have extended from dungeons and capturing to human relationships and solving different problems. Nowadays in games, in the group of adventurers there are very often female characters as equal actors, too. Almost every one of the players has at least once or twice played opposite sex. Is it more difficult to play opposite sex than play an elf or a halfling? I’m studying how some male players describe playing a woman and how they think it differs from playing a man. I am also looking at the characters of female players in the game, and the female player in the playing group.
Feminist researchers inspired by poststructuralist queer positions have discussed how to use discourse theory and analysis. Especially Michel Foucault’s work on the issue of power and a power-analytic has been useful (Simonsen 1996, Mills 1997, Heede 2000). I argue that the analysis of power has to begin with small mechanisms: with their own stories, technics and strategies – and from there it is possible to move towards more general mechanisms and forms of power. To make this move it is necessary to work with theories and methodologies of subjectivity, criticising however, the determinism in discourse theory and analysis (Oksala 1998). In my empirical studies of gender in three Danish classes, which I followed from 1995-2002. I have identified numerous discourses and mini life histories representing subjectivity.

To illustrate my work I will discuss two paradoxes: gender neutrality and gender awareness. The gender neutrality paradox I find when pupils and teachers in interviews on one hand claim, that there are no differences between girls and boys in the class – while they on the other hand construct gender differences in their interpretations of teaching situations, other pupils and other teachers. However when pupils and teachers do a lot to neutralize gender, they construct not only gender differences, but stereotypes in a heterosexual discourse. The gender awareness comes into focus when teachers want to work with differences between girls and boys in an equality discourse. With this focus gender differences so to say paste to gender differences, making the gender of girls positive at the expense of the gender of boys – or vice versa.

What do such paradoxes imply to the contents in and the way of teaching and learning? What and how do the paradoxes do to the persons, pupils and teachers, in the classroom? Does gender tickle unpleasant? Or pleasant and desirable?

Susanne V. Knudsen
Dr., Senior Researcher
NIKK, the Nordic Institute for Women’s Studies and Gender Research
This abstract relates to ongoing research that, ideally, will be a part of a PhD-thesis in sociology, concerning issues of gender and sexuality in research on sexual dysfunctions. At this stage I propose to investigate the distinction between organism and psyche, as it is employed and elaborated in psychiatric and sexological research concerning sexual dysfunctions. Primarily I will focus on one of the many kinds of sexual dysfunctions mentioned in the fourth edition of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV): Hypoactive sexual disorder (HSD), a dysfunction that manifests itself as a lack of interest in engaging in sexual activity. I will analyse how the distinction between organism and psyche figures both in relation to the more general notion of sexuality relied upon in research on HSD, and in explanations of supposed causes of HSD. The distinction between organism and psyche is strongly related to the one between body and mind, and will be analysed as part of a more widespread gender symbolism, and through a feminist conceptual framework.
ABSTRACT


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In my paper I will examine the physical borderlines of heterosexual home in the Hollywood thriller *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (US 1992, dir. Curtis Hanson). In the film the in-between spaces, like the glace house, the attic and the garden with a new fence, become meaningful scenes. A borderline can also be marked by an outsider lurking into the house through a window.

My starting point is Lynda Hart's argument, that the heterosexual woman is a cultural construction, which is often supported by the representations of non-normative people, especially violent women. When analysing the physical borderlines in HRC I am especially interested in the use of the outsider characters to support the white heterosexual family ideology and heteronormativity.

In HRC the main conflict is between the good family woman a vicious nanny, who tries to take the wife's place in the family. There is also a black retarded man helping with the house renovation and mostly working outside the house. He is framed guilty by the blond blue-eyed woman; the actual trespasser. In the end his force is needed to finally destroy the violent woman. Nevertheless he is ultimately an outsider. This character opens interesting questions of the relations of race, ethnicity, capability and heteronormativity.

The conventions of representing violent women in popular culture were changing in the 1980’s and early 1990’s. One of the new types of representations of a destructive woman was a trespasser moving about and around the heterosexual nuclear family or couple. There the main conflict in the end is between two women, the good family woman and the deviant and sexually different woman. The trespasser fully entered the screen in Hollywood thriller *Fatal Attraction* (US 1987, dir. Adrian Lyne). *Single White Female* (US 1992, dir. Barbet Schroeder) came out the same year HRC did. These movies can be seen in the context of the recent crises of the nuclear family and heterosexuality. They can also have interpretations where the vulnerability of the heterosexual family institution is revealed.
Journalism is about making choices, often under tight schedules and little time to think about different options. Therefore journalistic practices are easily a breeding ground for unquestioned routines supported by unspoken house rules. In order to avoid some of the most blatant problems this gave rise in the 1990s to a European wide discussion about racism and promoting of ethnic diversity in journalistic practices (cf. ter Wal (ed.) 2002).

This discussion, however, has so far not opened up the issues of sexual diversity and heterosexism in journalism. I intend to extend the scope of problematic practices by taking a close look at Helsingin Sanomat, the leading national daily newspaper in Finland, and at the ways it deals with homosexuality.

When “The Reader” is defined in the newspaper only as a heterosexual one, one whose uncertain homosexual orientation must constantly be affirmed by the daily news flow, it has formative effects on the journalistic practices. I discuss in my paper the strategies of sexual marginalisation and inclusion/exclusion, as well as the concepts of in/visibility in relation to outing or, here more importantly, to closeting.

The results challenge naive assumptions about the possibilities of promoting multicultural journalism simply by increasing either the number of “different” topics or the actual presence of “more colourful” staff in the paper.
I interviewed 40 Finnish bisexuals about their experiences of being bisexual in Finland for my master's thesis. They told me much about their thoughts of bisexuality and one of the things they talked about was prejudices of bisexuality - maybe not surprisingly. They wanted to discuss and contemplate the public discourse of bisexuality - namely the prejudices, and how they had emerged.

So how the prejudices emerge? One - if not only - space where prejudices are created and discourses strengthened is media. Bisexuality has not been much of an issue in Finnish media. During the last ten years there has been very few articles on it in newspapers or magazines. Bisexuality seems to be such a veiled phenomena that almost all of the articles concentrate on telling what it actually means. Who are bisexuals? What do they do? With whom they sleep with? Usually the articles also try to fight prejudices - but sometimes they manage to strengthen them too.

So what were and are the discourses of bisexuality in Finnish written media around the turn of the millennia? I analyse five articles that have been published in Finnish newspapers and magazines - they have been published in national tabloid newspaper, in the monthly magazine of the biggest Finnish newspaper, in health and sport magazine, in student newspaper and in lesbian and gay magazine. I try to find the discourses of bisexuality which are used when writing about bisexuality to general public.
ABSTRACT

MISS XL VERSUS THE DIET HEROINE: FAT BODIES IN FINNISH TABLOID Magazines

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During the last two decades the visibility of decidedly fat bodies in the mainstream media seems to have increased, but in ambiguous and limited ways. On one hand the medical discourses consider fatness a serious disease and set limits to positive representations of fat bodies, but on the other hand individualistic discourses demand fat acceptance, since “we come in all shapes and sizes”. When these discourses clash, as they often do, controversial images are bound to be produced – not only in terms of body size, but in terms of gender, sexual orientation, “race”, age and class. Many feminist studies have shown that body size is a thoroughly gendered issue deeply rooted in controversial demands of consumption and control in today’s welfare societies, but still there are very few analyses of how fat bodies are culturally represented.

Tabloid magazines and television are some of the few media arenas, where fat and other non-normative bodies are quite usual – therefore, however, the controversy between fat condemnation and fat acceptance is especially prominent in the tabloids. In the paper I compare two often-repeated story formats in Finnish tabloid magazines, the Miss XL beauty contest and its predecessors, and transformation-by-dieting stories. The latter group usually focuses on the monstrosity of earlier fatness and the glory of the transformation, but the Miss XL contest seems to promote the ideology of fat acceptance. How do the gendered, heteronormative beauty norms work or break in the contest? What part may nationality and “race” play in the contest as well as in the transformation stories, considering the history and contexts of Finnish ideals of feminine beauty? Where are the roots of these story formats and how have they changed through time?

From a theoretical point of view it is also interesting to consider how fatness differs from other vectors of difference, such as gender, race, nationality, class, sexuality. Fatness is thought of as a more transformable quality than most others, which may offer potential subversiveness as well as enforce the body norms’ oppresiveness.
ABSTRACT

MORAL MESSAGES IN DUTCH PRIME TIME TELEVISION

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In this paper I present the provisional results of a cross-genre content analysis of moral messages in Dutch prime-time television. Television nowadays provides a significant range of stories that teach us how to reflect on and deal with issues in everyday life. In short, according to some, television has replaced Grand Narratives such as religion and communism as the vehicles of moral change and progress. Some authors consider (popular) television to be the cause of society's moral decay. Yet, the actual moral content of television messages remains under researched. The research will be based on a content analysis of Dutch prime-time television. A cross-genre selection will be made based on ratings and market shares of the programs recorded. In the analysis all nine national channels, public and commercial, are included. The method of analysis is of a qualitative nature. Focus of analysis will be the normative messages about moral issues such as friendship, love, heroism and legitimate violence. One of the main purposes of this study is to find out which moral messages are presented in prime-time television and how these messages are related to gender, ethnicity, class and age.
ABSTRACT

ADOLESCENCE, GENDER AND SEXUALITIES

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Adolescence is a biographical phase, in which corporeality and sexuality become the central issues. At the same time social norms and social definitions of womanhood have an enourmous impact on girls. But how do adolescent girls discuss this issues in every-day-life situations, on which social ideas of gender, femininity, masculinity, homo- and heterosexuality do girls refer to? Which ideas and images do they develop themselves? And how can these issues be analysed?

In my paper I'll present the results of my dissertation thesis (2002) in which I'm trying to answer these questions.

The empirical data are video recordings I took in a girls group (age 11-12) I instructed during the school term 1997/98. During this term the girls produced their own video film called 'Girl Power', based on script they had collectively devised. The video recordings consist of the 35-minute-film as well as observation clips of the actual interaction and discussions between the girls during the video making process.

The story of the video film 'Girl Power' is about two quarreling girl gangs: the 'Black Outs' and the 'Modern Girls'. Especially in the first part of the film, the Black Outs represent what is commonly called 'masculine' behaviour, the 'Modern Girls' reflect what is commonly called 'female' bahavior. During a concert of the Back Street Boys one of the Modern Girls is being kidnapped and the Black Outs offer their help. The two gangs join efforts and sucessfully free the kidnapped girl from a mysterious black man. In the end they become friends.

I'll present how this data can be analysed with an interdisciplinary proceeding based on an ethnomethodological view of the construction of social reality and on the method of conversation analysis combined with the search for culturally determined subtexts.

I'll also present some exemplary readings referring to the questions above and some refelections on practical pedagogical work with girls.
Oriental dance (belly dance, *raqs sharqi*) in Finland is a site for negotiating gendered, ethnic and cultural differences. The purpose of my paper is to examine Finnish Oriental dance practitioners’ conceptions of these differences through Sara Ahmed’s notions of stranger fetishism and ethical encounters. For the analysis, I will choose interviews I have conducted with Finnish dancers and teachers during 1998–1999.

Orientalism and multiculturalism are examples of discourses defining Oriental dance in the West. Finnish dancers are familiar with the Orientalist representation of a belly dancer as over-sexual and mysterious. They cope with this exotic image by ignoring or reappropriating it. However, Orientalist discourse is also reproduced in the conceptions and practices of dancers. In some of my interviews Egyptian women were seen as more natural, feminine and subordinate than their Northern sisters living in the land of gender equality. The ideas of multiculturalism—all different but equal—were celebrated among some of the dancers as well. Middle Eastern dance, music and costumes were detached from their political and religious background and they became matters of styles to be consumed.

Discourses of Orientalism and multiculturalism can be read as stranger fetishism, which according to Ahmed “invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts ‘the stranger’ off from the histories of its determination.” The knowing subject imitates the stranger and simultaneously fixes difference onto the stranger and strange culture while allowing herself the freedom to choose individually whether to become or not to become the stranger.

Even more challenging than the analysis of stranger fetishism, is to discover possibilities for culturally responsible, ethical encounters. What could be read as subversive ways of thinking difference in the practices of transnational dance forms? I hope to be able in presenting some alternatives in my final paper.