

Editor's Preface: Author, text, and reader in the *Journal of Gender and Power*

The *Journal of Gender and Power* is open to dialogue between various theoretical approaches to research and accepts authors' diverse value systems. For us, the reader is not only the addressee but—most importantly—is framed as the subject in relation to the content of each issue of the journal.

This way of conceptualizing the relationship between the text and the reader entails that the latter exerts some sort of power over the former. It does not, however, consist in singling out all mysteries residing in the text; in this approach, the text does not possess the “immanent truth” about itself. This power is somewhat modest, individual, not aspiring to a kind of enlightened universalism. It is a power of assembling—while reading—the text anew... The reader—let us repeat this again—re-writes the text and imbues it with their own meaning while perceiving it. The text is being multiplied with every reader. Thus we are unable to state “what the author's intention was”, something that—from the postmodern perspective—is an attempt at imposing one's own subjective interpretation as the dominant one. Therefore, there is no “prototypical” or “original” text, but rather ways of reading the text preferred by a given reader that are inflected by their biography, experiences, social background or even mood. Every reading is inevitably a personal reading. There is, thus, no text in itself as there are only textual representations in the reader's mind or voice. And every representation is unavoidably local, contextual, deprived of “epistemological arrogance” which is characteristic of those who already “know everything”.

And it is the antiessentialist category of representation that seems to be very helpful in trying to understand the controversy surrounding text interpretation. Representations are “«schemes of interpretation», as

widely available, experientially acquired frameworks for organizing and making sense of everyday life. The schemes (...) represent the social forms or structures of our lives (...) Mediate individual biography and interpersonal relations, reflecting and perpetuating culturally promoted understandings of everyday experience" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 267) (given that every representation mirrors—in a peculiar way—cultural values and anxieties of a given era or society; Hall, 1997, pp. 13-74).

N. K. Denzin contends that "In the social sciences there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself". Researcher "faces the difficult and challenging task of making sense of what has been learned" (making sense of what has been learned *the art of interpretation*). At the same time everyone has their own interpretational script which leads to imposing a particular world order that is being researched; interpretation is not "mechanical" but "transformative" (in this context "crisis of interpretation" stems from the lack of universally accepted criteria of interpretation) (Denzin, 1994, pp. 500-502, 504). From this perspective we could follow A. Strauss and J. Corbin who claim that:

All interpretations, whether or not they have the features or status of theory, are temporally limited—in a dual sense. First, they are always provisional, they are never established forever (...) Second, (...) Researchers and theorists are not gods, but men and women living in certain areas, immersed in certain societies, subject to current ideas and ideologies, and so forth (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 279).

Relatedly, T. A. Schwandt writes that "we are all constructivists we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge (...)" (1994, p. 125). The current knowledge (specific to a given time and place) "consists of those constructions about which there is relative consensus", while "multiple «knowledges» can coexist when (...) interpreters disagree, and/or depending on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors that differentiate the interpreters" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 113). It needs to be added that displaying the social side of the text does not entail denying the existence of the text. It is important to note, however, that the text is never accessible per se, but always exists in the form of socially constructed meanings (meanings ascribed to the text) (Gromkowska, 2002, pp. 15-16).

It is beyond doubt that we frame our interpretations of the text in a “given theory” which we deem to be the most adequate way of conceptualising the world. Doing so, we tend to frequently absolutize our theoretical assumptions not realising that they are imbued with various socially constructed assumptions or even subjective biases. After all, analyses of “the history of theory” (the histories of subsequently created interpretational schemes of reality) lead to the conclusion that all of them constitute nothing else but “products of specific social discourses” and an answer to the current dilemma (Kellner, 1995, p. 24). Text interpretation, from the perspective of Marxist theory will revolve around “class struggle”, from the feminist perspective—around sexist gender stereotypes and female emancipation, from the perspective of critical theory—around domination and resistance. Thus, also in this context, analysis right at the very outset is a part of a social construction prone to a variety of (personal and ideological) “contaminations”.

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