

The State of Gender Studies in Germany: The current situation in research, teaching and institutions

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Abstract:

After thirty years of women's and gender studies we can see that the subject has established itself in two ways. By many academics it is regarded merely as a label testifying to their political correctness, whereas some view it as an area of research with considerable potential. Prof. Würzbach outlines and analyses the different currents within gender studies and their struggles for academic integration in Germany, their developments, controversies and expanding forces.

1 After thirty years of women's and gender studies we can see that the subject has established itself in two ways. By many academics it is regarded merely as a label testifying to their political correctness, whereas some view it as an area of research with considerable potential. If however we ask where prospective students of gender studies can apply to in Germany, or who encourages students' or university teachers' interest in the subject, the answers are not at all obvious. Institutions, researchers and teachers of gender studies are not easy to find. The subject rarely forms part of the remit of a university chair or even of a course of study. In some cases a specific central institution of a university is responsible for gender studies, and individual postgraduate programs have more or less explicitly included the topic in their courses. The occasional research project also focuses on the theme. Finally, a number of lecture courses in various disciplines at many universities reveal an interest in the subject.

2 Much research is thus needed to discover gender studies in Germany's academic system. In contrast to the USA and Britain, where gender studies has for many years been permanently built into courses at most universities, in Germany this academic area flourishes almost in secret - though where it does, it is most effective and successful. Institutional resistance, still rife today especially in conservative universities, has contributed to the relatively low incidence of gender studies in Germany. In the end, however, the promotion of the subject is always dependent on the initiatives of individuals. The motivation for it has always remained confined to relatively few female academics and a very small number of men. Finally, although the integration of women's and gender studies in cultural-study inquiry has in no way diminished the effectiveness of their academic investigations, the explicit nature of gender orientation has sometimes been obscured. I should therefore like first to give a brief overview of the institutions offering opportunities for

gender studies at German universities, and then outline recent developments in the academic understanding of this research area.

1. The institutionalization of gender studies: initiation, coordination, and presentation of research and teaching

3 The introduction of women's studies in German universities in the 1970s, arising in the first instance out of the women's movement, resulted in considerable activity in research and teaching. From its beginning women's studies and later gender studies have met with overt or covert resistance. Even today, serious research in this field does not have the reputation of helping in one's career. There are various sources of information dealing with the relevant research. They can be specifically accessed via the home page of the particular university. A comprehensive information service is provided by Bonn University, the *Center of Excellence Women and Science (CEWS)*, which gives an up-to-date report on, amongst other things, the situation in universities, research centres, women's and gender studies research, grants, conferences, and also academic policy, equal opportunities policy, and appointments. An annotated list of relevant university centres can be found in von Braun/Stephan eds 2000: 347-374. In addition the network of personal contacts between participating academics serves as a selective source of information. The following survey provides a representative selection only.

1.1. Central institutions at universities

4 Central institutions for women's and gender studies were set up at a number of universities through the initiatives of individual women, who were often able to exploit the pressure on society of political correctness in order to have their projects accepted. The financial means of these institutions are extremely limited. Some of them see their main task as providing a service and coordinating activities in research and teaching at their own university. An example is the *Cornelia Goethe Centrum für Frauenstudien und Erforschung der Geschlechterverhältnisse* [Cornelia Goethe centre for women's studies and research into gender topics] at the Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main (*Cornelia Goethe Centrum*), which has also been running a postgraduate program since 1999. The selective cooperation is confined to a limited number of subjects which are prepared to participate in workshops, series of lectures or conferences. Other centres have extended their coordination into a network of universities, for example the *Interdisziplinäre Frauenforschungszentrum* [interdisciplinary centre for women's

studies research] at the University of Bielefeld ([IZG](#)). This centre offers a number of politico-scientific courses itself, but is concerned primarily with women's and gender studies research activity in the Federal State of North Rhine Westphalia. A regular journal provides information about gender-orientated chairs, teaching activities, conferences and research projects. The *Koordinationsstelle Frauenstudien und Frauenforschung* [coordinating centre for women's studies and research] at the University of Hamburg ([Zentrum GenderWissen](#)) links up eight Hamburg colleges and universities.

5 Other central institutions are more interested in the promotion of internal research and teaching in the form of workshops, conferences and exhibitions, such as the *Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung* [centre for interdisciplinary women's studies] at the Christian-Albrechts University in Kiel ([Gender and Diversity Studies](#)), which aims to investigate questions of theory. The *Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung Zif* [centre for interdisciplinary women's studies] at the Humboldt University in Berlin ([Zentrum für transdisziplinäre Geschlechterstudien](#)) has been particularly active. This centre has documented the findings of its courses and the organization and setting up of its own course of study, Gender Studies (established in 1997), in twenty-one detailed reports. The main emphasis here has been on interdisciplinary issues and philosophy of science.

1.2. Courses of study

6 In Germany it took a long time for independent gender-studies courses to be established, with more comprehensive instruction in gender-relevant knowledge. So far there are two of these. The interdisciplinary course of study at the Humboldt University in Berlin has existed since 1997, so that its first degrees can be expected fairly soon. Participating subject departments range from German and foreign literature, history and history of art, musicology, pedagogics and ethnology, to theology, philosophy and psychology, sociology, law, agriculture and medicine. Interdisciplinarity and a wider interest in gender studies are reinforced by the fact that lectures can be attended by both students of this course (between 120 and 140) and students of the other participating subjects (about 350).¹ A somewhat different kind of course, *Frauen- und Geschlechterstudien* [women's and gender studies], was set up in 1997 at the Carl von Ossietzky University in Oldenburg with twenty places ([Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauen- und](#)

¹ Spahn 2000:165 gives the numbers for the winter term 1999/2000 as 93 (major subject) and 53 (minor subject), with a total of 485.

Genderforschung). Because of its connection to social sciences with a number of gender-orientated chairs, this course places its main emphasis on sociology and social history, social psychology, social pedagogy and music pedagogy. Degrees in gender studies are only possible with mathematics, biology, physical education or textile science as minor subjects. Other courses of study are planned at the universities of Bochum, Bremen, Freiburg and Constance.

7 The very small number of gender-studies courses does not, however, reflect directly the extent to which gender-relevant themes are covered in academic teaching. This occurs mainly in the humanities and social sciences, and usually within the context of a wider topic. Whether such topics include gender-relevant material depends on the academic interests of the lecturers, and is therefore not precisely quantifiable. Not infrequently such courses are summarized and made accessible to the public in an information brochure by a university coordination centre, for example one responsible for women's issues, or by a central institute concerned with gender studies.

1.3. Postgraduate programs [Graduiertenkollegs]

8 Postgraduate programs which run for a limited number of years promote the research and teaching of qualified young female and male academics. A small number of selected doctoral candidates can work and qualify in an interdisciplinary way in special state-funded centres. Various subject departments participate, and the students receive a grant. One pioneering and very effective postgraduate program, which ran from 1992 to 2001, is *Geschlechterdifferenz und Literatur* [gender difference and literature] at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. The topics are covered in regular seminars, series of lectures, guest lectures and an annual symposium. They have included cultural memory, writing and the writing of literary history, different forms of theatre, genre-orientated gender critique (travel literature, criminal biography, the picaresque novel etc), subversive analysis of the gender situation, corporality, aesthetics, the symbolization process and the male and female gaze. The comparative analysis of literary texts has been the main focus. Discussion of current theory has been continued, and translated into cultural-study textual analysis. There are now ten volumes of a publication series documenting the findings. The postgraduate program *Geschlechterverhältnis und sozialer Wandel. Handlungsspielraum und Definitionsmacht von Frauen* [the gender situation and social change. Women's power to act and define themselves] was sociologically and politically orientated. It was a combined project of the universities of Dortmund, Bielefeld, Bochum and Essen ([Archiv](#)

[Gender Graduiertenkolleg](#)) and ran from 1993 to 1999. It dealt with generation-specific and class-specific problems, women's self-awareness and life structure, feminist criticism and problems of gender theory.

9 Other postgraduate programs have a wider thematic scope, and gender studies is not obviously recognizable as a part of their specifications. An example of this is the postgraduate program *Identität und Differenz* at the University of Trier (www.uni-trier.de/linsenho/graduiertenkolleg.htm), which was set up at the beginning of the year 2000. The very recently established postgraduate program *Kulturhermeneutik im Zeichen von Differenz und Transdifferenz* (cultural hermeneutics in the light of difference and transdifference) at the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg ([Graduiertenkolleg](#)) is particularly comprehensive and promises to provide considerable methodological insight. Here gender difference in its relation to other differences of a national, ethnic, religious and social nature, as well as overlapping and boundary-crossing, are to be investigated. At the same time the compatibility of older materialistic cultural-scientific approaches with poststructural ideas are to be discussed.² Particular emphasis is placed on investigation into the literatures of various ethnic groups, popular literature and the media, as well as cultural institutions.

1.4. Research projects

10 Whereas postgraduate programs can combine research and teaching at a high level, the focus in research projects is clearly on research activity, with the opportunity for the team to share their findings. This does not exclude the possibility for individual members to engage in teaching outside their project. The focus on research enables participants to concentrate on their own topic of investigation. Here also, gender issues may either be integrated into a wider context, or form the central interest of research.

11 The research group with the theme *Umordnung der Dinge. Kulturwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen sozialer und ästhetischer Ordnungen* [the rearrangement of things. Cultural-scientific investigations into social and aesthetic arrangements], which was set up at the University of Paderborn in 1996, deals with the cultural coding of objects. In addition the gender allocation of everyday objects (jewellery is associated with femininity, coins with masculinity) as well as the provocative thematisation of gender reference in works of art. The research project

² See Doris Feldmann's information on the English department's participation in the postgraduate program on their home page of this postgraduate program.

Marginalität und Grenzüberschreitung in der englischen Moderne (ca. 1910 - 1940) aus der Sicht der Geschlechterforschung [marginality and boundary-crossing in English Modernism from the point of view of gender research] at the English department of the University of Cologne is concerned solely with gender issues, and has been supported financially by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* [German Research Board] since December 2000. It investigates changes in the concept of gender and in gender patterns in an era of radical change, with special reference to the discussion of values. These are illustrated in meaning- signifying spatial ideas as well as publishing conditions and forms of disseminating such subversive values. The research project *Rhetorik der Weiblichkeit* (www.uni-muenster.de/DeutschePhilologie2/Rhetorica.htm) in the German Department of the University of Münster 1997 to 1999 was concerned with the rhetorical construction of femininity and gender conditions. This included power relations, female education, personification of female speech (the nymph Echo, Cassandra, Sirens etc.), the relation of body and voice and female self-representation.

2. From women's studies to gender studies

12 Women's studies developed into gender studies through the distinction between sex and gender on the one hand, and the influence of male feminism, men's studies, and gay and lesbian studies in the 1990s on the other. It coincided with a backlash in the public and, frequently, academic interest in feminism (Oakley 1997), although this parallel development does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between the two. The broadening of women's studies to include the consideration of both sexes in no way necessitates the neglect of historical or present-day women's issues, as has sometimes been feared. On the contrary, research and teaching have shown in practice that concern with interrelational gender issues and the power situation has generated a particular focus on discrimination against the female sex, or rather the gender identified as female. Gender studies provides an opportunity to become aware of the extent and influence of the ideologies of gender difference and fundamentally review the heterosexual matrix with its open or subtle oppression of women and (seldom recognized) disadvantaging of the "stronger sex". In addition gender studies has undermined the concept of gender dichotomy, introduced radical cultural criticism on the basis of interdisciplinarity, and formulated and addressed a number of new questions. Gender studies in Germany played a part in the process, making its own contribution to this international development.

2.1. From women's studies as an internal subject to an interdisciplinary study

13 The first steps towards a study of women's issues at universities were made through individual initiatives in the 1970s, mainly in the humanities and social sciences. Soon afterwards there was a demand for university chairs in women's studies. This implied both a wish for independence and the idea of interdisciplinarity, although the latter was as yet in its infancy. The organizational and methodological possibilities and limitations of an interdisciplinary approach were explored. Institutional resistance, though also experienced particularly in the USA and England, mostly led to the abandonment of the concept of specific university chairs in favour of an affiliation of interested disciplines. This manifested itself in shared lectures, workshops, postgraduate programs and, the ideal case, the setting up for the first time of an actual program, at the Humboldt University in Berlin four years ago.³ The participants remain attached to their original discipline and their own departments. The modular nature of the curriculum, which thereby becomes necessary, makes it possible to link up with foreign universities through the planned European credit transfer system.

14 The Munich postgraduate gender studies program also retained close links with the participating academic disciplines, within which doctoral plans were monitored and carried through. At the same time there was continuous interdisciplinary exchange between teachers and doctoral candidates in courses with a small number of students, which is documented in relevant essay collections. Interdisciplinarity is of course also guaranteed in those postgraduate programs where this subject is only one among many, such as the recently established *Kulturhermeneutik im Zeichen von Differenz und Transdifferenz* at the Friedrich Alexander University in Erlangen/Nuremberg. Interdisciplinarity can be practised both through discussion of a basic theme in conjunction with various subjects, and within one subject bringing in different discourses. For example, fictional texts may be analysed as well as texts from philosophy, aesthetics, architecture, law, and biology, etc. and can be seen in their relation to each other.

15 A particular advantage of retaining close links with academic disciplines in courses of study, including postgraduate programs, is that students are guaranteed a solid basic academic training, and qualified female academics can bring their respective subject-specific knowledge and methods to a fruitful interdisciplinary discussion. This leads to a wider spectrum of topics and findings, where the far-reaching relevance of the category of gender can be shown with

³ For a discussion of interdisciplinary links and their practical application in this course, see Katrin Schäfgen 2000.

particular clarity. The variation in the methodological and thematic orientation of the different disciplines is not too great in the humanities and social sciences for them to be compatible. Poststructural epistemology has in any case led to a proximity, if not a convergence under the label of text-orientated cultural hermeneutics. This examines primarily semantic and symbolic processes in literature and art, language and media, and history and society, which can also be evaluated from psychoanalytical, philosophical and pedagogical points of view.⁴ Cultural-study interests today form an important common denominator for the separate academic disciplines, and a particular problem can thus be examined within the areas of literature, art, social behaviour and value judgements. The perspective of culture, its acquisition and formation by its members, its subject-dependence and great variety of media, are all subject to investigation. Gender issues are now accepted within the canon of cultural-study concerns, and so gender studies can also occasionally be found on the agenda of cultural-study research projects. Within the framework of the constructive nature of culture, and the necessity of a critical deconstruction of symbolization constraints, a socially contextualized examination of gender issues can take place.

16 At the same time the necessary interdisciplinarity of a cultural-study procedure makes possible an investigation of gender issues from various viewpoints, within different problem areas and with reference to several discourses. For example, thematic fields such as corporality, masquerade and role-reversal in various national literatures and on various literary levels, in the theatre or cinema, in past or the present can be investigated as well as interpreted from a historical, linguistic, psychoanalytical, theological, socio-historical, medical, statistical or legal point of view. There are a number of essay collections which document some impressive findings of research into gender issues in various topic areas.⁵

17 The way individual academic disciplines take part in gender studies has of course been and remains very varied. In the humanities and social sciences gender studies was seen as being full of potential, and in certain fields it became an integral component with concrete, subject-specific findings and occasionally also with methodological modifications. The participation of women in the shaping of society and culture, and the formative influence of and change in the status of the sexes, was thus demonstrated. For the natural sciences on the other hand, the gender-critical perspective above all brought ideological, scientific and epistemological insights. For

⁴ Gender stereotypes can be interpreted as projections, toys examined for their pedagogical implications. The satisfaction of emotional needs in popular literature, myths or advertising can be demonstrated.

⁵ See for example Bußmann/Hof eds 1995; Ecker ed. 1997; Braun/Stephan eds. 2000; Ecker ed. 2000; Hahn e.a. eds. 2000.

example, ideological-critical studies revealed the existence of gender stereotypes in supposedly objective medical findings (Edler 2000), and the so-called purely biological definition of gender was tested against its artificial, socially variable components (Beier 2000). More fundamental critical studies took a relative point of view, as for example in biology where the concept of the female reproductive function was seen in relation to the imposed hierarchy in nature and culture due to patriarchal projection. In medicine, the reduction of the female body to an object and a function was exposed as patriarchal power-mongering. The validity of the scientific principles of rationality, objectivity and universality was called into question (Scheich 2000; Mathes 2000). Altogether the cultural and historical basis of a number of totally "objective" and absolute scientific findings became clear, although this was certainly not always accepted. At the same time the critical approach to scientific concepts of social phenomena such as birth control, eugenics or technological progress caused the relevant discourses to be included in the humanities in a more fundamental way. Gender studies is not confined to the evaluation of literary theory, art theory and philosophical texts, but rather completes the picture presented by medical and scientific discourses, namely that ideas of gender are determined by culture.

18 A key role in gender studies has been played by psychoanalysis. Its far-reaching theoretical and conceptual significance for gender studies stretches from Lacan's and Kristeva's theories about the philosophy of language and psychological development, via a cultural-critical reconceptualization of femininity and masculinity (Chodorov 1978, German 1985; Rohde-Dachser 1992), right through to its development as an apparatus for textual hermeneutics. The particular focus here has been on the use of symbols with psychoanalytical relevance, the analysis of imaginative and metaphorical processes which have a preverbally subversive content,⁶ as well as on unconscious psychological processes as experienced by fictional characters. A more pragmatic but no less important role within interdisciplinary concerns with gender problems has been that of American and English studies in Germany. They have played an invaluable part in disseminating the ideas and theories emanating primarily from the USA and England, a task which they still should take more seriously.

⁶ The theoretical starting-point here is Julia Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic and symbolic mode, which assumes that pre-verbal and non-verbal experience has an effect on language and culture outside of one's sexual determination.

2.2. From a revision of gender concepts to cultural criticism

19 As the organization of women's and gender studies expanded, following the establishing of subject-specific interdisciplinary links, there was at the same time a widening of interest in the subject and its methods. The critical approach to stereotypes of femininity and masculinity and their concomitant hierarchical nature brought with it the beginnings of a revision of the concept of gender from the historical, sociological and psychological viewpoints and provoked a search for new directions in literature and the arts. This new orientation did not only highlight the relevance of gender issues for the society at large but also made it a possible starting-point for a more extended cultural criticism, to include for example the relationship between nature and culture, the understanding of ethnic problems, and theories about subjects and identity. It is with such topics that gender studies is concerned, within the context of present-day cultural studies.

20 Two concrete examples serve to illustrate the cultural-critical dimension of gender studies. A central concern of women's studies was the revision of the literary canon. This led to both a rediscovery of the cultural contribution of a large number of suppressed female authors, and a gender-critical reexamination of texts which had already been studied by literary historians as well as those from non-literary sources.⁷ This initiated a dynamic new lease of life for literary history, which increased considerably the types and number of sources relevant to cultural history. In addition, the spectrum of criteria for judgement was thereby expanded beyond aesthetics and elitist tradition to include historical, cultural, psychological, media-sociological and politico-educational criteria. This expansion was something that the previous debate on popular literature and New Historicism alone would have been unable to achieve. Both the textual basis of projects in cultural studies and the type of inquiry have been extended. Another example is provided by Queer Studies which, initially concerned with male and female homosexuality (Gay Studies), developed into an open-minded investigation of the traditional dichotomies of heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, and other identity labels of essentialist origin (Jagose 1996). This prepared not only the way for new concepts of gender and sexual behaviour on the basis of a poststructuralist understanding of gender identity. The constructivity and historicity of other concepts, as gender assignments which have become an integral part of the naming and evaluation of everyday objects, spaces and types of behaviour, has also been made clear.

⁷ For gender-oriented histories of literature in Germany see: Brinker Gabler (1988), Gnüg/Möhrmann (second edition 1999), Schabert (1997). For a review of research in German literary studies see Keck (in print for 2002).

2.3. From gender dichotomy to differentiation by distinctive features

21 Gender difference was the starting-point for an investigation into the discrimination against the female sex, by now a public issue. The reassessment of this discrimination has also called into question the correlation of the male sex with one-sided and in some cases also damaging stereotypical features.⁸ The dichotomy of the sexes, always in the forefront of discussion, has been variously conceptualized and evaluated in the course of the development of women's and gender studies. In the debate about equality and difference, gender difference appeared as either the cause of a one-sided exercise of power and discrimination or as the occasion for pointing out specific feminine qualities. The discussion of gender difference changed from a critical view of biologism, via a socio-stereotypical and image-semiotic analysis (images of women, images of men), to the demonstration of a strict dependence on discourse and its modification through the linking back to a material and physical dimension.⁹

22 This transition from a socio-historical and socio-critical treatment of gender issues to interdisciplinary cultural hermeneutics, turning away from essentialism, brought about a deconstruction of the gender dichotomy in two ways. First, dichotomy was shown to be purely a thought pattern, thereby making possible a more flexible use of gender dichotomies. Second, the deconstructivist semiotic approach brought with it the recognition that the feminine element, released from the physical nature and historicity of woman, fulfils a multifarious representative function (Bronfen 1995). Separated from defined subjects, so-called feminine or masculine tendencies in images, concepts, texts, behaviour and cultural notions can be discovered and opened up for discussion.

23 The complex German term "Heimat" [homeland] for example, is associated with numerous social ideas, longings, ideologies and activities and has strong emotional overtones. It serves as a mythical model for the return to the womb, an escape into fantasies of merging, an incarnation of the mother, lover and wife for the soldier at the front, and a place of peace and freedom from conflict. The idealization of the female, characteristic of male projections, again underlines the female representative function of the term "Heimat" (Ecker 1997). Towns and cities have male or female connotations (Schaff 1999), objects tend to have male or female

⁸ This problem was taken up by Men's Studies which despite their limited scope had a strong impact on the development of women's studies into gender studies.

⁹ Different views have been given by Butler (1993) and Grosz (1994). The German debate on discursiveness and corporality of the subject has been summarized and reviewed by Stephan 2000.

functions (Ecker 2000), and the perception and portrayal of landscapes imply male or female qualities (Pratt 1992: 201-227).

24 The recognition of a cultural-semiotic autonomy of femaleness and maleness as repositories of wishes and values confirms the domination of traditional gender stereotypes. At the same time, however, it releases them from their gender-specific subject relation, emphasizing the fund of features that are available. In travel texts, for instance, so-called male or female features in depiction and behaviours cannot be attributed simply to the biology and identity of the travelling subject. This cultural-hermeneutic conception of sexuality also draws attention to "masculine" modes of textual depiction such as logic and functionality, or features with "feminine" connotations such as vivid description and sensuousness, ignoring the person of the (male or female) author. As to subjects, the fluidity of distinctive gender features opens our eyes to textual subjects in expository texts and novels¹⁰ which impede or prevent a strict classification according to "male" or "female". A similar testing of male and female behaviours where gender is not defined through tradition, culture or even biology, also takes place in society. This ranges from role-reversal and cross-dressing to a rejection of (enforced) heterosexual relations and an acceptance of transvestism and gender reassignment. Primary gender coding has to be "rethought- as a dynamic area of different features where many positions overlap and are temporarily reconstituted."¹¹

2.4. New fields of investigation

25 The elimination of the concept of the dichotomy of gender - leaving much to be desired in its translation into social action - and the interdisciplinary and cultural orientation of gender studies, have made it possible to deal with the central themes of women's and gender studies from new angles, with striking results, as well as to introduce new topics. For example, in the 70s and 80s the theme of corporality involved the perception of a woman's body as part of her identity and as the scene of her conflicts, as well as the discovery of specifically female sensuality. On the other hand, in the semiotic and discursive-theoretical school of gender studies, the body was seen and studied as signifier of gender ideologies, power games¹² and cultural memory. The search for texts and pictures in which gender conventions were broken, either subversively, openly or more

¹⁰ See for example novels in which the protagonist's sex is not obvious, such as Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* (1969), Maureen Duffy's *Love Child* (1971), Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992).

¹¹ Kati Röttger and Heike Paul eds 1999: 21.

¹² This discussion derived mainly from the works of Judith Butler.

recently also provocatively, drew attention to the longstanding uneasiness regarding gender problems. The body, semantically of such fundamental, sexual importance was discovered to be part of the cultural memory. Thus, for example cultural patterns of body perception and presentation are handed down and modified through movements in dance and drama.¹³ The (semiotically based) capacity for modifying body images is also evident in the field of fashion and disguise, where sexuality can be created and stage-managed (Lehnert 1994, 1997; Bettinger/Funk eds. 1995). The performative dimension of gender ranges from attestation, via subversive questioning, to protest against conventions. Gender-orientated cultural studies have revealed numerous forms of gender-boundary crossing in both the past and the present.

26 The theme of language has also been significantly expanded. First of all it was examined from the point of view of its patriarchal aspects (Lacan) and the influence of pre-oedipal freedom (Kristeva), as well as from the perspective of feminine aesthetics. The poststructural approach to the traditional representative function of language made it possible to examine its plurality of meaning beyond its referential character, making possible a clearer perception of the linguistic exercise of power and fantasy in texts. With regard to cultural memory, the gender connotation of the "verbal" medium (unpredictable and irrational, but thereby also dynamic and creative, and acoustically sensuous) and the "written" medium (abstraction, logic, soundlessness) was discovered. The development of these two cultural media in different directions has been seen in conjunction with the development of the gender dichotomy (von Braun 2000). Rhetoric, with its gender-relevant character and influence without reference to the biological gender of its author, has become an increasing point of focus.¹⁴ Rhetoric involves both gender-reinforcing forms of linguistic presentation and subversive ambiguities and blueprints for the future. A further theme taken up by more recent gender studies, following the lead of cultural studies, is the question of subject and identity. The constructivity and variability of this theme opens up new possibilities for the concept of gender, and quite apart from a now almost undefinable subject, ascribes gender to the discourses alone.

3. Summary

Women's and gender studies took far longer to become established in Germany than in Anglo-Saxon countries. They are constantly in need of new organizational initiatives, especially as their

¹³ See several contributions in Claudia Öhlschläger/Birgit Wiens eds 1997.

¹⁴ This is the subject of the above-mentioned research project *Rhetorik der Weiblichkeit* [rhetoric of femininity].

connection with academic institutions is often of limited duration. Gender studies is not an independent subject area, but functions within an interdisciplinary context. The disadvantage of this is that gender studies has less university prestige, but on the other hand it has a greater academic effect. Altogether, the large number of relevant research and teaching activities and the comparatively few institutionally centred programs have had considerable influence. What can however be problematic is the necessarily varied level of competence of the participants, as a fruitful and successful implementation of gender studies demands a thorough training in the relevant theory and knowledge. A further problem is the relation between research and teaching. In a few centres at present, highly-qualified research is being undertaken, published and discussed in academic circles. The conversion of these findings into teaching is not very common, however. Here we have to question the social effects of revolutionary ideas emanating from a field of research which not only goes back to a socio-political movement but is still developing concepts that have enormous relevance for the critique of our civilization.

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