Conclusion

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Is there some easy way to envision the double-sided process that connects the production of gendered knowledge about the body on the surface to the materialization of gender within the body on the other? (Anne Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p.253)

The relationship between gender and media has received scholarly attention from the 1970's onwards. The emergence of feminist media studies and the link with emancipatory and women's movements (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005) has constructed a specific relationship between academia and gender issues. Feminist research or broader: research on gender and media is intertwined with societal and political realms. Notions of diversity and equality are the core of these two worlds and function as a bridge between them. Far more it established a relationship of co-existence, although this is not always the essence of scholarly work on gender and communication. As Byerly and Ross (2006: 3) argue this particular inclusivity is reflected by 'the women-and-media relationship [which]begin to reveal the process of struggle that women have engaged in for use of media to gain a public voice, presence, and influence'. This perspective with its roots outside academia and stressing the inequality of the gendered power struggle is the core of this research. Although until the 1990 research was primarily focusing on women, 'gender and media' is still a valuable subject in academia. Moreover the field can, and in our opinion should, be opened up to research on gender from a post structural perspective where the emphasis is more concentrated on the construction of masculinity, femininity and queer gender notions. As Gauntlett (2002: 9) has pointed out 'the ideas of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' have been pulled through the social changes of the past decades in quite different ways.' They are in flux and hybrid which comes with new articulations but also with revisions and entering hegemonic spaces. These gender notions are now applied in research on the level of production, text and audiences and are using paradigmatic notions of political economy to more post structural perspectives on deconstruction. Contemporary transformations in society,

politics and communication and media institutions are the space of research were the gender machinery is at it work and were notions of gender are also transformed.

In the introduction Liesbet Van Zoonen describes the contents and approach of *Gendered Transformations* as a re-establishment of research on gender and media as normal science — a *forward to the past*. Consisting out of a selection of articles originally presented at the 'ECREA Barcelona 2008' Conference, this anthology is intentionally eclectic in scope, encompassing a wide range of topics that reflect the entwining of media and gender in the context of discussions on identity politics, definitions of public/private spheres, visual culture, cyber culture, and access to media professions. It aims to bring together scholars who, despite coming from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, share a common research focus on gender and media. *Gendered Transformations* gives an overview of cutting-edge perspectives on the intersections between gender and media, whilst simultaneously exploring the wider implications and interdisciplinary nature of this academic field.

By drawing attention to a plurality of intertwining approaches to this theme, the book situates itself 'between camps' (Gilroy, 2000), exploring perspectives that range from the essentialist – which presuppose a pervasive commonality inherent in women – to the anti-essentialist – which problematise, and aim to deconstruct, the commonality of a sexualised essence (see Benhabib, 1992). The discourse of sex thus opens itself up to a discourse on gender, the constitution of which is performatively enacted in daily life, namely in communication and the media. If on one hand the essentialist discourse of sex is a valuable political asset in that it permits one to write back against 'sexism' (Spivak in Harasym, 1990: 12), seeking recourse in transformative projects that rely on the concrete classification – and representation – of a cohesive identity, anti-essentialist discourse on gender is, on the other hand, no less valuable in that it fragments the subject so as to open the latter to the non-identical, that is, to conflictual intersections such as class, ethnicity and race. Both essentialist and anti-essentialist perspectives ultimately – and perhaps paradoxically – point to a political dimension: if essentialist approaches may be strategically helpful in drawing attention to the historically rooted dimensions of sexual discrimination in the materiality of bodies, anti-essentialist approaches pave the way for a postmodern politics that seeks to remain open to the 'permanently contingent' (Butler, 1995: 41), thereby preserving the plurality and diversity distinctive of gender expressions.

The link between gender and media translates, in this anthology, into the dimensions of representational politics, embodied performativity and social constructions of reality. The first section, titled 'Gendered Politics', discusses the representation of women in the public sphere, exploring the extent to which the latter is permeable to issues allegedly pertaining to the private sphere. The focus on the political representation of women is clearly essentialist in that it presupposes women, as a collective -strategic or not- identity, to have a set of legal rights to recognition in the public sphere. The level of autonomy and equality – liberal democratic values so highly prized in Western society – enjoyed by women in any society can be gauged, according to this perspective, from the extent to which they are effectively recognised in the public sphere. Karen Ross, for instance, argues for a cultural and political change in the way women are represented by news discourse, pointing to the fact that the current increase in female journalists does not necessarily mean that women are more fairly depicted in the news. Claudia Alvares, in turn, analyses the link between academic feminist discourse and the journalistic representation of 'feminine issues' in two Portuguese 'quality' newspapers, inquiring into the degree to which the general public interest is effectively regarded as overlapping with private matters. Women's entrance into the realm of politics, one of the remaining 'bastions' of male hegemony, is explored by Marlène Coulomb-Gully in terms of identity construction, reactions to the latter, and contextual specificities. Margreth Luenenborg, Jutta Roeser, Tanja Maier and Kathrin Mueller also focus on the rise in visibility of female politicians, examining the changes both in media representation of such women as well as in the way they are perceived by media consumers.

The second section, titled 'Embodied Performativity', is concerned with the gendered body that is produced and enacted in a variety of media texts. The opposition of complementary terms – masculine and feminine – occurs within a grid of institutionalised heterosexuality and heteronormativity that limits the gendered possibilities within a rigidified binary system of gendered polarities. By drawing attention to the fact that a solid definition of gendered identity can only be defined appositionally against characteristics one lacks, a non-essentialist focus on gender attempts to deconstruct the rigid dichotomy between male and female, drawing attention to the fluidity of these categories. Frederik Dhaenens, Daniel Biltereyst and Sofie Van Bauwel argue for the integration of queer theory into historical film research on gay and lesbian representation, focussing on the challenge presented to the Motion Picture

Production Code by three popular films of the late fifties and early sixties that engaged with the theme of homosexuality and queer identity. Begonya Enguix-Grau examines film approaches to intersexuality, claiming that these are rare precisely because intersexuality evades the mappings of our representational frameworks which are usually based on the existence of two sexes and a gender dichotomy. The normalisation of the male/female dichotomy, respectively connoting oppressive/ submissive modes of conduct, in the infrastructure of popular virtual world platforms is explored by Delia Dumitrica and Georgia Gaden, a process that risks conditioning consumers' 'options and choices', as well as their perception of gender. Olena Goroshko and Olena Zhigalina also concentrate on the virtual world, focusing on the fluidity and instability of gender as a category almost rendered invisible in the construction of an online political identity in the blogosphere.

The third section, 'Gendered Socialisations', offers insight on the dynamics involved in shaping gendered ideologies in daily life, namely the manner through which stereotypes connoted with sex-based essentialisms are reproduced and reinforced through the media. Topics of concern are the media professional in context as well as gendered discourses visible in media content that mould socially-conditioned views of the world. Tonny Krijnen focuses on the gendered manifestations of emotion and morality in Reality TV, inquiring into the degree to which the stereotypical views according to which emotions are inherently feminine and morality intrinsically masculine intertwine in such shows. The role played by the media as an instrument of socialisation is analysed by Elke Van Damme, who concentrates on how the discourses of popular series are used by teenagers to define their own gendered identities, especially in the articulation of sexuality. Martha Blomqvist and Kristina Eriksson explore Swedish newspaper construction of gender in the ICT sector, drawing attention to the fact that the media's strategy of making women more absent than they in fact are only serves to perpetuate the status quo in gender relations. Examining the gendered inequalities in the Finnish media sector, Sinikka Torkkola and Iiris Ruoho claim that this industry is torn between the acceptance of journalistic practice as gender neutral on the one hand, and the concrete creation of gendered divisions of labour that ensue from genre stereotypes on the other hand.

The sections 'Gendered Politics', 'Embodied Performativity' and 'Gendered Socialisations' each address specific concerns concerning the intertwining of gender and media. However, the neutral and transparent status that the media claim as accurate

presenters of a 'true picture of reality' (van Zoonen, 2007: 152) provides a common link between those three sections. Representational politics seeks to challenge inequalities in the way women are represented in the public sphere, the focus on the enactment of the gendered body through media texts aims to open up the heterosexual binary matrix to other possibilities, and the exploration of sex-based essentialisms visible in the media emphasises the extent to which ideologies condition our daily life. As such, we can affirm that at the heart of this book resides a concern with the media both as agents of public knowledge, contributing to citizen-formation, as well as that of entertainment, namely industrialised popular culture (Corner, 1991: 268; Livingstone et al. 1994: 179). The links between public knowledge and entertainment, that is, between cognitive and emotional domains, is visible in the manner through which the media are regarded as aiding in the promotion of normative social consensus and ultimate in the construction of hegemonic morality.

However, this is not to deny the capacity of audiences to autonomously interpret media messages according to a variety of socio-cultural contexts in which they are received. What is in fact sustained is that the post-struturalist emphasis on gender as an ambiguous and unstable category may not necessarily imply a rejection of politics, but rather a redefinition of the terms in which the latter have traditionally operated (van Zoonen, 2007: 154). As such, new, more democratic political potential ensues from emphasis on the polysemic nature of media texts, as well as on the promotion of audiences' interpretative abilities. The struggle for women's rights and equal representation by the media and within the media industry can thus be complemented by a further political dimension, linked to that of audience research.

The essays collated in *Gendered Transformations* provide a valuable contribution to the area, due precisely to the interdisciplinary scope of the volume, coupled with its objective to deconstruct existing theories and methodologies, pointing in the process to novel ways of combining the latter. In effect, this anthology opens up the field of gender by analysing traditional perspectives on gender in light of recent advances in the field of media theory and methodology. The title, *Gendered Transformations*, points to the alterations that such new and fruitful combinations of theories and methodologies may lead to, transcending the restrictive compartmentalisations of pre-established disciplinary discourse. We hope that the critical reflection here presented on the intersections of gender and media may indicate

novel ways of deconstructing traditional views on areas that are irreducible to disciplinary camps, due to their permanent engagement with the field of possible experience in 'actuality'. In our view, the deconstruction of delimited 'camps' can deliver new insights on the reason why gender continues to be a topic well-positioned on the research priority list, particularly due to its multiple imbrications with media analyses.

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