

Chapter 3

The achievement of a standpoint: feminist epistemologies (2)

Next to psychological explanations concerning the construction of gender, many feminist thinkers agree that it is also the genderized organization of society itself which affects the way individual subjects come to relate to the world. A determinate factor concerning women's social position is the gendered division of labour in modern Western societies. Since the 1970's, socialist-feminists took issue with the one-sided focus in prevailing Marxist thought on the sphere of production, and its complete disregard of the economically and socially equally important sphere of reproduction. While Marxists focused on relationships of inequality and exploitation within the predominantly male realm of wage labour, they failed to see that its actual productivity is partly dependent on the effective organization of unpaid activities, such as the care for daily subsistence and the bearing and rearing of children. Women's so-called reproductive activities provide the necessary basis for men to contribute to economic and cultural production, to engage in social and political life.¹

1. Early feminist standpoints

Feminists' insistence to call these activities 'work' or 'unpaid labour' was one effective way of denouncing and transforming the Marxist conceptual framework. It enabled feminists to develop a critical stand concerning the workings of patriarchy in capitalist societies. Moreover, it made it possible to gain a better understanding of how psychological differences between men and women do not only produce, but are also reinforced by the gendered division of labour. Such a division of labour guarantees that women will keep 'mothering', whereas it at the same time sanctions the resulting psychological differences by the nature of the labour involved.

Thus Nancy Hartsock finds that housework resembles the manual labour of workers in its daily confrontation with material necessity and concrete human needs. Still, according to Hartsock, housewives are more engaged in the production of use-values than factory workers. As very little of the goods women produce are commodities, they are even more immersed in material processes of change. Women are therefore closer to nature. This connectedness to the 'facts of life', according to Hartsock, is strengthened further by women's work as mothers, which requires great skilfulness in handling relationships, and reinforces one's sense of unity: a unity between body and mind, but also with one's material surroundings and with other people. Hence, in the labour of caring, manual, intellectual and emotional aspects are interwoven, such that they further an 'integration of hand, brain *and* heart' (Rose 1983: 90). Women would therefore be more knowledgeable of what life is 'really' about, i.e. 'the continuation of the species' (Hartsock 1983: 287) and the improvement of the quality of human life.

These views about women's socially subordinate, but therefore epistemologically privileged position constituted the starting point for developing notions of a specific feminist standpoint. In the early seventies, Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith claimed that to undo the exclusion of women from the making of culture required more than the addition of some topics on the list of sociological subjects. An alternative sociology would have to be a sociology for women, a sociology which explores its usual

subjects, but does so from 'the standpoint of women'. To Smith, this implies that sociological inquiry should start from women's experiences of their 'everyday world'. This everyday world should not be perceived as just another object, as merely a new field of research, but as a 'problematic': "a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles but are 'latent' in the actualities of the experienced world" (Smith 1988: 91).

Because women take a greater part in the maintenance of material subsistence, they occupy an even lower position on the socio-economic ladder than male workers. From the Hegelian-Marxist perspective on the dynamics between the master and the servant, this means that women's view of reality will be less distorted by ideological prejudice. Whereas men, like the bourgeoisie, are in the position of the master, and as such have an interest in keeping up a view of existing gender relationships as natural, women, like the proletariat or the servant, have nothing to lose when they picture these relationships as they really are, namely as determined by power, exploitation and exclusion. Hence, women are disposed to a better view of the nature of relationships in capitalist-patriarchal societies (Smith 1988: 78-81).

Smith shares Code's conviction that women's experiences cannot be taken at face value. But her touchstone is not derived from empiricist epistemology, but from practices of feminist consciousness-raising. Such practices can teach women to give word to their 'direct' experience of the world, independently of existing cultural, social, ideological accounts. They are prerequisite for developing a women's standpoint, according to Smith, because, contrary to an empiricist view, what actually makes up our everyday world cannot be known from within: "The everyday world is not fully understandable within its own scope. It is organized by social relations not fully apparent in it or contained in it" (1988: 92). Still Smith emphasizes that the standpoint of women is not an ideological position. Rather than a perspective, it is a *method* according to which sociological investigation starts from the position of subjects "situated outside textually mediated discourses in the actualities of our everyday lives" (107).² Smith's proposal to start from the perspective of women is grounded in a materialist ontology, according to which reality precedes our discursive grasp, and can be found "beyond the immediately observable and known" only (143).³

In a markedly programmatic text, Nancy Hartsock argues how a feminist standpoint could constitute the ground for a feminist version of historical materialism. The talk of a 'feminist' rather than a 'women's' standpoint already indicates that Hartsock's notion of a standpoint, contrary to Smith's, *does* refer to a specific 'vantage point' from which we can "understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies as perverse inversions of more humane social relations" (Hartsock 1983: 284). Her standpoint thinking does not involve a method, it alludes to a specific content. Analogous to the Marxist credo that humans *are* what they *do*, or that practice structures thought, Hartsock's exploration starts from activities traditionally assigned to women within the present sexual⁴ division of labour: housework and the bearing and rearing of children. She is aware of her concomitant disregard of important differences between women, such as differences along the lines of colour, class and sexuality, but believes that the assumption of such commonalities is nevertheless justified. In the course of an extensive comparison between the activities of male workers and typically female practices, amplified with a psychoanalytic exposition of the construction of gendered identities, Hartsock comes up with a list of oppositional features that belong to women's and men's perspectives respectively, such as: change/stasis, concrete/abstract, use/exchange, quality/quantity, connectedness/separateness, unity/duality. The first element of each of these pairs refers to a traditionally 'feminine', hence underestimated value in Western societies. From a feminist standpoint, this scale of values should be completely reversed: it would give priority to the maintenance of 'life itself', while 'abstract masculinity' would be obsessed with the links between death, violence and sex. Only one text by a male author (George Bataille) functions as proof of

the content of this masculinist perspective. Notably, although Hartsock presents the aversion against dichotomous thinking as one of the typical traits of the feminist standpoint, the very analysis that leads to its 'discovery' is impregnated with it.

Hartsock's revaluation of women's experiences and perspectives also becomes problematic when she takes her analysis further than the initial analogy between the 'proletarian' and the 'feminist standpoint'. Although it is claimed that a standpoint does not come naturally but has to be achieved, Hartsock's discourse leaves the impression of a celebration of the 'naturally' better perspective of women. This is especially the case when she presents women as "fully human most centrally" (302). Thus, "the female experience in reproduction represents a unity with nature which goes beyond the proletarian experience of interchange with nature" (293), and would involve "a unity of mind and body more profound than is possible in the worker's instrumental activity" (294). From a feminist standpoint, it would be possible to reveal the 'perversity' and 'partiality' of abstract masculinity, and to expose the "real relations among human beings as inhuman" (285). According to Hartsock, the feminist standpoint is, all in all, 'deeper going' than the proletarian standpoint.

2. No normal science for us: Sandra Harding (1)

In an elaborate and detailed overview of feminist interventions in the field of science and epistemology, Sandra Harding notes a shift from 'the woman question in science', which puts the improvement of the position of female scientists first, to the 'science question in feminism', which takes issue with the masculinity of the norms of scientificity itself (Harding 1986a). As part of these feminist interventions, standpoint thinking signifies an important step forward with regard to the more moderate project of so-called *feminist empiricism*. According to Harding, the latter opposes 'bad science', i.e. a science from which the anthropocentric bias has to be removed in order to make its claims more objective, and claims that women scientists are more likely to notice such bias than their male colleagues. Feminist empiricists, in other words, believe in existing norms of scientificity. Their main point is that present scientific practice often does not meet its own standard: the pretended transcendental viewpoint actually appears to be masculine.⁵ Harding finds that feminist empiricism suffers from an internal tension, when it on the one hand professes a belief in women as 'better' knowers, whereas it on the other hand subscribes to the traditional scientific belief that the identity of a knower makes no difference. Moreover, history has shown that actual increases in objectivity have not come from within science, but were instigated by social liberation movements (1986a: 25).

Feminist standpoint epistemologies would take better account of this. In their attack of the ideal of transcendental knowledge as in itself a masculine ideal, they criticize 'science as usual'. The contention is that women as a social group (Smith), or female feminists (Hartsock), are epistemologically privileged. Hence, they share with traditional science and feminist empiricists the assumption that objective and true knowledge is possible. In that sense, Harding observes, feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint thinking are both 'successor science' projects: they remain faithful to the aims of modern science.

Her appreciation of early standpoint thinking notwithstanding, in the long run Harding thinks it cannot be a viable alternative. What is tacitly taken as the starting point for developing the feminist standpoint, in fact are the lives of Western, white, middle-class, heterosexual women. The claims of standpoint theorists about a typically 'female experience' exclude the experiences of many women. Women are not such a homogeneous group - the difference sexual difference makes, is not unequivocal. Thus, Harding

takes issue with Hartsock's defense of bypassing differences among women in favour of their commonalities. Women are not the only group excluded from the traditional scientific point of view; the same holds for other 'others', such as black men, homosexuals, working class people. With this, Harding links up with criticisms concerning the 'whiteness' of most of feminist theorizing, as expressed by and elaborated by black women intellectuals such as bell hooks, Chandra Mohanty and Patricia Hill Collins.

However, if one recognizes the limits of standpoint thinking, but does not want to give up the project of the 'return of the repressed', as Jane Flax once phrased it (Flax 1983), an intricate problem poses itself: how to construct a better notion of science and knowledge, which not merely undermines the supposedly masculine subject, but takes account of the variety of *all* subjugated and silenced perspectives, *without* relapsing into a relativist position?

To address this difficult question, Harding initially opts for the development of a feminist postmodernism. As she sees it, with the acknowledgement of the diversity of 'subjugated' positions, hence the diversity of possible standpoints, feminist theory can no longer simply reject the postmodernist scepticism regarding science's capability to gain unproblematic access to reality. For if reality cannot be established from one particular standpoint, we have to conceive of the possibility that there are many 'true' stories. In other words, feminist theory becomes suspicious of the conception of knowledge as consisting of 'true' representations of a world 'out there'.⁶ It faces the problem of the relativity of all claims to 'truth' and 'reality' - including its own (1986b: 648).

In thinking through the consequences of the inclusion of black women's and other "others" perspectives, Harding starts with an extensive argument on the basis of "the curious coincidence" (1986a: 165) of feminine and African 'world views', as this comes to the fore in feminist and Africanist literatures. Both would consist of feelings of connectedness to nature and to the community one belongs to. Whereas white European men have an autonomous idea of a self isolated from others, Africans and women share an experience of self which is part of a larger whole, defined in relationship to its social as well as its natural environment.⁷ Harding discusses in detail the risks involved in accepting the similarities between women and Africans. It might, for instance, sustain existing patriarchal and colonial schemes which rely on essentializing claims about the 'true' nature of women and blacks. Moreover, both feminist and Africanist authors tend to disregard each others' findings: feminists overlook the significance of racial differences among women, hence focus on white women only, whereas Africanists ignore the significance of gender, hence focus on black men only. As a consequence, black women "totally disappear from both analyses, [are] conceptualized out of existence" (1986a: 178). These points are well taken,⁸ but Harding feels that the coincidences between the two world views are too remarkable to simply be put aside: "Feminists and Africanists are clearly onto something important" (1986a: 171). To her, their findings suggest the possibility of the development of a 'unified field theory', which could explain both gender differences and differences between the European and Africanist world view with the help of one conceptual framework. In Harding's view, "[s]uch a theory will certainly be an intellectual structure quite as impressive as that of Newton's mechanics, for it will be able to chart the 'laws of tendency of patriarchy,' the 'laws of tendency of racism,' and their independent and conjoined consequences for social life and social thought" (186).

This announcement of a grand, all-explaining theory of structures of oppression does not sit easily with Harding's professed shift towards postmodernism. But Harding does not see this as an objection: a 'postmodern consciousness' would allow for incoherence and ambivalence in theorizing, because, after all, we live in an incoherent world. Moreover, it is in line with "the feminist emphasis on contextual thinking and decision-making" (1986a: 246).⁹ But, most significantly, the tensions and incoherences

peculiar to present feminist thought indicate that we are in the middle of a process of transformation, both on the level of social relationships and on the level of theorizing. This transformation involves a paradigm shift, instigated by feminist successor science projects, away from the modernist conception of objective, value-neutral science to a wholly new ideal of valid and valuable knowledges. Following Kuhn, Harding infers that the observed 'instability of the analytical categories of feminist theory' should be embraced as a rich resource for 'abnormal', revolutionary theory and practice. "No 'normal science' for us!" is the credo she would like feminist knowers to follow (1986b: 648).

Harding discusses several points of affinity between postmodernist insights about knowledge and feminist thought. First, both emphasize the interconnectedness between knowledge and power. Harding here associates with Richard Rorty in his claim that scientific knowledge acquisition is a rule-bound activity, the underlying epistemology of which sustains a concomitant 'policing of thought' with exclusionary effects: it determines which stories count as 'knowledge', and which as mere expressions of 'opinion' or 'belief' (1986a: 149-150). The mainstay of the prevailing modernist view of science consists of a set of hierarchical oppositions, such as subject versus object, reason versus emotion, mind versus body, the universal versus the particular. Harding (and here she resonates both Keller's and Hartssock's criticism) conceives of this style of dualistic thought, as well as epistemology's focus on control and domination, as closely associated with the male identity of most scientists. The intrinsic relation between knowledge and power is explained by the constitution of the (Western) male psyche.

Secondly, both feminism and postmodernism stress the constitutive role of particular norms, values and interests in the construction of scientific knowledges. To Harding, this insight, instead of inducing a position of epistemological relativism, can be turned to advantage by promoting the constitutive role of emancipatory values, norms and interests in scientific knowledge practices: "[I]t is only coercive values - racism, classism, sexism - that deteriorate objectivity; it is participatory values - antiracism, anticlassism, antisexism - that decrease the distortions and mystifications in our culture's explanations and understandings" (1986a: 249).¹⁰ Moreover, the emphasis on emancipation rather than domination and control implies a shift from cognitive to moral and political criteria, which ultimately will turn the traditional hierarchical order of the scientific disciplines upside down: the methodological and epistemological questions of the social sciences will come to guide the physical sciences, instead of the other way around.¹¹

Thirdly, both feminist and postmodernist approaches to knowledge question the strict distinction between the knowable world of quantifiable 'facts' and the intangible world of emotions, fantasy, values, between the universal and the particular, between the realm of science and the realm of art. Feminist epistemology, so Harding, calls attention for the ways in which unconscious motives, emotions and phantasy constantly intervene in scientific practice, and wishes to reveal "how each [world] shapes and forms the other" (1986a: 245).

Finally, feminism and postmodernism find each other in their critique of the notion of the universal subject, this "dangerous fiction of the naturalized, essentialized, uniquely 'human' (read 'manly').." (1986a: 28). In this respect, Harding observes an interesting connection between feminism's acknowledgement of differences among women, accompanied and enforced by the emergence of so-called 'fractured (or hyphenated) identities' and the postmodernist notion of the split and multiple subject. Harding adopts Donna Haraway's proposal for feminists to embrace their 'fractured identities' as the select sites from which to resist the fiction of the uniquely 'human'. The ground for feminist projects would then no longer reside in a common identity, but in the sharing of an 'oppositional consciousness'.

From this recapitulation of Harding's interpretation of the interfaces between feminism and postmodernism emerges a somewhat idiosyncratic understanding of postmodernism, an understanding which, in my view, is very much coloured by the preoccupations of feminist standpoint thinking.

Harding's interpretation of the fragmentation of the subject, for example, does not refer to the general condition of (post)modernity as described by thinkers such as Rorty and Foucault. Instead, she reserves this condition for those whose identities are formed within or in resistance to relations of oppression and marginalization. With this, Harding ignores Haraway's insistence on the political character of adopting an 'oppositional consciousness', and returns to the standpoint notions of privileged experiences and marginalized identities. Harding's plea for "a permanently partial science which is *for*, not just *about*, that majority of the members of our species who have fragmented selves and oppositional consciousness" (1986a: 195-196) bespeaks an inclination to equate the postmodernist notion of the 'fragmented subject' with the Marxist-feminist notion of the oppressed and consequently epistemologically privileged subject. It also reintroduces the familiar oppositional schema, in which 'white, European, bourgeois men' are put over against 'the rest of us' (1986a: 175). The predominance of this dualistic ordering also shows in Harding's consistent appeal to her readers to identify with a 'we' or 'us': 'we women', 'we (white Western) feminists', or 'the rest of us' who do not belong to the category of the white, Western, bourgeois male.

A similar move back to standpoint thinking can be discerned in Harding's interpretation of the postmodernist claim of the intertwining of knowledge and power, as for instance elaborated by Foucault and Latour. First, by reducing this to the claim of masculine domination, Harding disregards the Foucaultian distinction between, on the one hand, power as both repressive and enabling, and 'naturally' linked up with resistance, and, on the other hand, domination as the fixation of a particular power relationship. Secondly, this translation of power into domination leads her to reject the postmodernist view that power and knowledge are two sides of the coin of 'science as usual', and to claim instead that the intrinsic relation between power and knowledge renders present practices into 'bad science'. The feminist task would be to eliminate the commitment of scientific research to the interests of domination and dominating groups, i.e. to clear it from the 'wrong' values and norms, such that it may once again serve the goal of human emancipation - as it originally was meant to do. For these reasons, Harding's *The Science Question in Feminism* can be seen as a serious, but unfelicitous attempt to reconcile feminist standpoint thinking with postmodernist insights about knowledge and the subject. Ultimately, Harding shies away from a radical relinquishment of the modernist 'successor science project', because it would leave the power over what counts as scientific truth comfortably where it is, i.e. in the hands of the dominant groups. Consequently, the bravado with which Harding launches her credo for feminists, 'no normal science for us!', gets damped by her fear of the relativism that comes easily with epistemological anarchy.

3. Strong objectivity: Sandra Harding (2)

No wonder Harding retraced her steps. Since the early nineties, her work is dedicated to elaborating what she (as far as I know, only once) calls a "postmodernist standpoint approach" (1991a: 49). In an article that anticipates this turn, Harding already highlights some aspects of feminist standpoint thinking that show a distinctly anti-Enlightenment edge. Standpoint thinkers, for instance, do not believe that a-historical principles of inquiry warrant better representations. On the contrary, they see scientific knowledges as permeated with social values and interests, i.e. with politics.¹² And just like postmodernists, they consider a unitary consciousness an impediment rather than a prerequisite for

knowledge (1990: 97-98).

In *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (1991a), Harding introduces the concept of 'strong objectivity' to argue for a feminist epistemology that, *with* sociologies of knowledge¹³, takes the view that all scientific knowledge is socially situated, hence suffused with values and interests, but, *contrary* to their relativist conclusions, holds on to the idea that it is possible to aim at 'less distorted' and 'less partial' accounts of the world. The catchword 'strong objectivity' challenges the traditional assumption that objectivity and neutrality are inextricably bound up with each other. Harding's counter claim is that the objectivity of knowledge claims becomes stronger according as they are more closely and explicitly associated with particular, i.e. progressive, emancipatory, antisexist, and antiracist positions.

The ideal of value-neutral objectivity, Harding provokingly argues, is actually quite 'weak'. It is both too broadly and too narrowly conceptualized. On the one hand, it wrongly supposes that *all* values have a distorting influence on scientific accounts - which is an overgeneralization, because *some* values may precisely improve the quality of an account. On the other hand, it does not realize that *all* knowledge starts from certain locations, imperceptibly taking along certain values. Hence, value-neutral knowledge is simply inconceivable (1991a: 143-144).¹⁴

Harding presents her notion of 'strong objectivity' as an alternative to the 'objectivism' of the traditional conception of scientific knowledge. Rather than strive for the elimination of so-called 'external' factors from the process of knowledge acquisition, it asks for the inclusion and assimilation of those factors that may contribute to the making of, if not 'the one true account', then at least 'less false' or 'less distorted' accounts. Therefore, the strong objectivity program, like the emergent discipline of the sociology of science, is not much interested in distinguishing the context of discovery (in which external factors are acknowledged to play a part) from the context of justification (in which only internal, methodological factors would be decisive).¹⁵ Thus, Harding subscribes to the symmetrical outlook introduced by the sociologists of science of the 'Strong Programme': social values and interests play a constitutive part in the construction of all knowledge, either true or false. But she does not go along with their subsequent agnosticism or relativism.¹⁶ The principle of symmetry in Harding's view does not imply that the critic of science herself would not be able to tell truth from falsity, or better: less partial from more partial accounts. The fact that all knowledge is socially situated can be turned into a resource by asking *which* social situations are the better candidates for generating more objective knowledges.

Moreover, the exclusive focus of social studies of science on the micro level of scientific practice prevents it from forming a thorough picture of the variety of social elements which shape scientific knowledge. According to Harding, one should also develop a keen eye for the influence of the macro level: structural inequalities between social groups will not fail to affect the relationships between and the status of different knowers inside the laboratory. Although critical science studies scholars emphasize the need to be selfreflexive, they only develop a 'weak' notion of reflexivity. They don't get much further than expressing a desire to diminish their own status as author(ity) and democratize the relationship between observer and observed.¹⁷ What they lack is a 'competency standard' with which it can be assessed whether an author has been successfully reflexive (1991a: 163). Strong objectivity, Harding claims, requires 'strong reflexivity'. It requires researchers to look beyond the micro-level of the knowledge practice under investigation, to be able to take account of the effects of, for instance, gender, race, or class. Moreover, if *all* knowledge is socially situated, observer and subject matter are to be put on the same causal plane (1991a: 12). Strong reflexivity is not just required of the observed, i.e. the scientist, but of the observer, i.e. the science studies scholar, as well. Thus, a competently reflexive researcher would "conceptualize [the objects of inquiry] as gazing back in all their cultural particularity" (1991a: 163), in order "to look back at the self in all its cultural particularity from a more distant, critical, objectifying location" (151). Simply put, strong reflexivity is the capability to look at one self through

the eyes of the other. But it should be immediately added that Harding perceives neither the 'self' nor the 'other' as isolated individuals. Both the subject and the object of knowledge are members of particular social groups, cultures, communities: "I always see through my community's eyes and begin thought with its assumptions", therefore, "[i]n an important sense, my eyes are not my own" (1991a: 100).¹⁸ Hence, 'strong reflexivity' exceeds the boundaries of the strictly personal; it involves the development of a sociological and political perspective as well. It enables the knower to take account of, for instance, the Eurocentrism of prevailing views of knowledge and science, and to make science a more universal, that is a truly *multicultural* project (see Harding 1994).

Harding makes some scattered remarks about 'nature' as a cultural construct¹⁹, rejects the assumption that adequate representation would consist of the undistorted reflection of reality²⁰, and claims that feminist standpoint theory successfully dissociates the notion of objectivity from this superseded theory of representation.²¹ Nevertheless, her take on the issue of epistemological representation in my perception still remains of a realist vein. This does not only appear from the persistent and deliberate references throughout her work to the need for 'less distorted', 'less perverse', 'less false', 'less partial' accounts.²² It is also manifest in her professed belief that we need objectivity as a criterion with which we can distinguish between "how I want the world to be and how, in empirical fact, it is" (1991a: 160). Moreover, feminists should stick to objectivity as the standard for their claims, in order to associate with the term's "glorious intellectual history" (160). In spite of Harding's claim that 'strong objectivity' does not imply value-neutrality, this defense of objectivity straightforwardly returns to the conventional positivist distinction between values and facts.

Thus, Harding has abandoned her earlier revolutionary postmodern appeal to feminist knowers to produce 'abnormal' discourse. Instead, for both substantial and strategical reasons, she now carefully charts the extent to which standpoint thinking links up with other traditions in epistemological thought.²³

4. Outsiders within: Harding and Collins

Harding acknowledges that the validity of a knowledge claim must be assessed independently of the person who does the claim. Still she feels that "it *does* make a difference who says what and when" (1991a: 269). If it is recognized that *all* knowledge is situated, and if we do not accept relativism as a necessary consequence, we have to ask *which* social locations are likely to produce more objective knowledge, and also *how* these locations matter to the validity of the knowledge produced. These questions deserve to be answered with critical and scientific scrutiny. Harding admits that "[t]his may appear to be circular reasoning - to call for scientifically examining the social locations of scientific claims", but if this indeed is the case, she believes it would not involve a vicious circularity (1991a: 142). Again, the central issue is how the logic of standpoint thinking can account for the actual diversity of social locations. In order to answer this question, Harding tries out several typifications for the subject position of the feminist knower that could replace the notion of universal 'woman'. One qualification is the notion of the *outsider within*. Harding adopts this term from sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, who uses it to sketch the contours of 'a Black women's standpoint' (see Collins 1986; 1989; 1991). In many respects, the intellectual agendas of these authors coincide, especially when it comes to their wish to do justice to differences between women while holding on to the basic insights of standpoint thinking. But whereas Harding's project starts with 'thinking from *women's* lives', Collins' primary location is 'the lives and experiences of *Black women*' [my emphasis, bp]. What difference does such a difference in primary locations make? Does it indeed, as standpoint thinking suggests, make for different views of knowledge,

for different epistemologies? A comparison between the two projects might shed more light on the scope and the limits of the logic of standpoint thinking.

According to Patricia Hill Collins, black women historically have had the dubious honour of being the 'outsiders within' of US white society. Through their work as servants, cooks and nannies, Black women got intimately acquainted with the ins and outs of white households. At the same time, because they were not accepted as members of those households, they remained outsiders (Collins 1986: S14; Collins 1991: 11).²⁴ Black feminist scholars are faced with this same mechanism of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from the intellectual communities of feminist, Black and mainstream research, as these are dominated by white women, Black men and white men respectively (1991: 12).

Harding initially picks up Collins' notion to describe the position of women as the typical 'outsiders' or 'strangers' in a men's world (see Harding 1991a: 124). But to her, as to Collins, it is specifically 'marginal intellectuals', such as female researchers, women philosophers, African-American sociologists or lesbian literary critics (1991a: 131, 275) who are the typical outsiders within. As Harding indicates, these are new and unusual combinations of a marginal social identity with a highly valued occupational function within one person. From a mainstream perspective, these are 'misfits' (276). But it is precisely from the gap between the 'contradictory locations' these subjects occupy, from the clash between the different perceptions of the worlds they bring together, that new and unusual understandings may emerge.²⁵ Harding recalls that the identity of a 'feminist woman' is already endowed with this productive tension, in the sense that a feminist is someone who draws attention to her position as a woman, whereas she at the same time wishes to divert attention from it. A subject of feminist knowledge is never just 'a woman' in the unitary or coherent sense. Instead, she is the real-life embodiment of the paradox of gender: her identity is always multiple and contradictory, shaped through ever changing relationships and constantly in change itself.

From the above enumeration of exemplary outsiders within, it seems clear that, in the framework of standpoint theory, it is not granted to just any one to become a subject of Black and/or feminist knowledge. But both Collins and Harding are cautious not to end up in a closed off position. Thus Harding wishes to avoid two radically opposed, but equally parochial positions, i.e. transcendental foundationalism and experiential foundationalism. The first believes in the possibility and quality of a view from nowhere, the other takes personal accounts of experiences at face value. The wish to steer a middle course between essentialism and universalism is also expressed by Collins. In assessing *who* can be a Black feminist, Collins wants to avoid the extreme positions of, on the one hand, the materialist who claims that being Black and/or being female *determines* whether one can develop a Black/feminist consciousness and, on the other hand, the idealist who claims that the identity of the knower is of *no relevance* at all for producing Black feminist thought. For both Collins and Harding, a standpoint is a hard won achievement.

Harding emphasizes that *starting from* the lives and experiences of women does not imply that they constitute the *ground* for better knowledges.²⁶ Experiences in themselves are not reliable; they need to be mediated, both by feminist and scientific insights.²⁷ Ultimately, it is feminism that "teaches women (and men) how to see the social order from the perspective of an outsider" (1991a: 125). A feminist standpoint is also an achievement, because it is acquired through practices of struggle: it is only by resisting the existing social order that one will come to see how it actually works.²⁸ Knowledges based on a feminist standpoint, therefore, are "not a 'neutral' elaboration of women's experiences [...] but a collective political and theoretical achievement" (Harding 1995: 343). Consequently, standpoint theorists do not claim transcendental ground. But they do claim to have "*both* good reasons and social causes" to

hold their beliefs to be legitimate and less false than beliefs generated from more parochial positions (1991a: 168).

For Collins, the connection between Black women's experiences per se and a Black feminist standpoint is made by Black women intellectuals. It is their task, as leaders of and in close interaction with the community of African- American women, "to produce facts and theories about the Black female experience that will clarify a Black woman's standpoint", a standpoint, to be sure, that might not be clear to the women themselves (Collins 1986: S16). This elite of Black women endowed with a specific expertise is not restricted to women with an academic status: Collins draws from an extensive corpus of texts by African- American activists, poets, novelists, and academic researchers, such as Ella Baker, June Jordan, Zora Neale Hurston and bell hooks.

Standpoint thinking does not come 'naturally' to the ones whom it concerns. They have to learn to see its validity for understanding their own lives more fully. Both Harding and Collins, however, have higher ambitions: a (Black) feminist standpoint does not embrace solipsism or separatism, it also claims to enable others to understand their own social world better. Thus, Harding and Collins declare themselves against any form of separatism. To develop Black feminist thought, so Collins, coalitions with and contributions from other groups are necessary, just as those others may be positively challenged by insights from Black feminist thought to rethink their own lives.

In Harding's view, the more global potential of standpoint thinking depends on its acknowledgement that in societies stratified by race, class and culture, there are no 'women' or 'men' per se. Instead, there are only particular men and women, whose lives are structured by interlocking systems of gender, race, class, culture. From a Black feminist standpoint, according to Collins, it is simply impossible *not* to start from the existence of interlocking structures of race, gender, and class. A Black feminist standpoint cannot focus solely on issues of race, or gender, or class, because Black women are marginalized due to their (often) being simultaneously Black, female and poor.²⁹

Hence, according to Harding, although standpoint thinking may initially have been a form of 'identity politics', in which a particular marginalized group gave priority to its own empowerment over and against the empowerment of others, ultimately it can accomplish more. This implies that knowledge generated from a particular standpoint must be *transferable* to others than the ones from whose lives it starts. More so, it must even be possible for those 'others' to *contribute* to such a body of knowledge from their own perspectives.

Thus, Harding flutters many a dovecot by arguing for the viability of 'monstrous' identities such as the 'male feminist', the 'white antiracist' and the 'pro-lesbian heterosexual'. Not that such contradictory locations are occupied easily. If a feminist, a Black, or a lesbian standpoint already is a hard won and painful achievement for women, blacks or lesbians, the more so for men, whites, or heterosexuals. The achievement of such standpoints is rewarding, not only because it teaches one how the world looks from the perspective of the 'other', but also because it enables one to get a better, a more objective understanding of one's own life. Still, if we compare Harding's discussions of the different tracks which may lead to the adoption of such a 'traiterous identity', we find that she treats these purportedly similar processes in dissimilar ways.

To explain how *heterosexual* women, for instance, can start to think from the perspective of *lesbian* lives, Harding simply argues that it 'should not be much more difficult' than contemporary attempts to understand the works of Plato or Descartes. After all, these likewise require us to think from the lives of people from radically different cultures (1991a: 252).

But to set forth how *men* could become able to think from the perspective of *women's* lives,

Harding clearly has much more to explain.³⁰ Thus, she debunks several strategies often used by female feminists to categorically deny the possibility of a man be(com)ing a feminist. She cautions, for instance, not to use 'female', 'feminine' and 'feminist' interchangeably, but to distinguish carefully between the biological, the cultural and the political. Feminists are made, not born, and they come in great variety. All this said, Harding admits that women do have good reasons to be distrustful. There is a long history of men claiming to know better about women than women themselves, including men who claim feminist authority without any investigation of, let alone struggle against their own sexism.³¹ Feminist women therefore have every right to insist on their status as 'first' authorities when it comes to theorizing from the perspectives of women's lives. Moreover, for a man to start 'thinking from women's lives' cannot mean the same as for a woman. For a man, it would rather imply that he recognize his belonging to the group of 'men' as identified by feminist discourse, and then proceed to creatively think through his own life with the help of these feminist analyses. Men, so Harding, can take responsibility for their own identity by speaking "specifically *as men* of themselves, of their bodies and lives, of texts and of politics, using feminist insights to see the world as men who are as knowledgeable about female-generated feminist analyses as female feminists expect one another to be" (1991a: 291).

Harding takes issue with female feminists' distrust of men in feminism, not only because she is convinced that a male feminist perspective can be an enrichment, but also because such distrust against men is at odds with these same, mostly also white, feminists' self-confidence when it comes to their ability to engage in antiracist thought. Harding emphasizes that it is equally problematic, though by no means impossible, for *white* women to think from the lives of women *of colour*, as it is for men to think from women's lives. Like the budding male feminist, a would-be white antiracist should also take responsibility for her racial location as 'white', and be willing to learn about her own privileged position from the perspectives of women of colour. She is likewise urged not to appropriate, exoticize, or individualize the accounts of women of colour, or people of Third World descent.

For subjects with the 'wrong' (because not marginal) identity, such as whites, men or heterosexuals, the only way out is to engage in processes of 'becoming marginal': to try and 'reinvent' oneself as 'other' and learn to look at one's own dominant culture from a marginal standpoint. Harding also refers to this process as the adoption of a 'traitorous' or 'perverse' identity.³² It would involve a process of deliberate alienation in which the familiar and self-evident are turned into the bizarre. It takes hard work to become a male feminist, or a white anti-racist. It will not do just to repeat what blacks or women tell about their experiences of oppression. One must "learn to see the world differently [...] in an active and creative way through the theoretical and political lenses that African-American thinkers originally constructed to produce distinctive insights" (1991a: 291). What is at stake is a 'competency based' antiracism or male feminism. And "[i]f these processes are not painful, I am probably not doing them right" (293). It is in this way that the logic of standpoint thinking enables competent subjects to develop less partial views, and provides the grounds for solidarity between different liberatory movements.

Harding's extensive exposition of how to become a marginal subject illustrates how feminist standpoint thinkers, confronted with criticisms from a Black feminist standpoint, feel forced to perceive their own startingpoints not only as female, but also as *white*. In the context of racial relationships, they must admit to be located at the side of the dominant, rather than the oppressed. Deprived of 'our' epistemic privileges, so Harding voices the concern of many white feminists, are we still allowed to make any claims to knowledge? How could 'we' regain the legitimate status of knowing subjects? Harding's turn to the possibility of constructing a 'traitorous identity' vis-à-vis one's 'own' identity is her way out of this uncomfortable position.³³

Collins likewise discusses the issue of how to establish connections between different marginal

perspectives. In marked contrast with Harding, however, Collins starts from the assumption of *untranslatability*. Black feminist thought, so she observes, may *fail* to be translated in the language of (dominant) others. Hence, rather than universalize one's account, the Black feminist standpoint could be better articulated by more concrete, more specific stories.³⁴ Moreover, although it is likely that Black women's stance gives them more insight in mechanisms of oppression than other positions, it still presents a partial perspective. The Black feminist standpoint exists next to many other 'situated knowledges'³⁵: "[N]o one group can claim absolute 'truth'" (91: 234). In Collins' view, Black feminist thought proposes to overcome intellectual separatism through dialogue. As she quotes Black feminist historian Elsa Barkley Brown, "all people can learn to center in another experience, validate it, and judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own" (236).

Thus, whereas Harding emphasizes the *transferability* of a particular standpoint, Collins starts from the assumption of *untranslatability*. Consequently, in line with her project of 'strong objectivity', Harding ascribes responsibility to every knowing subject to learn to think from the standpoint of marginalized others, in order to achieve 'less false' knowledges of the social world. Collins' epistemology, on the other hand, gravitates towards a more relativistic outlook: although she too asks subjects to fully understand the outlook of others, there is no requirement to let one's own framework be affected or changed by the insights of others.³⁶

5. The modernist legacy

In the present and the foregoing chapter, different proposals for feminist epistemologies passed in review. It was shown that Keller, Code, Harding and Collins each opt for a different strategy for dealing with the ever-recurring knot that constitutes the heart of their critical project: the simultaneous affirmation and deconstruction of its very 'grounds'. Just like the projects of Keller or Code, the above discussed versions of standpoint thinking have to deal with a paradox. On the one hand, they wish to provide room for the particularity of (Black) women's experiences and perspectives. In this sense, they constitute an affirmation of 'thinking from (Black) women's lives'. On the other hand, a (Black) female perspective is presented as the result of structures of sexual and/or racial oppression, of a detrimental situation which ought to change. Hence, according to the logic of standpoint thinking, one *starts* from '(Black) women's lives', while at the same time *problematizing* these lives. Or, as Harding aptly formulates it, "[f]eminist thought is forced to 'speak as' and on behalf of the very notion it criticizes and tries to dismantle - women" (1993a: 59). Contrary to the strategies which use gender as a prism, the logic of standpoint theorizing leads its adherents to explore the more encompassing account of interlocking structures of oppression, and the possibility for subjects to learn from each others' standpoints. To be sure, this does not mean that standpoint thought has freed itself from its paradoxical position. On the contrary, a multiplication of standpoints only leads to a proportional multiplication of paradoxes: each new standpoint will involve both the affirmation and the problematization of the social location from which it starts.

In spite of their significant differences, the four feminist approaches of knowledge discussed so far agree on a number of issues. Keller, Code, Harding and Collins share a desire for *non-hegemonic* knowledges. In my view, in their tacit equation of 'better' knowledges with knowledges not affected by, or at least in opposition to existing relationships of power, they, against all the 'worldly' odds of their own critical

project, hold on to the idea that *innocence* would be a viable position for truly knowledgeable subjects.

5.1 *Innocence*

Among the four authors discussed, there is a shared understanding that, in order to avoid a relapse into objectivism, the traditional notion of objectivity should be reinterpreted. Keller favours dynamic objectivity, Code considers objectivity as a process of constant communication and deliberation, whereas Collins and Harding argue for incorporating subjective, be it consciously mediated experience, in a conception of more objective knowledge. Both Code and Harding declare the positivist distinction between the 'context of discovery' and the 'context of justification' null and void: in order to be able to judge the objectivity or validity of particular claims, the critic should take account of both - which is one of the reasons for Harding to name her alternative *strong* objectivity. Another common concern is the radical relativization of the opposition between the subject and the object of knowledge, because of the relationship of domination and control that usually goes with it. Instead, these feminist theorists wish to develop non-hegemonic forms of knowledge. Thus, at least in her earlier work³⁷, Keller opts for receptivity and reciprocity, for approaching the object-as-subject, for knowers who act like empathic listeners rather than courageous warriors: "In my vision of science, it is not the taming of nature that is sought, but the taming of hegemony" (1985: 178).³⁸ Code's positing of friendship as the paradigmatic model of knowledge likewise proposes to approach the object as subject, and posits the imperative to treat one's objects/subjects with respect. Finally, Collins and Harding, in elevating usually objectified social groups to the status of subjects of knowledge, and in their urge to members of dominant groups to take these marginal knowledges to heart, also attempt to counter prevailing structures of epistemic domination.

In this respect, the (Black) feminist subject of knowledge appears as one who is emotionally balanced, flexible, open-minded, respectful to different approaches, and both willing and able to put herself in the place of 'others'. Her relation to other subjects as well as the object world is described in terms of communication and understanding (Keller), passionate detachment (Code), or commitment to collective struggles of emancipation and empowerment (Harding and Collins). This envisioned subject of knowledge appears to meet perfectly the modern, humanistic standards of normality, rationality and moral decency. The emerging image of the subject in the work of these authors thus bears a striking resemblance to none other than the *fully human subject*, to which these very same feminists seriously object because of its lack of any marks of (social, sexual, racial, etc.) identity.

This striving for non-hegemonic knowledges and for a more fully human subject constitutes the *modern* side of these feminist theories. It shows their commitment to Enlightenment values such as emancipation, autonomy, justice and mutual respect.

I, for my part, would certainly subscribe to these values. But I also think that the (Black) feminist project has a more disturbing part. In the work of Keller, Code, Harding and Collins, there also figures another *persona*, who, especially in the work of the first two, unfortunately fades into the background. She enters the stage when for instance Keller states that "[a]s a woman and a scientist, the status of outsider came to me gratis. Feminism enabled me to exploit that status as a privilege" (Keller 1985: 12). Or when she typifies Barbara McClintock as a 'maverick' and an 'anomalous' scientist. Code likewise refers to this figure when she observes that "[f]eminism produces a subject located at once inside and outside ideologies of gender, conscious of this 'doubled' location, empowered by the doubled vision this ambiguous position affords" (Code 1991: 298). In the work of Collins and Harding she is more explicitly present as the 'outsider within' or the 'marginal intellectual'. This is a subject that sees prejudice and

interests where others think there is just neutrality and objectivity, points at differences where others merely see the same (human beings). And she notices these things because she is affected by them. In that sense, standpoint thinkers touch upon the constructivist view that reality is that which resists a certain trial: sexism has more reality for women than for men because women have a greater chance to bump into it; and the reality of racism is sooner acknowledged by blacks as it is more likely to constitute an obstacle in their lives than in the lives of white people. Consequently, it is not just the *claims* of such outsiders which are contested, it is their *objects* of knowledge which are disputed to begin with. In other words, the position of an 'outsider within' looks more troublesome and unruly than the reassuring image of the fully human subject. When one tries to get issues such as sexual or racial difference on the theoretical agenda, one will often be perceived as 'out of order' - and not at all as one who opts for a careful middle ground stance or for strong objectivity. One's discourse will be considered by many scholars as 'abnormal' rather than 'normal'. Consequently, I would argue, the knowing subject which emerges from these different feminist texts, is not a very 'human', rational or empathic subject; in prevailing discourses of knowledge and science, her voice rather sounds quite strange, out of tune, not appropriate.

I therefore think that feminist standpoint theorists are right in putting the figure of the 'outsider within' center stage. But I would also infer that, no more than Keller and Code take a middle ground position, do Harding and Collins practice stronger objectivity. Their contributions to epistemology are more excentric to existing theories of knowledge than these notions suggest. 'Gender and science', 'storied epistemology', 'an African value system' or 'traitorous identities' are topics most theorists of knowledge would find it hard to give a proper place within their own discipline.³⁹ This applies to feminist discursive interferences in many areas outside philosophy and science as well. Feminists have put a variety of issues on the public and political agenda which before were not even perceived as an issue, such as sexual harassment, incest, compulsory heterosexuality, rape within marriage. These realities have been *constructed* from critical positions located outside the dominant discourses of politics and law. It is such critical outsider positions which I therefore find most promising for rethinking issues of epistemology from a feminist perspective. However, I have problems with the way standpoint theorists flesh out the figure of the outsider within: in my opinion this alternative subject of knowledge remains all too faithful to the modernist legacy, in particular to the conception of epistemological representation as the more or less distorted reflections of a world 'out there'. In the last sections of this chapter I will argue how the identity political approach of standpoint thinking (section 5.2), and its ensuing tendencies towards circularity and essentialism (section 5.3), gloss over an important feature of (Black) feminist representations, i.e. that they are constructing the constituency of (Black) women they are claiming to represent (section 5.4).

5.2 Identities

In standpoint theory, the 'outsider within' appears in many guises: the woman, the black woman, the lesbian critic, the African-American sociologist, the female feminist - they all are familiar with both marginalized and privileged lives, and as such in the most advantageous position to develop a standpoint which enables them to see things 'better'. However, as already indicated, Harding would not want to reserve the ability to develop 'less false' views only to subjects with marginal identities. She therefore wishes to add "additional forms of situated knowing", by giving room to "other feminist identities, secondary ones, standing in the shadows directly behind the ones on which they focus" (1991b: 103). She labels such 'secondary' identities - the feminist man, the anti-racist white - as 'perverse' or 'traitorous'.

These labels suggest that to be white or to be male makes one accessory to structures of racism or sexism - until convincing evidence to the contrary is provided.⁴⁰ As explained earlier, to provide such evidence, members of a dominant group have to learn to look through the lenses of the marginalized other. In this argument a distinction is made between identities which one can *be*, and identities which one can *become*, or: between *given* and *achieved* locations. Hence, subjects *are* female, male, black, white, heterosexual, homosexual; and they can *become* feminist, anti-sexist, anti-racist, Black, etc. This strict separation between 'being' and 'becoming', however, is at odds with recurring reminders by standpoint thinkers that what it means to *be* a woman, or what it means to *be* black, is, on the one hand, determined by existing structures of domination - hence individual subjects are *shaped* by these structures as 'female' or 'black' -, and, on the other hand, that it requires a feminist or a Black consciousness to be fully realized: women have to *learn* to speak 'as a woman', just as blacks have to *learn* to speak 'as a black'. Hence, the dividing line between 'being' and 'becoming' is less strict than suggested. In fact, according to the logic of standpoint thinking, to speak 'as a woman' is to speak as a *feminist* woman.⁴¹ Or, if we take Collins' perspective, to speak 'as a black woman' means to speak as a *Black feminist* woman. Harding even typifies the feminist project as "Claiming Identities We Were Taught to Despise" (1991a: 272).

Next to the distinction between given and achieved identities, Harding's proposal for 'traiterous' identities involves another distinction, one that works *within* the set of given identities, i.e. the distinction between primary and secondary, between marginal and dominant, or between 'better' and 'wrong'⁴² identities. To be male, white, Western, middle-class, and/or heterosexual, from an epistemological perspective, is to belong to the 'wrong' side⁴³, whereas to be female, black, lesbian, gay, or working-class makes one's ability to achieve a 'less false' perspective more likely. Subjects in the secondary locations are asked to learn from the perspectives of the ones who occupy primary locations. The possibility of the transference of knowledge the other way around is simply not discussed - the presumption being, that 'all of us' are already infused by insights from the dominant side. Subjects with secondary identities, so it seems, have to go through a process of purification, in order to become more sensitive to experiences of marginalization. From this perspective, not only a contradictory combination of an achieved and a given identity is epistemologically spoken problematic. The same goes for all those who happen to combine more secondary identities in one person. The assumption is that to be Western, white, middle-class, heterosexual and male, is to be most coherent and most 'monstrous' at once.

From this perspective, it is claimed that men, or whites should *learn from* but not *appropriate* the perspective of women or blacks. For *betraying* one's 'own' identity does not mean one can or should *deny* it. To speak as a feminist man after all can never mean the same as to speak as a woman or as a feminist woman (Harding 1991a: 282). Collins' view is consonant with Harding's on this point: a white can/should learn to see things from the perspective of a black woman, but s/he cannot speak as a black woman. Viewed in the light of my remarks concerning the distinctions between given and achieved, between being and becoming or primary and secondary identities, this appears a demand which is difficult to comply with. For what is the difference between 'learning from' and 'appropriating' when it comes to the adoption of a new perspective, which is not given to either subjects with primary or subjects with secondary identities? Does not 'learning' *imply* 'appropriation', don't we speak of 'acquiring' new insights, 'mastering' new skills, and 'picking up' new expressions? The only way, so it seems, to prevent 'disappropriate appropriations' would be to keep the 'monsters' out, i.e. to allow only women to speak about, for and to women, only black women to speak about, for and to black women, etc. etc.. But this would precisely invoke the kind of separatism which both Harding and Collins reject. They have higher ambitions: to perceive the social world from a particular standpoint is to perceive it from a more objective perspective for *all* knowers.⁴⁴ However, the logic of standpoint thinking draws a strict, hierarchical boundary between two kinds of knowers: on the one hand, there are subjects with a given

primary identity who can become 'outsiders within', on the other hand, there are subjects with a given secondary identity, whose only option is to become 'traitorous' knowers. This assumption contradicts another assumption to which standpoint thinkers pay (lip?) service, i.e. that our lives, and consequently our identities, are structured by interlocking structures of race, gender, class, sexuality, and that every subject occupies many different and often contradictory locations. In my opinion, this latter observation would imply that, in the end, no one can lay claim to occupying a 'primary' position: in the end, we *all* embody 'monstrous' positions.⁴⁵

5.3 *Circularity*

What 'grounds' feminist standpoint theory, according to Harding, is not so much women's experiences per se, but 'the view from women's lives' (1991a: 269). Women's experiences have to be mediated by something else in order to *become* this 'view from women's lives'. What this 'something else' is, is made explicit in the following observation: "It is 'only' necessary to learn how to overcome - to get a critical, objective perspective on - the 'spontaneous consciousness' created by thought that begins in one's dominant social location. I say 'only' ironically, because many women have found the process of understanding their lives through the lenses of feminist theory to be an extremely painful process" (1991a: 287).

As noted earlier, Harding believes that *if* there is a circularity in standpoint thinking, it would not be viciously circular. Why this is not the case, she does not explain. In my view, however, the above quote shows how Harding's explanation of the 'grounds' of feminist knowledge actually comes quite close to a vicious circle. For while, on the one hand, the feminist standpoint is presented as a *criterion* for better knowledge, on the other hand, standpoints have to be developed *with the help of* better knowledge. What helps women move from the merely subjective level of experiences to the more objective claims of feminist theory, is feminist theory; whereas feminist theory, on its turn, is assumed to 'start from' women's lives. The same holds for Collins' exposition of Black feminist thought: it is Black feminist intellectuals who help black women attain an understanding of their lives as black women; whereas black women's lives constitute the starting point for Black feminist intellectuals to develop their thought. Judith Grant puts her finger on the sore spot when she notes that "feminism cannot simultaneously be the lens through which experiences are interpreted, and also find its grounding in those experiences" (Grant 1993: 101).

In emphasizing the *achieved* character of a feminist standpoint, the theorists wish to make clear that standpoint thinking does not start from an essentialist view of women as all sharing a set of 'natural', unchangeable, characteristics. If women have certain world views in common, it is because they have been socialized and shaped by the same structures of male domination. Nevertheless, as I argued above, the logic of standpoint thinking presupposes clear-cut distinctions between given and achieved, and between primary and secondary identities. Although experiences from a particular given and marginal locations are not assumed to be necessary for the development of a standpoint, they are presented as *hardly accessible* to subjects from other, i.e. dominant locations. Whereas Harding still does her utmost to explain how bridges can be built (but never crossed!), Collins acquiesces beforehand in the unbridgeable differences between (and even among marginal) locations. This identity political aspect of standpoint thinking, despite its claims to the contrary, makes it gravitate towards an essentialist position.⁴⁶

In my view, feminist standpoint thinking thus does not contain sufficient counterpoise to ward off its inclination toward vicious circular reasoning, nor the essentialist conception of identity that comes

with it. I therefore believe that its oppositional approach to knowledge takes over more of the vices of epistemology-as-usual than its proponents would care for.

5.4 *The problem of representation*

Another way to describe these tendencies towards circularity and essentialism, is that standpoint theorists tend to collapse the notions of 'women' and 'feminists', or of 'blacks' and 'Blacks', thus ignoring the difference between a gender or racial identity and a political identity. Not every woman is a feminist, not every black identifies as 'Black'. I think this highlights the problematic nature of the assumption that in (Black) feminist thought, (Black) women are finally speaking 'for themselves'. This 'grounding' phrase in my view glosses over the actual *distance* between (Black) feminist spokespersons and their supposed constituency.⁴⁷

Thus, a standpoint is presented as an 'innocent' position, which, whether through the mediation of feminist 'theory' or Black feminist 'intellectuals', merely facilitates and passes on the voices of (Black) women. To phrase it differently, standpoint theories deny their actual complicity into the *making* of other worlds, into *enforcing* different realities. They deny their own implicatedness in existing power/knowledge configurations, as well as their actual success in producing new alignments of knowledge and power.⁴⁸ As Jane Flax phrases it in her criticism of feminist standpoint epistemologies: "Like other Enlightenment thinkers, they believe innocent, clean knowledge is available somewhere for our discovery and use" (Flax 1993: 143).

The claim that feminist knowledges actively *interfere* with existing realities and *construct* new ones implies taking seriously questions regarding the relative validity of knowledge claims - including feminist claims to knowledge. It means thinking through the implications of the performativity of language or discourse, including feminist discourse. It also means that the insistence on 'strong objectivity' and 'less false' accounts in order to safeguard feminist knowledges against the undermining force of relativism has to be relinquished.⁴⁹ Code once assures her readers that an endorsement of relativism need not amount to a denial of realism, because "relativism is stopped in its feared slide into nihilism, solipsism, or subjectivism by the 'brute facts' of the world.." (1991: 321). These 'brute facts', so she proceeds, would be "[s]exism, racism, and environmental harm [which] are as demonstrably part of the world as tables and chairs, though they are open to more varying interpretations" (321). What Code forgets here, however, is that, far from being (accepted as) 'brute facts', the realities of sexism and racism are still, and unfortunately, very much contested. Not every subject 'stumbles' over them. In her more recent writings Code endorses this point of view with her suggestion that we try relativism for a while, because "it often turns out that the most secure and apparently universal assurances of science itself are not just wrong, but tainted, slanted, culpably partial. A profession of relativism keeps that partiality in mind, on the conversational agenda. It shifts the discursive emphasis, so that fixity and finality become the exceptions, and partiality the rule.." (Code 1995: 205).

In their practices of knowledge, feminists and other 'outsiders within' point out differences where before one merely saw a whole, a unity. Thus they cast doubt on what is taken for granted. Moreover, the making of such differences is not an innocent undertaking - it means controversy and conflict. As Dutch historian Mieke Aerts once put it sharply: feminism is not so much about *uncovering* realities that hitherto were invisible, it is rather about *making* certain realities, about getting something done - for instance "stirring up strife in happy marriages..." (Aerts 1986: 558). In taking up this insight, feminist

theorists can no longer evade the notion of the performativity of language, nor the insight that all knowledges are part and parcel of configurations of power/knowledge, and that this holds just as much for feminist and other oppositional knowledges as for knowledges from 'the centre'.

This underlines the necessity for feminist thought to link up with and elaborate its own constructivist impulses, such as Keller's eye for the constitutive role of scientific language and metaphors, Code's notion of positionality and rhetorical spaces, Harding's emphasis on the achieved character of a feminist standpoint, and Collins' reminder of the responsibility of marginal intellectuals. These aspects of feminist theorizing call attention to the fact that knowledge is situated, i.e. that every insight about the world carries traces of the time, place and subject which produce it. At the same time, these feminist outlines of the situated subject differ significantly from the constructivist figures of situated subjectivity. As we may recall, the latter concern the responsiveness of the knower to his/her particular local and historical situation: s/he may subsequently edify, write a genealogy of or 'anthropologize' the situation at hand. To be sure, the subject according to feminist epistemologies also responds to particular contexts - but s/he does so *from a particular, embodied position*. Moreover, as we have seen, whereas from a feminist or Black perspective such a gendered or racial identity is epistemologically significant, for constructivists the empirical subject is no more than one of the many (f)actors in a complex field of force relationships.

Constructivist scholars take epistemology under attack, because its questions concerning the universal conditions of possibility for true knowledge, as well as its sham fights with scepticism, would be superseded. Their alternatives boil down to the empiricization and historicization - hence the relativization - of existing bodies of knowledge. Feminist theorists, on the other hand, do not wish to abandon the project of epistemology in that radical sense. To them, the normative question of how to produce 'better' knowledge remains important. It hitherto only provided faulty answers. As Alcoff and Potter put it, "[f]or feminists, the purpose of epistemology is not only to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but also to contribute to an emancipatory goal: the expansion of democracy in the production of knowledge" (Alcoff and Potter 1993: 13).

The task for a feminist theory of knowledge, as I see it, is to connect the quest for non-hegemonic forms of knowledge with feminism's potential of critical outsidership, and to mediate this by the awareness of the non-innocence of feminism's own claims to knowledge. What is needed is an approach to knowledge which combines feminist insights about the *situatedness* of knowledge with a constructivist emphasis on the *contingency* of all knowledge claims. In my view, the work of feminist theorist and historian of science Donna Haraway sets the best example of an attempt to accomplish this complicated task. In the next chapter, I will therefore set out Haraway's insights concerning 'situated knowledges', the privileged subject position of the 'inappropriate/d other' and the non-innocence of all claims to knowledge.

Notes

1. In a creative paraphrase of Marx, Nancy Hartsock puts it thus: "If [...] we follow the worker home from the factory, we can once again perceive a change in the *dramatis personae*. He who before followed behind as the worker, timid and holding back, with nothing to expect but a hiding, now strides in front while a third person, not specifically present in Marx's account of the transaction between capitalist and worker (both of whom are male) follows timidly behind, carrying groceries, baby and diapers" (Hartsock 1983: 291).

2. In an earlier article, Smith calls attention for another methodological aspect of starting from the 'everyday world', i.e. the way it urges the sociologist to account for the fact that the relation between the observer and object is a social relation. It, in other words, highlights the *situatedness* of all sociological knowledge: "If we begin from the world as we actually experience it, it is at least possible to see that we are located and that what we know of the other is conditional upon that location as part of a relation comprehending the other's location also" (Smith 1987: 93).

3. It must be noted that Smith herself has spoken vehemently against the "misinterpretation" of her work as representative for standpoint thinking (Smith as quoted in Grant 1993: 209, n.35; see also Smith 1997). Although I do see the significant differences between for instance Smith and Hartsock, I still think Smith's exposition on 'women's standpoint' and her use of Marxist views of knowledge are elucidating for understanding the logic underlying feminist standpoint theory in general.

4. Hartsock deliberately uses the term 'sexual' instead of 'gendered', because she would not want to suggest that every dimension of the division of labour between men and women can be reduced to social components. The role of bodily aspects should not be overlooked - some may be still unknown, others are more obvious, such as the fact that only women can bear children (Hartsock 1983: 289).

5. Although Harding does not mention them here, Keller's views seem to fit the description of feminist empiricism quite well, such as her belief in the flexibility of science to digest internal criticism, or her assumption that women scientists are more likely to be attentive to sexist bias. Harding does refer to Keller's work, however, in her criticism of theorists who suggest that the alternative practices of individual women scientists would offer guidelines for the development of a feminist science. In her view, such an approach unjustifiedly assumes that gendered identities could constitute the ground for a feminist science (Harding 1986a: 139-140). Moreover, Harding is of the opinion that Keller's proposal for and belief in scientific pluralism ignores "the social, political, psychological, and economic constraints that explain why some scientific ideas gain social legitimacy and others do not" (1986a: 122). Later, Harding's assessment of Keller's position changes: at one point, Keller is presented as a standpoint thinker (1991a: 69, 70), at another point she is assumed to take a transitional position between feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint thinking (1991a: 118).

I have not found any reference to Code's work but for one note in which Harding characterizes it as an attempt to transform relativism into a useful epistemological tool, and as a "subjectivist epistemology" (Harding 1995: 340; 349, n.7).

6. "[...] professes a profound scepticism toward the Enlightenment vision of the power of 'the' human mind to reflect perfectly a readymade world that is out there for the reflecting. Many feminists share a rejection of the value of the forms of rationality, of dispassionate objectivity, of the Archimedean perspective, which were to be the means to knowledge" (Harding 1986b: 655).

7. See Harding 1986a, chapter 7; and Harding 1987a.

8. Although the more straightforward formulations in an article published in the same year do not testify to such caution: "It is a vast overgeneralization to presume that all African, let alone all colonized people, share distinctive personalities, ontologies, ethics, epistemologies, or world views. But is it any worse than the presumption that there are commonalities to be detected in *all women's* social experience or world view?" With this rhetorical question, Harding defends the right of 'Third World peoples' to claim a shared identity as a source for alternative understandings, just as "we women also claim an identity we were taught to despise; around the globe we insist on the importance of our social experience as *women*, not just as gender-invisible members of class, race, or cultural groups." So "[h]ow can white Western women insist on the legitimacy of what we think we share with all women and not acknowledge the equal legitimacy of what colonized people think they share with each other?" (Harding 1986b: 660)

This is not a very convincing argument in my opinion. It seems to me that the question is not whether it is 'any worse' (which, after all, only legitimizes one unfortunate strategy with the help of another equally unfortunate one), but whether it is 'any better' to work with such gross overgeneralizations! Moreover, the subsequent use of the denominator 'we women' first, and 'white Western women' just a couple of phrases later, perfectly illustrates what is 'bad' about such generalizations: in this case it is *white Western* women who claim the right to speak for *all* women, ignoring the voices of those feminist women who see themselves as female and (post)colonial subjects at the same time. In this respect, I cannot go along with Harding's reassurance that the 'problem of intellectuals' or of 'vanguardism' is less urgent for feminism than for Marxism. The fact that feminist intellectuals for the greater part are women themselves, whereas Marxist intellectuals rarely belonged to the proletariat, does not make for less significant differences (in power, literacy, class, etc.) between the feminist spokespersons and the women they are speaking for (1986a: 242).

9. Note that in this quote Harding translates Gilligan's findings about the typically *female* characteristic of contextual reasoning into the (not indisputable) assessment that this is a feature of *feminist* theorizing, whereas in the article which summarizes the book's main line of argument the word 'feminist' is replaced by 'women' (1986b: 650).

10. Harding substantiates her proposal for a different and 'better' science with a retrospective of the first stages of the development of modern science. The New Science Movement in 17th century England, so she sets forth, was explicitly committed to undermining the system of feudalism, and to enforcing the politically progressive values of Puritanism: it fostered an antiauthoritarian attitude, believed in progress, wanted to further the public good and redistribute 'both wealth and knowledge' (1986a: 219-221). Harding observes an 'eery resemblance' between this initial stage of modern science and feminist successor projects. The feminist claim that science is 'inherently emancipatory' (221), would therefore find support in its early conceptualizations.

11. Harding cautions, however, that thinking through issues of methodology should not lead to the search for the 'right', or 'scientific' method, as there is no simple recipe which prescribes how to do feminist research (see Harding 1987b).

12. In a more recent article, Harding discerns two kinds of politics at work within science: one concerns overt activities in the service of so called special interest groups, the other involves the more invisible effects of power through prevailing institutional arrangements, research priorities and strategies. Whereas adherents to the ideal of objectivity as neutrality reject the first as an 'intrusive politics' which would infect an otherwise clean practice, they deny the political impact of the second, the 'institutional' version of politics (Harding 1995: 335-336).

13. Harding refers to sociologists of knowledge such as David Bloor, Barry Barnes, Karin Knorr-Cetina and Steve Woolgar, whose work I shortly referred to in the first chapter.

14. Regularly, however, Harding specifies this observation, as follows: "In societies where power is organized hierarchically [...] there is no possibility of an Archimedean perspective.." (1991a: 59); or: "In a hierarchically organized society, objectivity cannot be defined as requiring (or even desiring) value-neutrality" (1991a: 134). Remarks which seem to suggest that in societies without or with less pervasive structures of domination, objectivity would coincide with value-neutrality. But such a view would contradict Harding's steadfast claim that objective knowledge is not value-free but invested with 'progressive' values. Notably, in a later article, Harding extends her analysis of prevailing views of objectivity as both too narrow and too broad to the dominant perceptions of scientific *method*, and consequently argues for the need for 'strong method', i.e. the need to systematically activate 'democracy-increasing interests and values' in processes of knowledge acquisition (Harding 1993b: 17-18).

15. Neutrality, so Harding observes, is often claimed by reference to methodological rigour, where it is assumed that

matters of method pertain solely to the context of justification. Thus, "it comes into play only after a problem is identified as a scientific one, after central concepts, a hypothesis and research design have already been selected" (Harding 1995: 338).

16. In an earlier article, Harding already sets forth how she agrees with a representative of the Strong Programme such as David Bloor in his criticism of empiricist epistemologies, but that she disagrees with his interpretation of his own analytical work as strictly sociological, hence scientific and value-neutral, because of its implicated 'functionalist' or relativist epistemology (see Harding 1983).

17. Harding refers to the work of David Bloor and Steve Woolgar (1991a: 162, n.27).

18. "Thus, in this theory the subject of belief and of knowledge is never simply an individual [...] It is always an individual in a particular social situation, and so in this sense it is also the social group that shares that situation" (Harding 1991a: 59). The knowing subject is always part of a scientific *community*: "It is not individual, personal, 'subjective' error to which feminist and other social critics of science have drawn attention, but widely held androcentric, Eurocentric and bourgeois assumptions that have been virtually culture-wide across the culture of science" (1995: 339).

19. "[...] we can understand how inanimate nature *simulates* encultured humans in that it always comes to us preconstructed as a possible object of knowledge, just as do humans" (Harding 1991a: 12); "Nature-as-object-of-knowledge is more than a cultural construct, but it is always that" (74); "[...] nature as-the-object-of-human-knowledge never comes to us 'naked'; it comes only as already constituted in social thought" (147).

20. She for instance refers to this theory of representation as "historically situated [...]: characteristic only of certain groups in the modern West" and "implausible" (Harding 1991a: 158), and notes that "[...] few thinkers today are quite as confident as heretofore concerning such central Enlightenment assumptions as the possibility of glassy mirror minds, the uniquely describable rational order of the universe, and the potentially good fit between the two" (1995: 332).

21. "The requirements for achieving strong objectivity permit one to abandon notions of perfect, mirrorlike representations of the world, the self as a defended fortress, and the 'truly scientific' as disinterested with regard to morals and politics..." (Harding 1991a: 159).

22. Compare: "Only through such struggle can we begin to see *beneath the appearances* created by an unjust social order to the *reality* of how this social order is *in fact* constructed and maintained" (Harding 1991a: 127 [my emphasis, bp]).

23. Harding for instance now finds that abandoning the notion of objectivity "is to adopt a 'bohemian' strategy; it is to do 'something else' besides to struggle on the terrain where philosophies, science projects and social policies are negotiated. Why not instead," she asks, "think of objectivity as an 'indigenous resource' of the modern North? It needs updating, rehabilitation, so that it is capable of functioning effectively in the science-based society that the North has generated and that many now say is its major cultural export" (Harding 1995: 347).

24. By using the notion of the 'outsider within', Collins places herself explicitly in the tradition of sociologists such as Georg Simmel, who in his famous essay elaborated the metaphor of 'the stranger' as a better knower, and Karl Mannheim, for whom 'marginal intellectuals' figured as the epistemologically privileged 'strangers' to the academy (Collins 1986: S15). Needless to say that the position of the 'outsider' or the 'stranger' has fascinated many sociologists, such as Norbert Elias, Zygmunt Bauman and Robert Merton, and that these metaphors are adopted by many

intellectuals to describe their marginal position vis-à-vis dominant discourse. Thus, Virginia Woolf, in *Three Guineas* (1938) already describes the position of woman as the position of an 'outsider' within her own home country, just as more recently, Black feminist writers such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Patricia Williams present themselves as outsiders to dominant white society. See Pels 1997b for a critical discussion of the postmodern popularity of the image of the 'stranger' and the proliferation of related figurations such as the 'nomad' and the 'traveler'. For an in-depth study of 'outsiders' in the realm of literature, see Mayer 1982.

25. The image of the 'outsider within' resonates Dorothy Smith's description of the 'bifurcated consciousness' as typical for women sociologists: "The identification of the bifurcated consciousness is a potential experience for women *members of an intelligentsia* or of *women otherwise associated with the ruling apparatus* that organizes society. It is clearly not every woman's experience of the world" (Smith 1988: 86).

26. "What women say and what women experience do provide important clues for research designs and results, but it is the objective perspective *from women's lives* that gives legitimacy to feminist knowledge" (Harding 1991a: 167). In a later article, Harding does speak of women's lives and experiences as 'grounds' for feminist knowledge. But she puts the notion of 'grounds' between quotation marks, and emphasizes that it does not refer to the conventional philosophical meaning of the term, but rather to "the site, the activities, from which scientific questions arise", and that it provides "only a necessary - not a sufficient - starting point for maximizing objectivity" (Harding 1993a: 56, 57).

27. Women have to *learn* to "define as rape those sexual assaults that occur within marriage" (Harding 1991a: 123). Thus, "we can *learn* to experience the race and class relations in which we participate" [...] "[w]e can learn to experience our race and class situation as one that gives us race and class overprivilege", just as "I can learn to experience the male supremacy that shapes my life as precisely the kind of male supremacy to which women in my class and race will be subjected...." (1991a: 284).

28. "Feminist struggle is a fundamental part of gaining knowledge, including knowledge about and through science. People, men as well as women, who do not engage in it, who do not risk in their daily activities offending or threatening the legitimacy of male supremacy in any of its encultured forms, cannot *know* how the social and natural worlds are organized.[...] a woman who can say 'I've never been discriminated against as a woman' has not engaged in those political struggles in personal, community, or institutional contexts which patriarchy finds so threatening" (Harding 1991a: 72).

29. From the perspective of Black feminist thought, therefore, the so-called additive approach, which starts with gender and then adds other categorical distinctions, is not viable (Collins 1991: 222).

30. The greater part of the chapter on 'Thinking from the perspective of lesbian lives' is dedicated to outlining the various ways in which heterosexual women gained a better insight into their own lives by learning to look at it through the lenses of lesbian critique. Whereas there are no examples of what 'thinking from the perspective of men's lives' would have to offer to feminism.

31. Harding enumerates all kinds of histories of 'inappropriate appropriations', as she labels them (see 1991a: 271), among which the appropriation of lesbian and gay histories by heterosexuals. However, in her discussion of heterosexual feminist women adopting a lesbian standpoint, this is not reflected upon as problematic at all.

32. See Harding 1991a: 288-295, where the term 'traitorous identity' is used. In Harding 1991b, the notion of 'perverse identities' prevails. It is adopted from Bonnie Zimmerman's concept of the possibility of 'perverse' (i.e. lesbian) readings of heterosexual texts (1991b: 107).

33. Both *The Science Question in Feminism* (1986a) and *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (1991a) are written from the same angle, i.e. the perspective of white, Western, feminist academic women. But whereas the 'we' in the first book appeals to women, unmarked, in the later book, 'we' does not appeal to women per se but has become marked as Western and white. This new 'we' does not merely occupy (epistemologically comfortable!) marginal positions, this 'we' now also belong to the centre. Hence, the problem shifts from how to give voice to 'our' perspective to the problem of how to shape 'our' relationship with those who live more, or otherwise marginalized lives than ourselves, and who, for that reason appear to be epistemologically privileged to 'us'. The nagging doubts behind this acknowledgement of one's own dominant position are expressed in questions such as: "How can *we* actively study and learn about our dominant group selves [...]?", and: "[I]s it only the lives of the oppressed that can generate knowledge, especially liberatory knowledge? What can the role in knowledge-seeking be for the lives of those of us who are or would be white antiracists, male feminists, heterosexual antiheterosexists, economically overadvantaged people against class exploitation, and the like?" (Harding 1991a: 271)

34. As Collins quotes Lorraine Hansberry: "[...] to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific" (1991: 234).

35. Collins here refers to Haraway's reformulation of standpoint epistemology in terms of 'situated knowledges'. In the beginning of her book she claims that her approach is closer to Haraway's views than to the more classical versions of standpoint thinking as developed by Hartsock or Smith (1991: 39, n.1). From my discussion of Collins' work thus far, as well as from my reading of Haraway's notion of 'situated knowledges' in the next chapter, it will be clear that I don't agree with Collins on this point.

36. See also Lennon 1995 for an interesting discussion of the relationship between epistemologies of standpoint and the recognition of knowledge as 'perspectival'.

37. As I noted earlier, in her more recent work, provoked by many feminists' supposedly too easy wholesale repudiation of all science, Keller is less unequivocal in her rejection of the domination of nature. She now proposes that we first ask which ends might be served by the language of domination, and which by a language of connectivity (see Keller 1992).

38. The same motivation is ascribed to Barbara McClintock: "To McClintock, science has a different goal: not prediction per se, but understanding; not the power to manipulate, but empowerment..." (Keller 1985: 166).

39. Take Code, who draws an analogy between her first study, *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987), which could not be fit into a "readily available space within the discourse/rhetoric of epistemology.." (1995: 6), and the reception of Carol Gilligan's work on female ethics. Code typifies both texts as "ex-centric" (7).

40. "After all, it can't be a pleasure to discover the unintentionally racist assumptions that have guided so many of my thoughts and practices - especially at those moments when I was exactly trying to enact a piece of antiracist business" (Harding 1991a: 293).

41. Note that the same slippage between 'women' and 'feminist women' can be discerned in an avowedly non-, if not anti-standpoint feminist such as Keller! (see chapter 2, section 2.3)

42. Harding uses the term 'wrong identities' just a few times, and puts 'wrong' between quotation marks, to indicate that this is merely in a manner of speaking (see Harding 1991a: 272). For she would not want to scare people off by suggesting that they are "the wrong kind of people" to speak up (1991a: 294; 1991b: 110). In my view, however, it is precisely the conceptual framework of 'primary' and 'secondary' identities which conjures up the very risks Harding

claims she would want to avert.

43. Note that 'achieved' racist, homophobic, or sexist locations are not 'wrong', but 'false'!

44. Harding's concern for getting in principle everyone interested in and committed to 'feminism and other counterculture studies and politics' also shows in her apt reminder that "people are not enthusiastic about participating in such efforts if they are constantly told that they are the wrong kind of people to speak in this group and that consequently their learning can only be passive - rehearsing what others have thought up for them to think. We need to devise agendas of activity for all the social identities and social locations that our potential recruits carry. If women, people of color, gays and lesbians, and the economically disadvantaged can create counterculture agendas for themselves, then so can men, whites, heterosexuals, and the economically overadvantaged" (Harding 1991a: 294; see also 1991b: 110).

45. In a critical essay on feminist standpoint thinking, Dutch sociologist Hans Harbers starts with his experience of having an article refused for publication in a Dutch journal of philosophy, one of the arguments being that, before venting his ideas about how feminist studies should proceed, he had better first reflect on his position as a man in feminism. Well, Harbers took up the gauntlet. The essay is his forceful reply. Perhaps here is the place to make the small confession that I was the author of that letter, written on behalf of the board of the journal *Krisis*. It must have become clear to Hans by now, that since then I went a long way to meet him. Although I still think it necessary to exercise some selfreflexivity about one's own position, I sympathize with Harbers' heartfelt refusal to identify as 'the Monster Man'. Precisely for the kind of reason he refers to in this essay, namely that "feminism is a project that concerns both women and men". The same holds, so I would add, for anti-racism as a project that concerns both blacks and whites (Harbers 1994: 91).

46. Initially, Harding presented 'identity politics' or 'situated politics' as the political companion to the feminist standpoint view of 'situated knowledge' (1991a: 273). She showed to be alive to the essentialist tendencies within standpoint thinking: "[T]hey tend to center a difference between the genders at the ontological (and, consequently, scientific, epistemological, and political) expense of clearly focusing on differences between women or between men in different races, classes, and cultures" (1991a: 178). Nevertheless, she believed that it also contained strong resources to emphasize differences between women (1991a: 180; 1993a: 58-63). More recently, however, and precisely to rebut charges of essentialism or ethocentrism, Harding claims that standpoint theory is *not* an 'identity politics' project (1995: 343).

47. In this respect it is interesting to note that the *sociologist* Collins does reflect on Black feminist *intellectuals* as both spokespersons for and teachers of black women, whereas Harding betrays her *philosophical* mind-set when she claims that it is feminist *theory* which teaches women. The avowed difference between 'Black feminists' and 'black women' to Collins is reason to reflect on the responsibilities and tasks that come with a Black feminist position: it is to simultaneously identify with, be subservient to and in mutual exchange with the ones one represents.

48. In his discussion of feminist standpoint thinking, Pels observes that "[t]he Marxist slippage between proletarians and intellectuals is repeated in terms of a similar metonymic transcription from the broad category of 'women' to the more restricted one of feminists - who are usually *intellectuals* (and more often than not, also marginal ones)" (Pels 1997a: 9). He consequently argues for the need for feminist and other standpoint thinkers to be selfreflexive concerning the gap between their own particular location as intellectuals and their constituency, in particular concerning their particular investment and interest in this 'third position', which is not only marginal vis-à-vis the centre, but also vis-à-vis the marginalized groups they represent (10).

49. I agree with Susan Hekman when she criticizes standpoint thinking for halting between two positions: on the one

hand, it holds a constructionist view according to which *all* knowledge is socially situated, on the other hand it claims the privilege of some knowledges over others. Thus Harding would "not acknowledge that 'the reality of women's lives' is itself a socially constructed discursive formation. It is a discourse that has been constructed, at least in part, by feminist standpoint theorists who define it as the ground of their method" (Hekman 1997a: 355). According to Hekman, to think through the epistemological potential of standpoint theory, feminists should attempt to *deconstruct* the dichotomy between essentialism and relativism rather than locate themselves somewhere in between. In their respective responses, Hartsock, Collins, Harding and Smith in the same issue of *Signs* (1997) especially castigate Hekman for her one-sided focus on issues of truth and method, while ignoring the relevance of power and politics. Harding's explanation of the logic of standpoint thinking, for that matter, only confirms Hekman's observation that she mixes the relativism of 'situatedness' with the realism of the 'privileged situation'. In her comparison with the 'natural experiment' of the stick in the pond, Harding talks of 'different locations' that generate different accounts, but at the same time indicates that some locations are optically deceptive - the stick *appears* bent -, while other locations reveal how things really are - if you walk around the pond, the stick appears straight, "as it really is" (Harding 1997: 384). Strangely enough, though Hekman mentions Haraway as the author who has 'done the most' to think through a new epistemological paradigm, she ends with a recommendation of Max Weber's concept of the ideal type.