

Gender – Still a Useful Category of Analysis?

FORSKERINTERVIEW MED
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Er køn stadig en brugbar analysekategori? For ti år siden gæstede den amerikanske kvindehistoriker Joan Wallach Scott Norden, herunder også Københavns Universitet, hvor hun under stor bevågenhed holdt en gæsteforelæsning. Joan Scott havde få år forinden skrevet den banebrydende artikel *Gender a Useful Category of Analysis* (1986), hvor hun forsøgte at formulere en feministisk tilgang til den poststrukturalistiske tænkning. Det var på et tidspunkt, hvor poststrukturalisme stadig nærmest blev betragtet som et skældsord blandt kvinde- og kønsforskere.

Som sådan var artiklen og Joan Scott med til at bane nye veje. Indenfor den historiske kønsforskning betød det, at den hidtidige blanding af overvejende *herstory* og marxisme blev helt eller delvist afløst af poststrukturalistiske og konstruktivistiske tilgange. At netop denne artikel i dag er oversat til 5 sprog, herunder til japansk, vidner om dens store gennemslagskraft. – I interviewet fastholder Joan Scott køn som

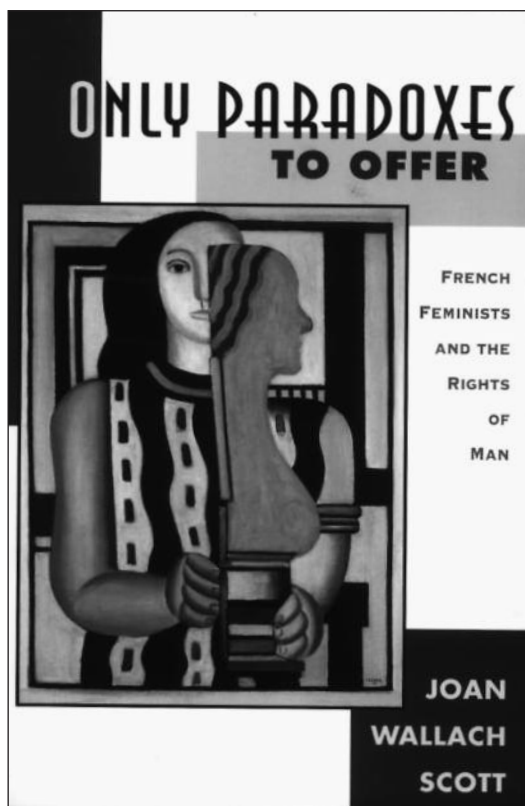
Interviewet foregik på en camp adresse i Greenwich Village på en januardag i 1999

en vigtig analytisk kategori, men hun tager samtidig afstand fra den forfladigelse, der er sket i den akademiske jargon. "Gender" er blevet for mainstream og et ord, der lukker for analyse, fremfor at åbne og stille nye spørgsmål.

I interviewet giver Joan Scott også et bud på, hvad der er sket indenfor "Women's Studies" i de sidste 10 år. Hun bruger i interviewet termen *Women's Studies*, som samlebetegnelse for det, der foregår. Også når det gælder institutionerne, ved Joan Scott, hvad hun taler om. I 1981 var hun i sin egenskab af professor i historie ved Brown University med til at starte *Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women* ved samme universitet. Hun var centrets første direktør indtil hun i 1985 blev professor i socialvidenskab ved det prominente forskningsinstitut *Institute for Advanced Studies* i Princeton. Stillingerne her bliver ikke slået op men besat ved udnævnelse. Dette sker i instituttets egen selvforståelse på grundlag af *excellence* og ikke på grundlag af køn. Det betød, at Joan Wallach Scott indtil for nylig var den eneste kvinde blandt 25 mandlige kolleger. I hele instituttets historie havde der kun været en kvindelig professor før hende!

Samtidig med tilknytningen til dette institut har Joan Scott status af adjungeret professor ved det nærliggende Rutgers University. Det betyder, at hun holder kontakt med undervisning og det pulserende universitetsliv. I 1997 redigerede Joan Scott et temanummer af tidsskriftet *differences* om *Women's Studies on the Edge* (Vol. 9, no. 5), hvori hun stillede kritiske spørgsmål til en række forskere ved institutionerne

Der er stor spændvidde i Joan Scotts forfatterskab som består af en række bøger og talrige artikler, hvoraf flere er prisbelønnede. Fra den første bog med titlen *The Glassworkers of Carroux: French Craftsmen and Political Action in a 19th Century City*



(1974) over artikelsamlingen *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988) til den nyeste bog om fransk feminisme: *Only Paradoxes to Offer. French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (1996) afspejles også 20-30 års intellektuelle strømninger. Selvom den røde tråd ser ud til at være køn og politik, så viser forfatterskabets udvikling at dette emne kan ses under mange synsvinkler. Fra marxistisk farvet socialhistorie, over foucaulsk inspireret poststrukturalisme til Joan Scotts aktuelle og endnu uafsluttede arbejde med psykoanalyse og den internationale kvindebevægelse. Joan Scott placerer sig altid på kanten, af det der lige nu står i focus, og har i tidens løb frygtløst og med analy-

tisk skarphed sat både marxistiske og post-strukturalistiske koryfæer under lup. F.eks. i analysen af den kendte engelske marxist og historiker E.P. Thompson i *Women in the Making of the English Working Class* (Scott 1988 – oversat til dansk i årbog for Arbejderbevægelsens historie 1989). Alt i alt må Joan Scott betegnes som en fornem repræsentant for den dynamik og analytiske dybde, som hun selv slår til lyd for i interviewet.

At dømme ud fra det årlige møde i *American Historical Association*, som i år fandt sted i Washington DC, er der sket en hel del mere i det amerikanske historiemiljø end i det danske, når det gælder inddragelse af kønshistorie. F.eks. var der oplæg, som handlede om køn i alle paneler. Det gav mange steder anledning til helt nye og livlige debatter. F.eks. i panelet om køn i rumfartens historie, hvor det viste sig at kvindelige amerikanske astronauter blev diskrimineret og holdt ude af rumfarten i USA langt op i tiden. Ikke af teknologiske, men af politiske grunde. Det skete bl.a. i ly af den kolde krig og opbygningen af ideologiske modstykker til ligestillingsidealene i USSR, som tillod kvindelige astronauter.

På trods af denne åbenhed, så eksisterer der stadig store reservationer overfor en historiker af Joan Scotts støbning. Det kom bl.a. frem, da hun sidste år stillede op som præsident til organisationen. Hun blev ikke valgt, fordi, som hun selv siger i interviewet, kvinderne ikke stemte på hende. Jeg er, siger hun, blevet et symbol på en type post-strukturalistisk feminisme, som er uacceptabel for mange.

For nu at bruge en af Joan Scotts egne pointer, er det måske blot endnu et af de paradokser, som historien er så fuld af.

Hilda Rømer Christensen: Do you think that gender is still in 1999 a useful category of analysis?

Joan Scott: Yes and no. I think it is still a useful category of analysis because it lets you ask questions or identify issues about the relations between men and women: how they are constructed, how masculine, feminine, male, female are being understood at a particular historical moment. But the trouble with gender in 1999 is that it has become so routine a category for so many people.

They'll just say "gender" as if it carries an explanation of its own. As if, if you say 'I'm doing a gender analysis' you already know what you are going to find out: that men are superior, women inferior; that women have been discriminated against in certain ways that there are certain stereotypes operating and so on. And I think that once any category becomes used that way, becomes predictable – when people think that saying the word explains the phenomena – then you have to start troubling the water a little bit and looking for some other way of asking the questions. In fact in my latest book *Only Paradoxes to Offer* I probably use the word sexual difference or the differences between the sexes as much as I use the term gender. I hardly use gender at all. In Anglo-American scholarship gender has become a synonym for women and men rather than a category that opens up analytical questions, which in 1986 it really did.

I don't think that is true all over the world. I think that one of the very interesting things to see is the way that gender has been appropriated. It is not used in the same way in China for example or in Africa. In South Africa for example, gender is an important concept to add to thinking about race and racial and class division. In China gender opens up a whole set of analytic possibilities. To people in eastern Europe it is a way of avoiding getting involved



in battles about post-communism and feminism and the traditional versus the non-traditional role of women and so on. So I think it is a category that, depending on where in the world you look at it and how it's appropriated, still has a lot of useful work to do. The only place that worries me is the United States where it's becoming stale, or we assume we know too much about sexual difference simply by saying the term gender. So I try not to use it, I try to say, what I want to understand here is how women are being constructed, or on what ground women are being excluded from citizenship or some particular area of activity. Because those really were the questions gender was meant to probe: Why are differences between the sexes usually attributed to nature? How are differences between the sexes being used to justify things that don't seem to have anything to do with gender or with women and men, but somehow organize people's understanding of hierarchy, power, and social organization?

HRC: So in a way your own suggestions of the category in the 1980s has become too great a success?

Joan Scott: Yes

HRC: What should be done then? In terms of knowledge and also in terms of institutions?

Joan Scott: Let's take scholarship first. I think that feminist scholarship needs always to provoke, to destabilize accepted ways of thinking. So if gender in the 1980s was meant to say: "Wait a minute, women are not just a simple group to be studied, but it is how women get defined as they are, to hold the roles that they do, in relation to men. They have to be studied, how the system of organizing sexual difference get put into place and used for different reasons and different times. That was what gender was meant to address before. In

some ways the questions are the same, but "gender" is too easy an answer now. In the US, in fact, gender is no longer a question (about, say, how sexual difference becomes knowledge of "nature"), but an answer. And people talk about "gender identity" as if it were a fixed product of culture and society. In order to attack the identity issue, I've been trying to use psychoanalysis because it suggests that identities are individualized, variable, and mutable. I think that maybe psychoanalysis will give us some critical angle of vision. Which is not to say that I am a convert to psychoanalysis or that I have given up on Foucault's analysis of power. But it does say that I am looking for ways to make more complicated or to not let us take for granted understandings that we don't have. I think that the minute you start thinking that you really know something, you are in trouble because then you don't ask curious questions or call into question the way people have begun to take something for granted.

HRC: It is what some of the scholars in the volume of the journal *differences* (special editor, Joan Scott, 1997) point to. For example Wendy Brown claims a certain "moment of thought" which might apply both to current institutions and to knowledge. Other scholars such as Biddy Martin suggests a more all-encompassing look at the current transformation of the university as an institution. Also she argues for a genuinely interdisciplinary approach and the inclusion of natural sciences in the feminist discourse. Do you see your own projects as a sort of parallel in the sense that you try to innovate interdisciplinary approaches?

Joan Scott: Well, I think that issue of *differences* actually gives you a good sense of the range of the institutions and scholarship in the United States. The variety is tremendous. Just as there is no homogeneity in the categories 'woman' or 'women', East

and West, there is no singular definition of American feminism, no one model of Women's Studies. There is a range, not only of opinions, but of institutions in the country that make women's studies more useful in some places than others, more conservative or more radical depending on how you define conservative or radical and what it means in its institutional context. So for example one of the pieces in the issue is by Afsaneh Najmabadi, an Iranian woman who teaches at Barnard College. She talks about being invited to a conference and finding herself listed as a Muslim woman who was going to speak about postcolonial issues. She said she was horrified when she saw the listing because Iran was never a colonial nation or subjected to colonial domination and she is not a Muslim. She's been secular for her whole life. The categorization of her in this way as very troubling. And what she talked about is the fact that it is very hard for her to find her space in this tightly organized world of women's studies, women of color, white women, post-colonial, colonial, first world, third world, since none of those categories accurately depict who she is. So she makes the argument that what is needed for people like her is a much looser approach to women's studies which deals not in identity, but that gives space to differences. Another article is the discussion that Evelyn Hammonds and Beverly Guy-Sheftall have about women's studies at an all black women's college in the south – Spellman College in Atlanta. There it is clear that women's studies is crucially important as a separate program because those undergraduates are very reluctant to raise critical questions about the position of women, and the faculty has been reluctant to incorporate women into the curriculum. There women's studies serves a radical, critical function. On the other extreme, there is Wendy Brown's piece about Santa Cruz, where things have become so politically correct and the attempt to think only in terms of tight cate-

gories of identity is so limiting that somebody who wants to raise new questions is simply ostracised as being against women or not doing what she should be doing for women. Yet another example is the new gender studies center at the University of Chicago, which includes gay and lesbian studies along with gender studies. This is very different from what is happening elsewhere in the country.

At some places gay and lesbian studies are competing with women's studies for resources and you think to yourself "crazy," but it is happening. At Chicago they are figuring out a way to do it differently. Chicago is a place that never had a women's studies program because the university held to universalist principles.

Given that history, it is terrifically important to have a challenge to the standardized curriculum going on.

My favorite part of the *differences* volume is the interview I did with two Brown women's studies students. They give you hope for what women's studies could be. They say "I learned all my theory in women's studies." They think that rigor is really important, that women's studies was the best education they got. For me they represent the wave of the future. They are very clear that they are not about the politically correct kind of women's studies that Wendy Brown is describing. These students are doing the most interesting kind of interdisciplinary work under the umbrella of women's studies. So I think that my answer would be that it really depends on what institution you are in and I will fight very hard to keep women's studies as an option as long as it serves a critical, radicalizing function.

HRC: So you are arguing in favor of differentiated strategies?

Joan Scott: I think that's exactly right. That in fact the pressure that feminism and women's studies apply is necessary because it

insists that the curriculum include women. You observed that American Historical Association meeting had lots of sessions that included gender. My bet would be that without an active women's organization in the American Historical Association, that would start to disappear. So that the pressure needs to be maintained. Discrimination against women hasn't gone away. There has to be an organization dedicated to these questions, but it has to be an organization that is open to change, that doesn't become dogmatically invested in its categories and become for feminism what the Stalinist freezing of categories of class analysis became for Marxism.

HRC: In the US you have had a certain success in changing gender and race inequality by means of affirmative action. I recently read a piece by Judith Butler on affirmative action, where she critical analyses the problems of affirmative action and the basis of it in light of its dismantling in California.¹ Where do you see the problems?

Joan Scott: I think Judith Butler is offering a critique from the side of affirmative action. She wants to change inequalities of power that rest on race and gender. But making the argument is hard because of the tensions within affirmative action policy itself. In order to claim equality, in order to end discrimination based on ascribed differences, you have to pay attention to difference and treat those discriminated-against groups differently, more favorably than others. So if you are black and you are discriminated against, you'd say "I shouldn't be discriminated against, because I am the same as any other person in this society, I want a color blind society". At the same time, in order to be a colorblind society, you have to look at the category "black" and see how people identified as black are being treated.

Likewise with women. But how do you



do that? You would have to say “how many women are employed in this place?”, “how many blacks are let into this university?”. There is no way to make sure discrimination isn’t happening without naming the group that is being discriminated against. This is not reverse discrimination because in order to achieve a balance you have to watch out for discrimination and make sure it doesn’t happen. And the way to do that is to keep track positively of the success of classes or groups of people, because they are discriminated against as members of groups, not as individuals.

They can’t get to be taken as individuals because they are treated as members of groups. The backlash against affirmative action, collects stories of individual “injustices”: a job advertised, for example, in women’s studies for which a qualified man applied and was not hired because of the pressure to increase the numbers of women on the faculty. There are, of course, abuses, but for the most part affirmative action worked. It produced the black middle class in the United States, and increased the numbers of women in professions and in the academy, and it brought attention to the issues of gender and race in ways that never would have happened without affirmative action.

Some of the success of affirmative action in this country has to do with size of the United States and the openness of job markets and the susceptibility of the universities to pressure for greater equality. This is simply not true in the (Continental) European university which has a much smaller system, much more tightly controlled by the professors at the top, who can block the appointment and promotion of women much more easily than here. Here the numbers are getting better. In fact the trend may be to another kind of sexual division of labor within the university: men in sciences, economics, computer science, women in the arts and humanities.

HRC: This brings us into the discussion of center and periphery in regard to the academic disciplines. There seem to be a growing acknowledgement of gender studies as a field one can study. But when it comes to filling up of positions in the disciplines it is not taken into account as a core issue.

Joan Scott: Women’s studies is an example of good interdisciplinary work. But I also think that we need discipline. And I don’t know what has happened in Denmark with cultural studies, but here we have a cultural studies movement, which has a good and a bad side. The good side is that new theories are being brought to bear on all sorts of activities that haven’t been considered “serious” before – fashion, film, advertising, and the like.

The bad side is a certain eclecticism and lack of disciplinarity and a tendency to treat cultural phenomena of all sorts in the same way, as evidence of “power.” I find a certain loose interdisciplinarity very disconcerting because it seems to me that one of the things that studies of women and gender need to do is establish their serious, empirical and methodological base. I think the best way to do that is to have some disciplinary training somewhere on the way, not to say that you are forced to stay in history only. But I think people need to be trained as e.g. sociologists or historians, and then bring new theoretical and substantive issues to existing disciplinary paradigms. How does consideration of women (or gender) change our ideas of politics? Of historical causality?

I want the future of women’s studies to be tied to disciplines. The disciplines still need pressure from women’s studies.

Change has happened, but not enough. In history, for example, textbooks may mention women in connection with the industrial revolution as factory workers and in the suffrage movements of the early twentieth century.

Otherwise, women are not integrated and I think the challenge of integrating questions about women and gender is still there. It's true in hiring too. As long as a department treats "women" as a specialty separate from general history, and refuses to hire – in a French history position, say – a woman whose economic history research focuses on women workers or whose political history research focuses on a woman politician, we still have work to do within the discipline.

There is a need for people to continue to produce scholarship that pushes on the center, that pushes on the traditional assumptions about what matters and what doesn't matter. Because although I think that you could argue that there has been a lot of fragmentation, I still think when you come down to it, there's a kind of central core of – in the case of the United States history – of national history which is either a genderless story or really a story about men.

I think that the question about gender, how it's working, whether it's working, what is being done in the name of sexual difference and how sexual difference is being produced, is always going to be important to ask. The question, I think, for the people in women's studies is: how to get more people than ourselves to ask that question. How to make it so routine that no student doing a dissertation in economics would rule it out. So routine that a student in sociology doing a dissertation would not be allowed by anybody on the committee to propose a topic without having said "I have considered the issue of gender, here is how it matters" or "I don't think it matters at all". So that it became as routine as the questions about class or about institutional organization or about power distribution. And so it seems to me it is not that you really want to make gender part of the package of questions that any serious scholarly work has to ask. Every bit of research doesn't have to be about

gender, but it should be considered seriously, ruled out rather than ignored. I think we are still a long way from that. In the United States there are many more people willing to ask questions about gender than there used to be. But that isn't the case overall. Of course, there's a contradiction in my saying this – that gender should become part of routine scholarly questions – and what I said earlier – that when gender is too routine, it loses its critical edge. But I think that's a tension we have to maintain, not resolve: we push to be included and at the same time, work critically within and against the grain of revailing disciplinary attitudes and practices.

HRC: Let us return to your own work, your latest book *Only Paradoxes to Offer* and your current project on the international feminist movement. To take the book first: I found it enjoyable to read not least your configurations and stress on paradoxes, instead of the usual narrative of coherence. But what also struck me was the position of Foucault, I did not find any references in the index, only a short paragraph in the last chapter.

Joan Scott: First of all, *Only Paradoxes to Offer* was a kind of challenge to myself to write theorized history, but to make the history the focus of the book, rather than the theory. Though I would say that many of the arguments are influenced by Foucauldian notions of power and genealogical analyses of the individual and the self and gender. And certainly the arguments about the discontinuity of history. But I didn't want to make a big deal out of theory because I wanted the book to stand as a piece of history, informed by theory, to be sure, but not primarily "about" theory.

When I finished writing *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988) there were a lot of reviews that said "well, this is all very fine but can she write history any more"? So the absence of a whole lot of theoretical appa-

ratus is strategic. I wanted to exemplify concretely what I had said abstractly in my earlier work. That was one thing.

The second thing was that in the course of doing the book, things came up that seemed to me to need a psychoanalytic explanation: the best example I can think of now is the one chapter on Hubertine Auclert. An election official describes looking at Auclert, who was protesting women's exclusion from suffrage by turning over a ballot box, and says, "I looked at her and I froze, it was as if I had seen the Medusa". And I said to myself, that's just asking for a Freudian reading. So I re-read Freud and decided to interpret this remark as a fear of castration, not castration in the literal sense, but in the metaphoric sense. This led to the point that masculinity and citizenship are tied up together so that attacks on the exclusivity of male citizenship are felt as attacks on masculinity. The man feels himself threatened by the fact that women want to do what he thinks of as an act that only men can do. Women want to take away some power that only men can have.

Then I began to read more psychoanalysis partly because it seemed to be current again among some historians. Partly because I started to think that if gender was about sexual difference and if sexual difference was about sexual identity, then the one theory that addresses that directly is psychoanalysis, so it would make sense to try to learn more psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis also might provide a way of troubling notions of 'gender identity.'

I had ruled psychoanalysis out in the essay "Gender as a Useful Category of Analysis" (1986) as ahistoric. So I thought that maybe I should think this over again. I teach a graduate course on history every fall and I can do it on anything I want. So I spent a whole semester reading Freud. The following year we read Lacan. And then this fall I did a course on fantasy. We read Freud, Lacan, LaPlanche, Zizek and others such as the American psychoanalyst and



philosopher Jonathan Lear. All of whom have written about fantasy and have theorized the relations between individual and collective fantasy, between individual subjectivity and collective identification. So that is what I have been doing lately. Not that I think that psychoanalysis will become the only way I understand the world, but it lets me ask questions about identification and about the role of unconscious fantasy and conscious action which I would never have asked before. And so that's the place where I am now, just thinking through these questions. I don't think of myself as a die hard follower of any school, even though people have labelled me a post-structuralist feminist. I don't know exactly what that means. A better description is that I read widely, looking for theoretical approaches to help me make sense of "gender" and help destabilize routinized ways of thinking about it.

HRC: How did you get to do the international feminist movement as you have lately done?

Joan Scott: It came out of personal experience at an international conference on "Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminisms in International Politics" held at Rutgers University and the Institute for Advanced Study in 1995. It was an attempt to look at different feminisms all over the world and to ask what was at play in international feminism. Were ideas being transferred from the West to the East? Was "feminism" a singular or plural movement? Should we talk instead about "feminisms." This conference was really fascinating and really upsetting. People fought with each other. It was just unbelievably contentious. But also very productive and I decided that this was not an example of feminism versus anti-feminism or imperfect adaptations of feminism. But this was what international feminism was: a contentious political negotiation of differences in the name of the

emancipation of women. I began to wonder what the historical experience of international feminism had been. So I went back to the first international congresses, starting in the 1880s. And I've also been reading the records of the most recent UN conferences: Mexico City, Copenhagen, Nairobi, Beijing.

At the same time, I've been trying to think about traditions of feminist action in terms of fantasy. Not fantasy as the opposite of reality – but fantasy as a way that people establish identifications that transcend national boundaries that transcend time.

HRC: You always tend to stress politics as an area of importance for gender studies, why?

Joan Scott: I guess because I think that that is the place where the lines of power are most directly negotiated. It is true that power is negotiated in other realms: doctor-patient, teacher-student, household etc, but it is politics that appeals to me. I guess it is because that is where law and regulation and the establishment of social norms are finally contested and put into effect as well. So I am interested for those reasons.

And because for some reason political history, no matter what happens with cultural history or social history, political history is a preoccupation, an ongoing preoccupation of historians. So if we are going to bring gender into the story, bringing gender into political history is a bigger challenge than bringing it into the history of the work or cultural practice, for me.

HRC: So in that sense you are really in the core of mainstream history!

Joan Scott: I am trying to bring gender into the core of the enterprise and that's why I think that my *Only Paradoxes to Offer* book is not only about feminist claims for political rights, but is a re-reading of the history

of French republicanism. What I argue is that the exclusion of women from citizenship by a theory that claimed to be democratic, indeed that a certain view of democracy depended on the exclusion of women. I want to argue that through the feminist lens you can re-read the dominant political history and that seems to me a way of bringing the margin right into the center. And I still insist, as we did at the very beginning of women's history, that feminist history can provide a different understanding of history in general.

HRC: It is tempting to ask for more context, the relationship of the prominent women you have focused on to a broader women's constituency, the network of elite women e.g.

Joan Scott: I had to limit my story. And these women, in fact, aren't the elite, they are middle class, but they are not like Simone de Beauvoir.

Somebody in France asked why I didn't include Simone de Beauvoir, and I said because nobody in that book is a philosopher. They are all political activists. Even Madeleine Pelletier, who was a psychiatrist, was a very marginal figure and poor. She is more the equivalent of somebody who would be the head of an abortion rights organization today. She is just a radical for her time, but she is not in there with Simone de Beauvoir at the higher level of the elite. But I think also there has to be lots of different work. I don't think that the work I do is the work everybody wants to do or should do. I think there are a lot of things people should be documenting like the lives of ordinary women, writing about cultural and social issues. It's just that the challenge for me has always been to get into politics.

HRC: It surprises me that you tend to talk about yourself as somebody on the margins of American history. As a very productive

scholar at one of the most prominent research institutions in the country you seem to be right at the center of American intellectual life.

Joan Scott: I feel very lucky to be at the Institute. I don't think I am marginal, I think that I am controversial. When I ran for presidency last year of the American Historical Association I was not elected and that was because a significant number of women did not vote for me. I have become the symbolic figure of unacceptable post-structuralist feminism. It doesn't make me marginal it makes me very controversial.

HRC: But you do not consider yourself as part of the intellectual mainstream?

Joan Scott: No, not really in the mainstream. Probably I would feel as if I were compromising something if I were completely in there. I would start to worry. You would too. Somebody might consider you a representative of the status quo.

HRC: A final question which is also a big one. Some feminist scholars have suggested a merging of poststructuralist thinking with the thinking of German sociologist Jürgen Habermas – here understood as an epitome of Enlightenment discourse?

Joan Scott: What I object to about Habermas is the notion of rational communities of discourse. In a way that excludes a certain kind of political contestation – doesn't pay any attention to the way in which those communities exclude women or "others." For me he doesn't pay attention to the kind of questions I am interested in, which are the questions about how and why groups are excluded in the name of some kind of universal privilege. He doesn't go after any of the contradictions of the Enlightenment society that he describes. He just talks about the institutions and the foundations of civil society. But what about

those who are excluded from the conversation?

What about the kind of fundamental difference that has to be negotiated in democratic society? Feminists are a good example, feminists have been excluded from communities of rational discourse because they were not thought to be rational. Any protest in the name of women's rights was considered to be crazy. And if you can't participate in the conversation then how do you influence decisions and the organization of communities. I just don't find Habermas interesting because contradiction and contestation aren't central to his preoccupation.

HRC: On the other hand if you take him to this limit as a representative of Enlightenment discourse, a certain amount of this is perhaps still necessary in order to act politically on a day to day basis. As Stewart Hall puts it, there exists a sort of gap between deconstructionist approaches and how to act politically.

Joan Scott: I don't think there's anymore of a contradiction between deconstruction and politics than there is between Marxist theory and politics. Theory and politics are different endeavors, even though they influence one another.

NOTE

1. Judith Butler: "An Affirmative View". In *Representations*. No.55, summer 1996. Special Issue: "Race and Representation: Affirmative Action".

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