

### Part III: CONCLUSION

## Chapter 9

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### The standpoint in question

In the opening chapter of my thesis, I indicated how the so-called constructivist turn signified a break with the epistemological preoccupation: how is (true) knowledge possible?, and shifted attention to a more down-to-earth empirical issue: how is 'true' knowledge crafted? In the first question, the addition 'true' actually is redundant, as the word 'knowledge' counts as synonymous for what *is* true. In the second, 'true' goes with quotation marks, as it refers to what is *taken* to be true by certain communities of knowers. Feminist theorists agree with many constructivist insights, but not with their relativistic implications. Donna Haraway coined the term 'situated knowledges' to describe a feminist-constructivist approach that could meet these objections.

#### 1. Constructivism and feminism

For Richard Rorty, Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour, the idea of knowledge as a *representation* of the world 'out there' has become obsolete. Instead, they perceive knowledge practices as part and parcel, even constitutive of the very reality they claim to describe. In line with this, they conceive of language in terms of speech acts, which may have concrete, material, performative effects. Thus, Rorty calls attention to the constitutive force of vocabularies, Foucault speaks of discourse as a material-symbolic event, while Latour's semiotic approach conceives of knowledge practices as processes of signification by human and non-human actors. Hence, knowledge does not innocently reflect or 'mirror' the world, as if it were unchangeable, fixed, only waiting to be discovered. Practices of knowledge rather link up with the worlds they describe, and in the process of doing so, they both are led by and interfere with those worlds. This is claimed to be equally valid for the natural as for the social sciences: nature, society or the self are all conceived of as constructed, i.e. as local and historical entities, always liable to change.

The constructivist authors discussed also make short work of the notion of the transcendental *subject*. Knowledge does not originate from an autonomous, transcendental position; it is crafted by particular, embodied and situated persons, who are constructed as subjects in and through language. A subject of knowledge is both source and product, origin and outcome of discourse. The subject is the relatively coincidental outcome of complex processes of interaction between a multitude of actors, only one (f)actor in a vast field of relationships of knowledge and power. Ultimately, it is impossible for any knowledge practice to rise above its local and historical context. Ultimately, all knowledge is *situated*. Still, their emphasis on contingency does not imply that for Rorty, Foucault or Latour 'anything goes'. Their respective suggestions regarding the future role of the philosopher, for instance, are quite at odds with this professed death of the subject. Thus, Rorty's ironist position endorses both the liberal value of individual freedom and the liberal aversion against cruelty which calls for justice and solidarity. Foucault's genealogies are the histories of those who are excluded from dominant Western discourse: the mad, the delinquent, the homosexual, the hermaphrodite. Finally, Latour's project of anthropologization

implies a deconstruction of the hierarchical divide between the 'modern' and the 'primitive'; it instead recognizes the multitude of hybrid actors who are simultaneously brought to being and denied existence since the establishment of the modern constitution. In my view, the difficulty of these constructivist projects therefore is not so much their relativism. It rather is their reluctance to lay down universal norms, their refusal to legitimize their accounts with an appeal to last instances such as 'Truth' or 'Reason'. In other words, the gist of these constructivist attacks on epistemology-as-usual is a radical *anti-foundationalism*, accompanied by a deep distrust of the modern genre of *critique*.

Precisely because of their affinity with the constructivist turn, feminist theorists can be counted among its most concerned critics. They subscribe to the deconstruction of the transcendental subject of knowledge, likewise prefer a more empirical approach of epistemological questions, and they agree that knowledge is the outcome of relationships of power. However, they cannot go along with what they perceive as the relativistic implications of constructivism. The reason is that feminist thought is engaged in a down-right *critical* project: it takes issue with the *distorting* influence of particular constellations of power on agreed upon bodies of knowledge. For constructivists, there is nothing wrong with the intertwining of power and knowledge - it is what keeps science going. But in the eyes of feminist theorists, relationships of power make the knowledge produced less objective and less true. Their plea for empirization does not so much imply the death of the subject, but shows that the subject is actually endowed with a very specific identity, which is male, but also white, Western, middle-class, heterosexual, etc.

Despite their different views of the epistemological significance of gender, Keller, Code, Collins and Harding stick to the normative dimension of epistemology. Thus, they formulate criteria for the production of 'less false' and 'non-hegemonic' knowledge, such as a radical relativization of the opposition between subject and object, and the need for knowers who are dynamic (Keller), friendly (Code) or committed to projects of emancipation and empowerment (Collins and Harding). Their answer to radical constructivism is a 'middle ground stance' between realism and relativism. With these proposals, these feminist theorists show their commitment to Enlightenment values such as equality and justice, and their agreement with the modern conception of the 'fully human' subject.

But there is also another voice speaking in the work of these authors, one which rejects this modern legacy. From this perspective, the notion of the (fully human) subject is criticized for its mistaken suggestion of universality and disembodiedness. Other, more particular and embodied figures of subjectivity are propagated, such as the woman, the outsider or the maverick. Such marginal locations endow feminist knowers with epistemic privilege: they enable them not only to see more, but also to see things differently. From this perspective, feminist knowledges look more disturbing, more 'inappropriate', than the occupation of a middle ground stance suggests.

In my view, it is this counter-current within feminist thought which should be emphasized more. For it is precisely the 'abnormality' of feminist discourse, to speak with Rorty, which makes for its innovative impact. Rather than *uncover* already existing realities, feminists are actively engaged in *constructing* new 'matters of fact'. This means that a feminist theory of knowledge has to account for the fact that feminist knowers, however marginal, are not innocent, but implicated in configurations of knowledge and power.

In their proposal to conceive of the subject of (Black, feminist) knowledge as an 'outsider within', the standpoint theories of Patricia Hill Collins and Sandra Harding show most affinity with this more knowledge-political approach of epistemology. Harding puts forward the criterion of 'strong objectivity'.

She recognizes that all knowledge is socially situated, and at the same time requires that one critically evaluate which social situations generate the more objective knowledge. Strong objectivity, Harding claims, can be expected from those who have learned to think from lives situated at the margins, such as the lives of blacks or women.

I have serious problems with the logic of standpoint thinking. First, it shows a tendency towards circularity when presenting the concept of a standpoint as a *criterion* for better knowledge, while at the same time assuming that a standpoint is to be developed *with the help of* better knowledge. Secondly, although Harding assures us that experiences of marginalization are not necessary for developing a standpoint, the suggestion is quite strong that such experiences are *hardly accessible* to others. Here, standpoint epistemology tends towards an essentialist position, according to which the (gender/racial/ethnic/class) identity of a subject becomes a crucial, if not the decisive criterion for establishing the validity of her claims about the world.

I agree with the constructivist insight that knowledge is inextricably linked up with relationships of power, and that truth discourse consists of a set of performative practices which not only represent, but also constitute realities. All knowledge is situated: every insight about the world, 'true' or not, carries traces of the time, place and subject that produced it. But I also wish to hold on to the basic assumption of standpoint thought that some knowledge practices are 'better' than others. So, how can we allow for the situatedness of all knowledge, and still claim that it is possible to distinguish between more or less valuable knowledges?

With the concept of 'situated knowledges', Haraway in my opinion successfully brings together insights from feminist standpoint thinking and constructivist views of knowledge. Situated knowledges, Haraway claims, are partial in both senses of the term, i.e. they are incomplete and they take sides. I conceive of Haraway's 'situated knowledges' as a multi-layered concept, which contains at least three different dimensions of meaning.

First, the concept of situated knowledges involves the *descriptive* claim that *all* knowledge is linked up with the local and historical context from which it emerges. A constructivist acknowledges this claim without much ado. Haraway, however, connects it with a normative statement for which a constructivist would undoubtedly recoil, i.e. that the more situated knowledge is, the more objective it will be.

Haraway thus provocatively subscribes to the insight of standpoint thinking that a view 'from below' produces better knowledge than a view 'from above'. The partiality of situated knowledges in this second, *normative* sense of the term, concerns the perspective of any collective that falls outside the norm of the white, Western, heterosexual, middle-class man, such as women, blacks, gays, working class people. Such perspectives may yield oppositional knowledges, serving the empowerment of hitherto marginalized points of view. Still, so I claimed, Haraway's interpretation differs from standpoint thinking in its greater wariness of essentialism and closed-off stories. Although experiences of marginality may give one a better clue as to how to see from the margins, such experiences are neither sufficient nor necessary for developing a situated view. The reason is that, from a constructivist perspective, experiences are always mediated with the help of collectively available vocabularies and discursive conventions. Hence, they are endowed with a certain 'artefactuality' - even for the subjects of these experiences themselves.

Practices of situated knowledges, however, could accomplish more: instead of the mere *reversal* of structures of dominance through the empowerment of the marginalized, they may also *deconstruct* such hierarchical frameworks. Haraway's concept thus contains a third layer of meaning, according to which situated knowledges may have a more *visionary* dimension as well. As such, they cross the borders of humanity to side with other species: with plants, animals and machines, but also with more hybrid creatures such as the cyborg, OncoMouse<sup>TM</sup> or the FlavrSavr Tomato. The latter are the most 'promising monsters': truly 'inappropriate/d others' from whose locations new, unexpected vantagepoints may be developed. According to this third layer of meaning, situated knowledges offer non-innocent, non-utopian stories in which the world described becomes more promising, though not less 'worldly', than it is.

Unfortunately, the overall feminist reception of Haraway's notion of situated knowledges picks up only its normative dimension, where it shows most resemblance to standpoint thinking. In disagreement with these 'one-dimensional' interpretations, the present study wishes to emphasize the actual complexity and multi-layeredness of Haraway's view of knowledge. To assess its scope and limits, I carried out a series of studies in which different knowledge practices were read as cases of situated knowledge. The subject matter of these knowledge practices concerns the position of so-called 'ethnic minorities' in the Netherlands.

## 2. Cases of realism

To investigate the concept of situated knowledges with the help of a case study is a precarious undertaking. After all, to investigate whether and how particular knowledge practices may count as practices of situated knowledges, is itself also a knowledge practice. Consequently, each claim, each critical reading of a particular text as more or less 'situated' may backfire, may be 'returned to sender' by asking whether and how that critical reading itself counts as 'situated'. The critical questions I have conjured up by engaging in this case study, are: are my readings self-exemplifying, do they do what they preach? Or do they conceal internal contradictions? Furthermore, are these contradictions of the kind that can be solved, or are they inherent to the problems raised?

In the following recapitulation I will show that the case studies undertaken in this thesis, besides developing a theoretical argument about the concept of situated knowledges, indeed also make an effort to practice situated knowledges. My readings of the Dutch minorities discourse thus follow a double track. On the one hand, they intend to assess the merits and drawbacks of the concept of situated knowledges. Motivated by my objections to the tendencies towards closed circularity and essentialism in standpoint thinking, the explorations are specifically attentive to the points of difference between knowledge from a particular 'standpoint' and 'situated knowledges'. On the other hand, my readings relate critically to the various interventions in and contributions to the Dutch minorities discourse themselves. At several points I do not hesitate to voice objections, appreciations or agreements. The case study, in other words, moves on two levels at once: it *uses* the Dutch minorities discourse as a case to illustrate and test the theoretical notion of situated knowledges; but by positioning itself with regard to the issues at stake, it also becomes *part* of this discourse.

In assessing the results of the case study, I will therefore regularly switch between these two levels: on the

one hand, I will draw conclusions about the theoretical notion of situated knowledges, on the other hand, I will reflect upon the implications of my analyses for Dutch knowledge practices concerning ethnic minorities.

My case study opened with three telling episodes in the Dutch public debate on ethnic minorities. I focused on the position of so-called *new realism*, as represented by Herman Vuijsje (1986), Frits Bolkestein (1991) and Bernadette de Wit (1993). The discourse of new realism, in my view, provides a telling example of what it means for knowledges to be situated in the *descriptive* sense of the term.

Bolkestein, Vuijsje and De Wit claim to represent reality as it is, without the impeding force of prejudice, the burden of taboos, or the distorting influence of interests, values, or desires. My readings dispute this purportedly disinterested sense of reality: the 'realistic' accounts discussed are no less inspired by particular interests, values and desires than they discern among their adversaries. Thus, a realistic attitude itself is presented as an expression of honesty, and gets associated with other virtues such as courage and sobriety. These virtues, moreover, are assumed to be typically Dutch. Appeals to Dutch identity are made to distinguish oneself from one's political opponents who, in their proclivity for cultural relativism would not be willing to stand up for their 'own' (i.e. Western, modern) values, and from the ethnic 'others', who would be unwilling to subscribe to these values. Moreover, the purportedly Dutch virtues carry connotations of masculinity and virility. As such, they are set against the weaknesses of the opponents, who are accused of being too caring or oversensitive - characteristics with feminine connotations. And they produce distinctions along genderized lines within ethnic minority groups. Thus, Bolkestein's realistic attitude makes him challenge Muslim men to enter into honest confrontations and talks 'from man to man', while at the same time his discourse represents Muslim women as in need of his, i.e. of Western, protection. And the realistic 'guts' of De Wit makes her reiterate stereotypical, racist images of Surinamese women as taking advantage of 'their' men and the Dutch welfare state alike.

As may be clear, my critical readings do not discuss the 'adequacy' or 'truth' of the new realist discourse. Instead, they confirm the constructivist scepticism towards epistemological representation by showing how new realists' representations of reality 'as it is', involve the representation of a particular social group (i.e. the indigenous lower classes), and their supposed perspective on reality. In other words: the new realist representations are not innocent, but partisan accounts of Dutch multi-ethnic society. Epistemological and political representation imply one another: representations, in 'standing for' some reality or object, simultaneously 'act for' or 'speak on behalf of' a particular constituency or subject. The controversial column 'White in the Bijlmer' provided a poignant example of what can go wrong if this intertwinement between the epistemological and the political is not recognized. The unintended, but detrimental performative effect of De Wit's ventriloquism is that a *realistic* representation of a reality of racism turns out as a *racist* representation of that reality.

Rather than enter into a discussion about the truthfulness of new realist assertions, my readings take issue with the *performative effects* of such appeals to reality. The call to 'be realistic' has a strong impact, insofar as it links up with and strengthens (white-Dutch) desires for vigour, purity, honesty, innocence, or guts - virile, heroic virtues, which enable one to pose as a powerful, autonomous and self-controlled subject. As a white-Dutch reader, I am 'interpellated', to phrase it in Althusserian terms, by the new realist discourse. But this does not mean I need to answer its call. What concerns me, is the way in which it constitutes the kind of social reality it purportedly only represents. For it is *in* the public discourse about Dutch multicultural society that this society is simultaneously taking shape. Therefore, the way in

which positions within the discourse are taken matters greatly; it sets the tone, to adopt Martin Schouten's metaphor, for the kind of society that the Netherlands may become. In my view, the self-righteous attitude of new realism, its heroic pose of guts, firmness and intransigence makes for an antagonistic society, in which parties entrench themselves, in which conflicts are made to a head, and in which there can only be winners and losers. In appealing to the white indigenous Dutch only, the new realist discourse reiterates and reinforces dividing lines between myself as 'Dutch', and black and migrant people as 'other'. In my view, however, to build a truly multicultural society, we are not in need of heroes with the guts to tell it 'as it is', or to defend our 'own'. On the contrary, we are in need of a greater sensitivity to what is different, more tolerance for uncertainty and ambivalence, a deeper awareness of the relativity of our own perspective, and a sense of the cultural enrichment this may bring us. Or to adopt Clifford Geertz' phrase: we need less provincialism, and more relativism. In this respect, I like to break a lance for the Dutch political culture of accommodation; a culture that, indeed, has little room for heroic splendour, but is based on collective bargaining, tedious consultations and pragmatic compromise. It is a political culture which does not make conflicts disappear, but which provides room for constructing points of affiliation *across* the familiar dividing lines of race and ethnicity. It is a culture which provides a good breeding ground for knowledges that are partial, not partisan.

The next episode in my account of the Dutch minorities discourse concentrates on a study which is exemplary for the kind of discourse new realists oppose to: Philomena Essed's *Understanding Everyday Racism*. In reading *UER*, I particularly set out to explore the second, i.e. the *normative* dimension of situated knowledges. For a significant part, Essed's study fits in perfectly with the assumptions of feminist standpoint thinking. Thus, in *UER*, the standpoint of black women, i.e. their understanding of everyday racism, forms the starting point for 'Understanding' everyday racism on a more scientific level. In order to achieve this aim, *UER* constructs 'black' and 'white' as homogeneous and mutually exclusive positions, simultaneously racial and political in character. The racial identity of the black women interviewed makes them into privileged subjects of a knowledge which is hardly, if at all, transferable to whites. At the same time, the experiential accounts of the black women count as the articulation of a Black standpoint only if they testify to having an "understanding of everyday racism", i.e. if their accounts are in agreement with what the author (as their involved, but supposedly more objective representative) sees as scientifically reliable knowledge. Hence, *UER*'s proof concerning the existence of everyday racism shows the same tendencies towards essentialism and closed circular reasoning as I discerned in the theoretical expositions of a (Black) feminist standpoint by Collins and Harding.

The discourse of *UER*, however, only *partly* subscribes to standpoint epistemology. For when it comes to positioning herself, its author consistently refrains from any reference to her own (racial or gender) identity, nor does she present her knowledge about everyday racism as knowledge from a particular standpoint. On the contrary, Essed pointedly asks her findings to be called into account on the basis of nothing else but the scientific criterion of objectivity. Thus, in second instance, *UER* claims to objectively represent the reality of racism, and denies the situatedness of its own account.

This realistic character of *UER* can be confronted with a more constructivist approach, in which the focus is not only on the author's *epistemic* commitment to represent a racist society, but also on her *political* commitment to represent the perspectives of black women. From this perspective, *UER* appears as a mixture of two discursive genres: the genre of denunciation and the genre of empowerment. Insofar as the discourse of *UER* is a denunciation, it assumes that the racial conflict between white and black is, in

the terms of Jean-François Lyotard, a *litigation*. It concerns an injustice that can be proven, hence straightened out before an impartial forum - in this case the neutral forum of science. Insofar as *UER* belongs to the genre of empowerment, on the other hand, it perceives the racial conflict as what Lyotard calls a *differend*. From this perspective, the harm done by whites to blacks causes more than a repairable damage, it involves a *wrong*: a damage which deprives its victim of the means to prove that damage. Hence, as a victim of a wrong one has only two options: to retreat in silence because of the unrepresentability of the damage suffered, or engage in paradoxical testimonies which inevitably evoke a relation of double bind between speaker and addressee. In both cases, the *differend* of racism repeats itself. But the author of *UER* takes up the challenge: by *voicing* black women's charges about their being *silenced* as black women, she deliberately evokes a paradox. This courageous evocation of the paradox may have a transformative impact on *UER*'s black readers: as such, *UER* actively contributes to the empowerment of black women as subjects of speech. For a white reader such as myself, however, the impact is less felicitous. The discourse of *UER* reverses the burden of the double bind: for if, as a white reader, I subscribed to *UER*'s denunciation, I thereby detract from its validity, and if I questioned it, I therewith make it more valid. In the end, the discourse of *UER* leaves the establishment of racial relationships as an unresolvable *differend* intact. To me, this seems a detrimental outcome for *both* parties, although I know that Essed would disagree with this.

I am convinced of the existence of everyday racism as a wrong constantly to be fought and resisted. The point of reading *UER* as a situated discourse is to draw attention to and relativize its detrimental performative effects. While her new realist adversaries appeal to the supposedly typical Dutch virtues of realism and guts, Essed asks her readers to identify with either the 'white' or the 'black' position in a white and racist society. I resist such identifications along strictly divided and antagonistic racial lines, for exactly the same reason that I resist the new realist separative move between the (autochthonous) 'us' and the (allochthonous) 'them': such oppositional categorizing denies the many possible points of affiliation which I am convinced can and should be made *across* these lines. It merely confirms the prevailing binary oppositions.

### 3. A narrative turn

The objection above may also be formulated otherwise. Due to its oppositional realism, the discourse of *UER* limits itself to the interpretation and consequent affirmation of only one narrative script, a script in which white and black appear as antagonistic parties. Other stories are deliberately left out of the picture. In my view, it is precisely *UER*'s effort to conceive of black women's accounts as instances of *knowledge* which impedes the exploration of *other narrative scripts* that might also be available to speak about black women's lives in a white society. This deliberately limited starting point causes the discourse of *UER* to remain captured by the racial *differend* which at the same time it so forcefully resists.

In order to avoid the paradox evoked by oppositional knowledge practices, or at least lessen the burden of the double bind it causes, I find it therefore expedient to develop a keener eye for the different narrative structures of knowledgeable accounts. To be sure, this does not merely hold for the stories told by the supposed 'objects', but also for the (scientific) interpretations of the 'subjects' of knowledge.

Thus, in the remainder of the case study I focused on a variety of journalistic and scientific



accounts of the position of Dutch ethnic minorities. They convey their stories with the help of different narrative devices which shape the relationships between the actors within the narrative triangle: between author, protagonists and audience. My concern, again, is with the potential performative effect of these texts. The difference with the foregoing readings is, that I now focus on the role of narrative features: is it possible to tell 'true' stories which use different narrative scripts than the script of the racial conflict between 'black' and 'white'? It appears that in the Dutch discourse indeed other narrative scripts are used as well.

In my analysis, I distinguished three different genres of discourse concerning ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. Within the genre of *denunciation*, the protagonists of the story are the victims of injustices and wrongs. The author makes an appeal to the inscribed audience (most often the 'autochthonous' Dutch) to have an understanding for their situation, to protest the described practices, and to change existing habits, rules, policies. Within the genre of *empowerment*, stories show the level of achievement of the stories' protagonists, both with respect to their personal careers, and in the field of political struggle. The inscribed audience primarily consists of members of ethnic minority groups themselves. The stories provide them with role models, and are to function as sources of inspiration and encouragement. The genre of *emancipation*, finally, focuses on the extent to which members of minority groups (still) live in a situation of social, economic or cultural arrears in comparison with the 'autochthonous' Dutch. The inscribed readers of these texts are policy makers, politicians, managers, social workers, teachers - in short, everyone who is professionally involved with the 'integration' of members of ethnic minority groups in Dutch society.

Each of these genres sets limits to the narrative devices that can be used to structure the story told. Thus, stories within the genre of denunciation, in order to make the position of their protagonists as victims convincing, are told by an author who is more articulate and more knowledgeable about their situation than the protagonists themselves. Sometimes, the author's role as the more articulate spokesperson may backfire. As in the accounts by Nelly Soetens, whose use of free indirect speech adds to the dramatic impact of her stories in showing how foreign guest workers are not treated as human subjects, but which at the same time therewith repeats their position as not yet fully subjects. The genre of emancipation, to give another example, appears to make contradictory demands on its authors. On the one hand, the emancipatory stories make an effort to convey a sense of the uniqueness of each individual protagonist, of the particularities of the different cases. On the other hand, they try to provide their readers with a valid assessment of the situation of their research population in general. This tension between a literary and a scientific aim shows in the simultaneously absent and present positioning of the author, and in returning oscillations between qualification and quantification, between individual cases and general findings.

Like *Understanding Everyday Racism*, the genres of denunciation, empowerment and emancipation constitute a counterpoise to the discourse of 'new realism': the stories are written from a strong involvement with and concern for the position of members of ethnic minority groups, and they are embedded within a particular view of the nature and dynamics of power relationships in the Netherlands. Within the genres of denunciation and empowerment, the accounts are particularly structured by the critical frameworks of Marxism, feminism, anti-racism and/or Black theory: they start from assumptions regarding the existence of structural relationship of dominance, to be changed through strategies of resistance and struggle 'from below'. The emancipatory accounts stand closer to a social-liberal tradition of political thought in which the autonomy, independence and responsibility of individuals are both

starting point and ultimate aim, and according to which governmental and other social institutions should create the conditions under which individuals can develop their personal capacities as much as possible.

Notably, the different genres emerge from different institutional contexts. The denunciatory and empowering accounts are written by journalists, teachers, social workers, activists, while the authors of the genre of emancipation are mostly scientists.<sup>1</sup> The three genres, moreover, express different historical stages in the interaction between Dutch society and Dutch ethnic minorities. This does not mean that the texts are literally written in subsequent periods, but I do think each genre can be seen as developed in response to a particular situation. Thus, the genre of denunciation pertains to a stage in which migrants and indigenous citizens live in separate and unequal worlds, the genre of emancipation belongs to a period in which efforts are made by Dutch society to include and integrate migrants, and the genre of empowerment stands for a time in which migrants speak up for themselves and demand a say in the conditions under which they can acquire their rightful place in dominant society. This is the most obvious sense in which these accounts can be perceived as 'situated' stories: they are linked up with different times and places, they are meaningful and efficacious within specific contexts. My analyses point out, however, that the situatedness of an account can also be read in the way that a story is structured, in the inscribed positions of its author, protagonists and audience.

As indicated, the genres of denunciation, emancipation and empowerment provide us with different narrative scripts to talk about Dutch multicultural society. Although likewise critical of existing relationships of power and inequality, they offer alternatives to the script of racial antagonism presented in *Understanding Everyday Racism*. Still, these stories testify to the same problem I observed with regard to Essed's oppositional realism: their representations of Dutch multicultural society are based upon the very oppositional frameworks they wish to deconstruct. Thus, the genre of denunciation makes use of the framework of victim versus perpetrator, the genre of empowerment needs the opposition between marginal and dominant, while emancipatory accounts are structured with the help of a duality such as traditional versus modern.

This observation puts forward what could be called the central knowledge-political problem of realism, namely: how to prevent representations of reality from being no more than conservative reiterations of that reality? Or, to phrase this in more constructivist terms: how to craft 'true' stories which achieve more than a truth-effect? In my view, it is this question to which the visionary meaning of Haraway's concept of situated knowledges provides an answer.

In the last part of the case study, I presented a fourth genre within the Dutch minorities discourse, that of *heterogeneity*. These are texts which address both white-Dutch and members of ethnic minority groups. By concentrating on the complexity of interethnic relationships, they cut across the binary oppositions that play a constitutive role in the genres of denunciation, emancipation and empowerment. Within the genre of heterogeneity, ideas concerning collective struggle or collective development do not play a focal role. Power is rather conceived of as a relational and dynamic category, with which individual subjects interact in a variety of ways: sometimes they are subdued to forces beyond their reach, sometimes they know how to bend things to their own will, at times they manage to struggle out, at times they exert power over others.

The heterogeneous texts distinguish themselves from the other genres for not being unambiguously on the side of one or other, well-defined party. Which does not mean that these stories are not involved with the subject(s) of their investigation. On the contrary. Within the genre of heterogeneity,

the author is constantly positioning herself, both vis-à-vis her protagonists and her audience. The difference with the other genres is that these positions are constantly shifting: the author places him/herself (and henceforth the readers) in a variety of positions, siding then with one, then with another perspective. S/he is surprised, moved, or keeps cool, s/he hesitates, distances, admires, denounces, un.masks, reproaches. In doing so, s/he does not rely upon categorical dividing lines, such as oppressor versus oppressed, dominant versus marginal, modern versus traditional, white versus black - let alone good versus bad. Instead, the author of a heterogeneous account shows sensibility to the impurity and inevitable deficiencies of the world as it is, without relapsing into relativism or indifference. If these stories do start from a clear-cut standpoint, it is a fundamental distrust of accounts that divide the world into opposite parties, of narrative scripts in which it is merely Us versus Them.

Of all contributions to the Dutch minorities discourse investigated, the genre of heterogeneity in my opinion shows most affinity with the visionary meaning of Haraway's concept of situated knowledges. Although they may seem to be the least 'political', these heterogeneous stories contain situated knowledges in the most radical sense of the term, i.e. they take sides, and they are open-ended. They foster heterogeneity, both in the realities they represent, and in their positioning vis-à-vis these realities. They convincingly evoke realities and testify to their contingency, hence changeability, at the same time. In my view, these accounts thus aptly illustrate what Haraway refers to as 'diffraction': they show how 'true' stories can be both faithful and unfaithful to the reality they describe. These Dutch stories of heterogeneity, to be sure, do not go so far as to include the perspectives of other kinds than the human - their design is down-right humanistic. But I think they are 'visionary' in their envisioning of a humane world which defies descriptions in terms of 'proper' or 'pure' identities.

My preference for the genre of heterogeneity is not meant to disqualify the other three genres. As indicated earlier, the respective genres of denunciation, emancipation and empowerment can be conceived of as pertaining to different 'stages' in the development of the Dutch minorities discourse. Perhaps it may therefore be more appropriate to claim that we have entered a new 'stage' in the Dutch interethnic conversation, aimed at the deconstruction of prevailing ethnic and racial boundaries, and the construction of alternative common grounds. It think it is time to break with the almost exclusive focus of mainstream Dutch academic minority studies on issues of emancipation and integration, and with its assumption that scientific accounts should primarily be concerned with problems and solutions - which in the context of the Dutch welfare society means that they should offer guidelines regarding governmental policy. A very mundane reason for this is of course that the bulk of minority studies take place at the request of, and are subsidized by governmental institutions. Still, why not adopt a broader interpretation of the social and political utility of research, according to which the accounts might have political relevance in themselves? Why not conceive of the outcome of scientific investigation in more constructivist terms, and look for the making of new vocabularies, new stories?<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Style matters

Thus, in the course of this empirical-philosophical study, I turned from epistemological questions on representation and the relation between subject and object, to questions about narrative scripts and the relation between author, protagonists and audience. I did so in order to clarify what I perceive as the crucial differences between epistemologies of standpoint and the concept of situated knowledges. But to which extent has this trajectory been helpful in clarifying the central problem of my thesis, i.e. to allow for the radical contingency of all knowledge, while at the same time holding on to the assumption that some knowledges are ‘better’ than others?

The answer, in my opinion, cannot be summed up in a list of criteria with which knowledge practices should henceforth be evaluated, or in a package of guidelines on how to write situated stories for future authors. The reason is that situated stories are not to be identified with a particular *standpoint* from which they are told, but are to be identified on the basis of their *positioning* or *style*. In a different context, Nelson Goodman has made some remarks concerning the relationship between style and situating which I find extremely helpful for explaining my interpretation of situated knowledges.

In his *Ways of worldmaking*, Goodman notes that the discernment of the stylistic features of a work of art is a means of answering the who? when? and where? questions concerning that particular work. It boils down, he states, to the identification or situating of the painting, novel or sculpture in question. Its association with a specific individual, group, period or school, helps the reader or viewer to understand that work better: “[K]nowledge of the origin of a work [...] informs the way the work is to be looked at or listened to or read” (Goodman 1978: 38). A style, according to Goodman, “is metaphorically a signature” (35). But he immediately cautions that the reverse does not hold: a signature is not a feature of style. Hence, while elements of style are indicators for how to interpret and evaluate a particular work of art, the signature of the artist is not.

On the face of it, a transference of Goodman’s reflections about art to knowledge practices may seem far-fetched. But it makes sense if we take into account that, from a constructivist perspective, both works of art and scientific texts are ‘ways of worldmaking’. Goodman’s observations then shed interesting light on the three dimensions of meaning of ‘situated knowledges’ as I discerned them.

Following Goodman, the first we could say is that each (truth) discourse is written in a particular style, the identification of which helps to situate, hence interpret and evaluate that discourse. This is in accordance with the descriptive layer of meaning of ‘situated knowledges’. The proposition that all knowledge *is* situated, here implies that all knowledge can *be* situated. Thus, the stylistic features of a story, of which its narrative structure is a significant part, may be useful indications *for the reader* to situate, and consequently evaluate it.

Secondly, in accounts inspired by the epistemology of standpoint thinking, the author endorses her story with what could be called, in a variation on Goodman, ‘an elaborate signature’. That is: the author situates her claims by identifying herself - not so much by her proper name (by *literally* signing her text), but by her avowed partiality to, or identification (‘traiterous’ or not) with a particular gender, class, race, sexuality, etc. The suggestion is that this enables her readers to assess the value of her story better. However, following Goodman I would say that a signature *in itself* does not suffice to situate a story. At the most, such a metaphorical signature is an attempt to strengthen the legitimacy of the claimed knowledges by the assurance that they come from a reliable source, from a privileged knower.

Finally then, we may discern knowledge practices which distinguish themselves for a particular style of writing, a style which renders them more 'situated' in the visionary sense of the term. Such stories are characterized by heterogeneity. They hold together different and contradictory perspectives: both in their depiction of reality as heterogeneous, and in their heterogeneous positioning vis-à-vis reality. Their openness to differences does not lead to indifference. On the contrary: because the author of an heterogeneous account knows his/her story to be part and parcel of the world it describes, s/he will be attentive to its potential performative effects.

In Haraway's own work, style is of vital importance: she tries out unorthodox ways of writing, argues for irony, a 'speaking in tongues' and 'heteroglossia'. Haraway's style is deliberately multi-vocal and excessive. Her stories are larded with self-reflexive remarks, reminding the reader of their constructed, artefactual character, reminding us that these are, indeed, stories. At the same time, Haraway refrains from explicating, let alone prescribing, distinctive criteria or norms for how to write situated stories. This is in line with her anti-foundationalist stance and her wariness of the genre of critique.

And it is consistent with my assessment of the importance of style. For it indicates that situated knowledges cannot be brought about by following certain methodological guidelines. While method is applicable, style is at best imitable. While method lends itself to general prescriptions, in style there is always an element of radical specificity. When we refer to the style of a particular story, metaphorically speaking we are touching on its unconscious layer. Consequently, we have to acknowledge that this is something which can never be wholly grasped, and certainly not by the story itself. Concerning his or her style of writing, an author will always be endowed with a blind spot. Style is so intimately connected, so interwoven with the authorial position, that it is impossible to see it from that position. Or, to adopt another vocabulary: when we speak of style, we are actually addressing the issue of form. And as the form of a message is that which conveys the conditions under which the content of that message can be understood, it is impossible to describe it within these same conditions. Hence, if we rephrase the concept of situated knowledges in terms of style, requirements of self-reflexivity are to little avail.<sup>3</sup>

These remarks are not meant to absolve authors of the responsibility for the stories they tell. On the contrary, we remain accountable for our writings, as we do for all of our actions, no matter their being mixtures of conscious choice, unconscious motives and incorporated conventions. There may be no doer *behind* the deed, there is always a doer *in* the deed. That is the sense in which we, as subjects of knowledge, as tellers of 'true' stories, are implicated in what we know.

In the style of this thesis then, my conclusion is open ended. My reflections about the performative significance of style indicate that to be engaged in practices of situated knowledges is to be engaged in ongoing conversations. Rather than demanding the guts of hard-boiled realists, situated knowledges require a consistent sensitivity to one's subject-matter and to one's audience. They do not ask for heroic partisanship, but for a determined partiality. They invite subjects of knowledge to grow into skilful story-tellers.

**Notes**

1. This underlines the uniqueness of Essed's scientific study of everyday racism which, in its mixture of denunciation and empowerment, clearly distances itself from the discourse of emancipation.
2. It might be an idea, for instance, to add a literary writer or critic to the committee of experts which is often installed to supervise a particular research project.
3. It is interesting to compare Latour's radically constructivist view of reflexivity in terms of style, with Harding's views of reflexivity and standpoint thinking. A methodological interpretation of situated knowledges would focus on what Latour calls meta-reflexivity: the need for an author to insert self-referential loops (Latour 1988b). According to Latour, however, self-referentiality does not invoke a more sophisticated level of representation - it merely adds another story. Latour's alternative proposal for crafting better knowledges is infra-reflexivity, or style. Scientists, so he claims, should simply become better, more self-conscious story-tellers, who use all the stylistic means at their disposal to win over their readers. Harding also criticizes prevailing conceptions of reflexivity for being too 'weak'. Her proposal for 'strong' reflexivity, however, only repeats, be at a much larger scale, what for Latour is the illusion of meta-reflexivity, namely that 'looking back at the self' would make one's knowledge more reliable. For me, Latour's distinction between the *methodological* approach of meta-reflexivity and the *stylistic* approach of infra-reflexivity, underlines the crucial difference between an epistemology of standpoint and Haraway's proposal for situated knowledges.