

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of Lancaster University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA licence which allows you to:

- access and download a copy;
- print out a copy;

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this Course of Study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Course of Study: GWS 407: Debates in Gender Research

Name of Designated Person authorising scanning: Maureen McNeil

Title of article or chapter: 'Reflexivity and the politics of knowledge'

Name of Author: Lisa Adkins

Name of Publisher: Open University Press

Name of Visual Creator (as appropriate):

pters that follow two further aspects respect to modes of knowing and make clear in both of these areas tly detraditionalizing. Thus, and as vity in relation to knowledge has dominant ways of knowing, while ed as challenging the heterosexual/ with the analysis of reflexivity and suggest that such reflexivity should involving the very inscription of

from: Adkins, Lisa, Revisions:
Gender and Sexuality in Late
four Modernity. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press
reflexivity and the politics of knowledge pp. 30-56

ISBN:

0 335 20522 4

introduction

In the previous chapter, I questioned the idea that recent transformations of gender (and of identity more generally) are best understood in terms of a feminization of social fields, constitutive of both gender reflexivity and detraditionalization. In so doing I suggested that aesthetic reflexivity is a central source for the making of differences and relates to emerging forms of social inequality. I did so with particular reference to cultural economy, especially general processes of denaturalization and desocialization in regard to gender in this context, and especially the emergence of a reflexive stance towards gender. In so doing I also questioned the idea that such reflexivity should be understood as transgressive or 'liberatory'. In Chapter 2 in my discussions on reflexivity in relation to recent feminist and social theory more generally, I mentioned that such aesthetic reflexivity has been understood to be transgressive in another kind of way, namely as a mode of knowing. Specifically, reflexivity enacted at an epistemological level has been understood to undo the conventions of dominant ways of knowing and provide a ground for the creation of alternative knowledges.

My concern in this chapter is with this latter form of reflexivity and in particular with how reflexivity has been understood to break down subject-object relations in ways of knowing and to lead to a kind of reflexivity akin to that talked about by Lash, that is a hermeneutic or aesthetic reflexivity involving subject-subject forms of knowledge. What I shall point towards in this chapter however is the ways in which such reflexivity enacts not so much subject-subject relations but a configuration of the relation between subjectivity and knowledge or knower and known which only allows certain

subjects to speak. Specifically, I shall argue that reflexivity in relation to knowledge practices concerns a speaking position constituted in terms of a vision of a mobile relation to identity on the side of the knower in relation to the known, a position from which there are a number of exclusions. I address these issues with reference to recent debates over reflexivity in relation to social research and through a discussion of some of my qualitative empirical research regarding sexuality and labour markets, and especially sexuality and service labour (see e.g. Adkins 1995, 2000a). What I draw attention to in relation to the latter is a recent review of some of my research in this area, especially some of the points of critique raised in this review. I do so not because I want to take this opportunity to mount some kind of defence of my research. Rather, I do so because these points of critique highlight for me some of the issues at stake in current disputes over reflexivity. In particular they highlight the limits of the form of reflexivity which is currently being encouraged in social research. To begin to lay out these limits I turn first to some recent discussions of reflexivity in relation to social research.

reflexivity and social research

From the early 1990s and even before, reflexivity has been recommended as a critical practice for social research (see e.g. Steier 1991, Woolgar 1991a; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000), especially as it is often understood to serve as an antidote to the problems of realism. For example, reflexivity has been recommended as a response to and indeed is often represented as an answer to the crises of representation and legitimization in social research widely associated with postmodernism and poststructuralism (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 10–11; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000). These crises made problematic a number of central assumptions of social science research. Thus the idea that researchers can somehow directly capture lived experience has been troubled by the argument that experience is created in the social texts written by researchers. In addition, the criteria for evaluating and interpreting social research have been problematized. Thus terms such as reliability, generalizability and validity have come into scrutiny in regard to what totalizing and universalizing assumptions they make regarding the social, knowledge and ways of knowing. Denzin and Lincoln suggest that the result of these crises is that 'any representation must now legitimate itself in terms of some set of criteria that allows the author (and the reader) to make connections between the text and the world written about' (1994: 11). One way in which social researchers have attempted to perform such legitimization is through a turn to reflexive practice (Game 1991; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000), including new forms of textual expression and analysis.

This is clearly visible in the social studies of science where one consequence of applying the argument that 'natural' scientific knowledge is a social construct to the knowledge generated by the social sciences has been

a turn to reflexivity. Thus in their introduction to 'the reflexive project' of the social studies of science Woolgar and Ashmore (1991) have posited reflexivity as a kind of corrective to the problems of both realism and relativism. They discuss the ways in which, as they see it, the conventions of realism constrain explorations of knowledge practices and inhibit the development of reflexive practice in the social sciences. Such practice is itself illustrated by the self-conscious, reflexive style of the introduction to the collection. Here, Woolgar and Ashmore (1991: 4) explicitly give presence to more than one textual voice in dialogic form to remind the reader

that interpretation goes on all the time, that the idea of one reading – a singular correspondence between text and meaning – is illusory. In particular, the dialogue is one way of introducing some instability into the presumed relationship between text and reader.

Thus such forms of textual expression are located as potentially overcoming the problems of realism in social research through a self-consciousness regarding the role of the author in producing accounts of the social world. Such self-reflexivity is understood to destabilize the relations between text and reader, author and text, researcher and social life. In short, such practices are understood to destabilize all that realism held in place. Consider, for example, the following (abridged) section of dialogue in which such a self-consciousness is enacted both to take account of its own production and to illustrate the ways in which realist conventions inhibit the development of reflexive practice (I shall return to this dialogue in a later section of this chapter).

... REITERATING THE TIRED OLD PLATITUDE THAT ALL TEXTS ARE MULTIVOCAL ...?

Certainly not.

... TRYING TO FIND A NEW WAY OF SUPPLYING REFERENCES THAT HAVE USED OR DISCUSSED THE SECOND VOICE DEVICE ...?

Look, it's your intervention. I don't see why you're asking me ... And while you're thinking about that you might explain why you appear in UPPER CASE this time?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

... the use of UPPER CASE makes it seem like you're shouting!

... YOUR MONOPOLY OF THE CONVENTIONAL IDIOGRAPH MAKES ME SEEM LIKE THE ODDBALL. BESIDES I THOUGHT WE'D BOTH AGREED THAT THERE WAS NO REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US: THAT WHEN ALL WAS SAID AND DONE WE ARE NOT TWO VOICES BUT TWO SETS OF INTERCHANGEABLE SCRIPTED REMARKS; THAT OUR ORIGINS SHOULD NOT BE HELD AGAINST US AS SOURCES OF SANCTIONABLE CONSISTENCY, AS LABELS TO WHICH OUR REMARKS ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE, AS ...

... Why don't you just say that actors' voices can emanate from quite different and interchangeable identities, and that this can be done without any evident contradiction on the part of actors themselves?

YOU THINK THAT'S LESS OBSCURE?

Not very.

BUT THE BASIC POINT IS THAT WE COULD SWITCH ROLES WITHOUT ANYONE NOTICING?

Yes.

AND THAT WE COULD DROP THIS UPPER CASE/lower case DISTINCTION IN ORDER TO DELIBERATELY CONFUSE OUR SUPPOSEDLY SEPARATE IDENTITIES?

Right.

(Woolgar and Ashmore 1991: 3)

Such textual self-consciousness is understood however not only to overcome the problems of realism, but also relativism. Woolgar and Ashmore discuss how in the relativist (or constructivist) social study of science, while the topic of investigation – science – is relativized, a realist methodology is maintained. The consequence of this adherence to a realist methodology is the construction of a new metascientific reality – that 'scientific knowledge is built in such and such a way and has such and such a character' (Woolgar and Ashmore 1991: 4). Within such relativist approaches, however, the nature of the reflexive similarity between findings and methods is itself not an issue; 'reflexivity is either treated as an inherent but uninteresting characteristic of such work... or, by contrast, is actively opposed' (Woolgar and Ashmore 1991: 8). Thus Woolgar and Ashmore point to a lack of reflexivity regarding the role of method in social world construction in such approaches. In short, such approaches do not problematize the role of the author in producing social worlds, and as an escape from such problems the abandoning of the commitment to realist methods is recommended along with a take-up of the reflexive project, a project described as concerning 'some of the most exciting intellectual work currently being undertaken anywhere' (Woolgar and Ashmore 1991: 9).

two reflexivities

May (1998) has, however, recently noted a number of limitations of such reflexivity for social research. He distinguishes two dimensions of reflexivity: endogenous and referential. By endogenous reflexivity he refers to the ways in which the actions of members of a given community are seen to contribute to the constitution of social reality itself. This dimension of reflexivity includes not only 'the methods of people within lifeworlds who are the subjects of social investigation but also those within social scientific communities in terms of how they construct the topics of their inquiries and conduct their

investigations' (May 1998: 8). By referential reflexivity May refers to 'the consequences that arise from a meeting between the reflexivity exhibited by actors as part of a lifeworld and that exhibited by the researcher as part of a social scientific community' (1998: 8). Through a review of reflexivity in the social sciences in relation to social research – from Weber, through the ethnomethodologists, to the methodological changes brought about by poststructuralist and postmodern arguments – May shows how in all of these different traditions there is a tendency to bracket referential reflexivity. He argues this has the effect of producing an inward-looking practice that results in a failure to adequately understand the role and place of the social sciences in the study of social life (1998: 18). The methodological implications of 'postmodernism' for social research – including the critique of the idea that the relation between research production and the representation of the social world may take place according to universal concepts of reliability and validity – are, for example, understood to have resulted in such a bracketing of referential reflexivity and a focus on endogenous reflexivity alone. For instance, May notes a tendency 'to take the words that are written about social life as *the central topics* for the social construction of reality' (1998: 17, emphasis in original) with the consequence that the authority of the author often becomes an important focus. Indeed, certain critiques of the authority of the author have led 'to research accounts that reproduce ego-identity!' (May 1998: 18). Thus he sees the problematization of social science methodology, especially the techniques of representation of the social world, to have led in some quarters to a (rather ironic) privileging of a new form of authority – that of the author. Instead of turning inwards in this way and relieving social science of engagement with the social world, May suggests the social sciences need also to embrace referential reflexivity. Quoting Fay, he agrees that the worth of social science should be judged in terms of 'what it tells us about those under study, not just what it reveals about the social scientist' (Fay quoted in May 1998: 20).

May's distinction between endogenous and referential reflexivity and his claims regarding the limits of reflexivity for social research may be paralleled to Latour's (1991) arguments regarding the problems of reflexivity for the social studies of science. Latour distinguishes between what he terms meta- and infra-reflexivity. By meta-reflexivity he refers to 'the attempt to avoid a text being believed by its readers', while infra-reflexivity concerns the 'attempt to avoid a text *not* being believed by its readers' (Latour 1991: 166, emphasis in original). Latour's meta-reflexivity is similar to May's endogenous reflexivity. It is based on the idea that

the most deleterious effect of a text is to be naively believed by the reader as in some way relating to a referent out there. Reflexivity is supposed to counteract this effect by rendering the text unfit for normal consumption.

(Latour 1991: 168)

Latour argues this position makes a number of assumptions, including that people easily believe what they read, and that believing always involves relating an account to some referent 'out there'. Yet the most bizarre assumption involved in meta-reflexivity, Latour suggests, inheres in arguments regarding self-reference. Here Latour refers to Woolgar's (1991b) discussion of reflexivity, where there is an assumption that an ethnographic text which discusses the ways in which ethnography is produced, is more reflexive than an ethnographic text which talks, say, about the Balinese. But Woolgar goes further, to suggest that such a reflexive account could be replaced by another account (or layer of reflexivity), since the reflexivity involved in discussing the ways in which ethnography is produced could be a naive way of telling a true story about ethnographic production. But still more, this third layer may not be reflexive, and thus Woolgar imagines 'many other rungs on this Jacob's ladder' (Latour 1991: 168). The problem Latour has here is that an nth degree account is no more and no less reflexive than any of the others in the chain,

A text about . . . [a] way of writing about the Balinese is no more and no less reflexive than . . . [a] text about the Balinese and this is no less and no more reflexive than what the Balinese themselves say.

(Latour 1991: 168)

The whole vertigo regarding self-reference, Latour argues, stems from a very naive belief that the same actor appears in the first and last text, while at the same time believing that when a text does not have an author as one of its characters it is less reflexive than when it does, 'as if these were not, in semiotic terms, two similar ways of building the enunciation' (1991: 169).

In place of piling layer upon layer of self-consciousness to no end and holding on to the possibility of reaching a meta-language – searching for a meta-meta-language that would judge all others – Latour asks, why not just have one layer, the story, and obtain the necessary amount of reflexivity from somewhere else? This strategy entails what Latour refers to as infra-reflexivity and is close to May's notion of referential reflexivity. Instead of focusing on the knower, infra-reflexivity focuses on both the knower and the known, 'displaying the knower and the known and the work needed to interrupt or create connections between A and B [elements to provide explanations and elements to be explained]' (Latour 1991: 172). This he says is a non-scientific way of studying the natural and social sciences. Instead of turning to the word, Latour urges, let us go back to the world. He considers, for example, completely 'unreflexive', 'journalistic' accounts of the world in which it is things – such as computers – that appear as reflexive, active, full of life, and ready to take part in dramatic stories, and thus are not objects in the way that empiricists would have them. Latour proclaims, 'there is more reflexivity in one account that makes the world alive than in one hundred

self-reflexive loops that return the boring thinking mind to the stage' (1991: 173). Thus while Latour agrees that the problems located by the reflexivists are correct, and that the reflexive trend is inescapable – 'otherwise our field would . . . be self-contradictory' (1991: 176) – like May, he also agrees that meta or endogenous reflexivity is too limited as an alternative, especially since in the end it endorses a scientific agenda by believing that there is no other way out of empiricism than language and self-reference. For Latour, a better strategy is to search for non-scientific and weaker explanations, and to look for reflexivity not 'in' the author but in the world.²

reflexivity 'in the world' (again)

But are these problems only at issue in regard to textual self-consciousness or to endogenous or meta-reflexivity? In what follows I suggest that many of the same points – especially the location of reflexivity 'in' the self – may be made in relation to the research practices social researchers have taken up in relation to 'the world', that is, in the kind of research which both May and Latour suggest is the domain of referential or infra-reflexivity, the kind of reflexivity which is about the knower and the known. To do so, and with May and Latour's distinctions between endogenous and referential or meta- and infra-reflexivity in mind, I want to now turn to a review (Williams 1997) of some of my research regarding sexuality and labour markets. Here the reviewer compares aspects of my research account with a research project on masculinity in British corporate culture (Roper 1994). The latter involved life histories conducted with 25 men and five women executive managers, while my own research involved two case studies of service (tourist) organizations in the UK (a hotel and a theme park) and a study of the organization of the occupation of public house management.³ Like some other commentators on organizations Roper foregrounds the operation of homosocial relations between men in organizations, while in my own account I stress that in service organizations a heterosexual imperative may be central to understanding the organization of service labour. Here then we have two accounts that are squarely in the world, yet, as we shall see, the reviewer attributes referential reflexivity to Roper's account (and to Roper himself) and discounts it from my own. The grounds on which the reviewer makes this move I believe may tell us much about the limits of reflexivity as a critical practice for social research.

The reviewer describes my own and Roper's study, charts out her points of contention, and then makes what for me are some interesting moves in terms of the current debates regarding reflexivity. She says that reading these two books together made her 'ponder some epistemological issues involved in gender research on organizations when it is conducted either by a man or a woman' (Williams 1997: 519). In particular, she was 'struck by the different depictions of male sexuality in the two studies' (1997:

519). She describes a portrayal of men as hostile to women in my study, and in Roper's study a 'much more humane and sympathetic view of his subjects' (1997: 519). Williams is anxious to get to grips with these differences, and on this she has two proposals. The first of these concerns *empathy*, which she understands to be an effect of the social characteristics of the researchers. She suggests,

Part of the difference may stem from empathy: as a young woman, Adkins no doubt had difficulty seeing the world from the vantage point of the sexist managers and ride operators she interviewed. In contrast, Roper admits to experiencing countertransference in his interviews: he describes tensions he felt 'between affection and criticism, sympathy for the organization man's masculinity, and an often uncomfortable identification with it' (p. 40).
(1997: 519)

The second proposal, which Williams suspects is more important than the first – indeed, she says 'something more than differences in empathy may be going on here' (1997: 519) – involves the relations between researchers and research subjects. To illustrate this issue, Williams turns to Roper's study. In particular, she discusses how Roper's study points to the importance of the business world as an arena for intimacy among men. Summarizing this aspect of Roper's research Williams (1997: 519) writes,

Men are drawn into the competition, aggression, and risk of business because it is one of the only avenues available to them to establish close, personal, emotional bonds with other men. Women represent a threat to this homosocial world. In fact, Roper found that men were much more inhibited with their emotional expressiveness with women than with other men. Career women provoked fears in the men about the security of the gender order and their own masculinity.

Crucially for Williams, it is this aspect of Roper's study which is held to explain the differences in the 'depictions of male sexuality in the two studies'. On Roper's research regarding homosociability in organizations she says, 'If this finding is correct – and I believe that it is – this could help to explain the different depictions of men in the two works' (Williams 1997: 519, emphasis added). In effect, Williams argues that my research was an outcome of the kind of homosocial logic identified by Roper. In Williams's view, I was positioned by such a logic in that my experiences in the two tourist organizations were mediated by organizational homosociability, and as a consequence, my research was a direct effect of this logic. She suggests,

Adkins's male respondents may have seen her as an intruder and an interloper – a challenge to their masculinity and to their authority over women – and treated her accordingly. Roper's male

respondents, in contrast, clearly saw him as 'one of them' or at least a younger version of themselves: many projected their own values and ambitions onto him, offering him unsolicited advice about his career and giving him business contacts.

(Williams 1997: 519–20)

Roper's account of homosociability in organizations is therefore held by Williams to be correct ('if this finding is correct – and I believe that it is') and is mobilized to position my research as the effect of this logic. Moreover, according to Williams, unlike Roper, I could neither escape nor be aware of this logic as a result of certain social characteristics: 'as a young woman, Adkins no doubt had difficulty seeing the world from the vantage point of the sexist managers and ride operators she interviewed'. In effect, Williams is claiming that certain immanent characteristics (in this case age and sex) on the part of the knower meant that a 'meeting of the reflexivity exhibited by actors as part of a lifeworld and that exhibited by the researcher as part of social scientific community' (May 1998: 8) was not possible in my research. Thus for Williams age and sex ensured that this research could not involve referential or infra-reflexivity, including the various forms of identification between knower and known described by Roper in his research project. Indeed, Williams goes on to write that it is unfortunate that I have not provided any information about how I was treated or how I felt doing the study (1997: 520), that is, that I did not provide a more self-conscious account of fieldwork of the sort given by Roper. In making these claims however, Williams assumes or reads in an antagonism between myself and the various men I interviewed in the course of this research project. Yet in assuming such an antagonism, she ignores the accounts provided by the men and women interviewed of their experiences of work in tourist organizations and their explanations of aspects of service work organization including selection criteria, rules and regulations and the specifics of service work, especially the significance of issues of self-presentation in relation to customers. Williams therefore not only discounts referential reflexivity from this research on the grounds of age and sex on the part of the knower, but also on the grounds an assumed antagonism and hostility in relation to the knower on the side of known.

What interests me about Williams's review is the kind of politics around reflexivity being enacted here, about who is and who is not recognized as capable of being both self and referentially reflexive in regard to social research *in the world*, that is reflexive in terms of the knower and the known. Let me pose a number of questions to get at this politics. Why is Roper's account read as concerning self and referential reflexivity but reflexivity discounted in my own on the grounds of age and sex on the side of the knower and antagonism on the side of the known? Why is my research discounted on the grounds of a logic which my own positioning did not allow me to 'see', while Roper's positioning is understood to be constitutive

of both self-reflexivity and the kind of reflexivity between knower and known (referential or infra-reflexivity) which writers such as May and Latour suggest the social sciences need to embrace? Why does the reviewer foreground the relationships between the researchers and the men interviewed in Roper's and my own study and ignore the relationships between the researchers and the women interviewed in the respective studies? Why doesn't the reviewer see similar problems in Roper's research with respect to his relationship with the women executive managers he interviewed to those she accredits to mine in relation to interviewing men? In short why does my sex (and age) matter while Roper's does not?

My answer to these questions is that it has something to do with the concept of reflexivity, and in particular that reflexivity entails a particular figuring of the relationship between the knower and the known, not only in relation to textual and other forms of endogenous reflexivity, but also in social research 'in the world'. Specifically, and in the section which follows I will suggest that reflexive social research puts in place a relationship between the knower and the known which positions the researcher as able to 'speak' (and be viewed as 'correct') via a particular figuring of identity. However, I suggest that this speaking position does not concern a claim of a transcendental positioning as in realism, but rather that in reflexive social science practice such a speaking position is constituted in terms of a vision of a *mobile relation to identity* on the side of the knower in relation to the known. In short, I shall argue that calls for reflexivity in social research comprise this kind of vision of mobility in regard to identity. One implication of this argument is that the kinds of problems located by May and Latour in relation to reflexivity are not simply confined to meta or endogenous reflexivity but also to the reflexivity associated with being-in-the-world. Another implication, however, as I shall make clear, is that there are a number of exclusions from reflexivity.

To make this argument I turn to Felski's (1995) analysis of the emergence of self-conscious textualism in the writings of the literary avant-garde. That is, I turn to an analysis of the cultivation of a reflexive stance in the artistic and intellectual counter-cultures at the turn of the nineteenth century. As I mentioned in Chapter 2 in my discussion of Featherstone's analysis of the aestheticization of everyday life, it is such cultures in which the more contemporary (and more widespread) forms of aesthetic reflexivity are understood to have their roots. In turning to Felski's account I therefore suggest that the reflexivity at issue in regard to knowledge and modes of knowing (whether endogenous or referential) is the very same form of reflexivity at issue in respect to the aestheticization of everyday life, that is the kind of reflexivity which has been the topic of discussion in previous chapters. I turn to Felski's analysis not only to illustrate this point, but also because it highlights the kinds of politics operating around reflexivity which I want to suggest are at issue in relation to contemporary calls for reflexivity in relation to social research. If my turn here to textual reflexivity seems odd

in the light of the way May and Latour tend to associate textual reflexivity with endogenous or meta-reflexivity and their distinctions between endogenous/meta-reflexivity and referential/infra-reflexivity, I hope it will become clear that part of my argument is to question whether or not these distinctions can be so easily drawn.

self-reflexivity and the politics of subversion

In *The Gender of Modernity* Felski (1995) discusses how during the late nineteenth century the literary avant-garde pursued a self-conscious textualism as a strategy of subverting sexual and textual norms. Such a strategy was deployed in the context of the emergence and rise of consumerism for the middle classes, particularly for middle-class women. This 'feminization' and aestheticization of the public sphere, Felski suggests, was threatening to bourgeois men whose social identity had been formed 'through an ethos of self-restraint and a repudiation of womanly feelings' (1995: 90). Yet for men who were disaffected from the dominant norms of middle-class masculinity, Felski argues the emergence of an aestheticized and feminized modernity offered hope of an alternative to the forces of positivism, progress ideology, and the sovereignty of the reality principle. It was this alternative that offered the literary avant-garde a ground to challenge traditional models of masculinity via an imaginary identification with the feminine (Felski 1995: 91). This took the form of a self-conscious textualism which

defined itself in opposition to the prevailing conventions of realist representation, turning to a decadent aesthetic of surface, style and parody that was explicitly coded as both 'feminine' and 'modern'.
(Felski 1995: 91)

While as Felski points out these practices were limited to a small, if influential group, nevertheless in questioning dominant ideals of masculinity this group aimed at 'the heart of bourgeois modes of self-understanding' (1995: 92), in particular, these practices denaturalized masculinity. Thus masculinity could no longer be assumed to be fixed, unitary and stable. But, Felski argues, it is a mistake to understand the feminization of texts as simply undoing gender, since the appropriation of an aesthetic of parody and performance 'reinscribes more insistently those gender hierarchies which are ostensibly being called into question' (1995: 92). This, she argues, is the case as the transgressive power of feminine in such texts is predicated on a 'radical disavowal of and dissociation from the "natural" body of woman' (1995: 92).

Felski considers a number of avant-garde texts to give flesh to this proposal. Here, she draws attention to the ways in which femininity was crucial to the self-reflexivity of such texts. She considers, for example, how the trope of femininity is mobilized to epitomize artifice rather than authenticity

and acts 'as a cipher for the very self-reflexivity of poetic language itself' (1995: 94). The key precondition of this move was the aestheticization of woman in relation to consumerism, and in particular how the everyday practice of femininity gradually came to concern practices of adornment and self-presentation. This aestheticization of woman decoupled femininity from the natural body, and as a set of signs femininity lent itself to appropriation. Through this very artificiality 'femininity was to become the privileged marker of the instability and mobility of modern gender identity' (Felski 1995: 95).

For example, in avant-garde texts the 'modernity' and supposed gender transgressiveness of the male protagonists is portrayed in terms of femininity. Thus the protagonists possess traits usually associated with women such as a love of fashion, sensitivity and vanity and they spend much time in private space codified as feminine rather than in the public sphere of work and politics, often locked into practices of self-reflection and self-contemplation regarding their aesthetic practices. In addition, language itself in such texts is an object of display, with description taking priority over narrative, form over substance, style over history, characteristics which the protagonists also share. This abandonment of realist conventions in such texts leads, Felski argues, to a self-conscious preoccupation with the surface of language, a self-consciousness which is evident in the use of techniques of cliché, stereotype and paradox which undermine any referential dimensions. Thus in these texts the transgressiveness of the protagonists (their mobility in terms of gender) and the challenges to realism and to conventional codes of masculinity all converged on the appropriation of the trope of femininity, whose very stylization, denaturalization and artificiality provided the grounds for such moves.

But while Felski draws attention to the ways in which the trope of femininity is central to such moves, she also highlights a number of key exclusions from this textual strategy. For example, while women's bodies in such texts are often portrayed as aestheticized – for instance, through portrayals of women as actresses, performers, images and works of art – nevertheless women are denied mobility in regard to gender and an ironic self-consciousness in relation to this aestheticization. Indeed, women are portrayed as embodying 'artifice naively... without being able to raise it to the level of philosophical reflection' (Felski 1995: 110). The subversion of gender norms is therefore not available to women 'whose nature renders them incapable of this kind of free-floating semiotic mobility and aesthetic sophistication' (Felski 1995: 106). For example, Felski points to Huysmans's text *Against the Grain* (1884), where after fantasizing about the possibility of erotic perversity with a masculine female athlete, the male protagonist is dismayed to find that she is 'unable to transgress the limits of her own gender' (1995: 111) and possesses 'all the childish weaknesses of a woman' (Huysmans, in Felski 1995: 111). In avant-garde texts women are thus excluded from a self-conscious transcendence of corporeality and identity.

In this context Felski draws attention to how the very strategy of subversion deployed in such texts is constitutive of new boundaries and gender hierarchies, as well as to the similarities between self-conscious literary texts and modern rationalism. In particular, the latter share a vision of,

overcoming the constraints of psychological determination and dissolving the power of sexual difference. Reducing the body to a free floating play of signs and codes, aestheticism, like science, positions itself as being against (female) nature.

(Felski 1995: 112)

With writers such as Featherstone, Felski therefore draws attention to how this strategy of subversion served to establish the class distinctiveness of the avant-garde. More than this, however, she shows how this strategy reinscribed gender hierarchies even though it appeared to challenge the conventions of gender. Her analysis of the gender politics of such reflexivity therefore suggests that in his analysis of these intellectual and artistic counter-cultures, and more generally of the aestheticization of everyday life, Featherstone tends to downplay the significance of aesthetic reflexivity in this regard. Specifically, and as my analysis in the previous chapter also pointed towards, Felski's analysis suggests that Featherstone downplays how the cultivation of an aesthetic stance involves such forms of inscription in relation to gender. And this is so even as he recognizes the significance of the cultivation of an aesthetic stance in the making of class distinctions. Felski's analysis also underlines a number of further points made in previous chapters. These include her insistence (albeit somewhat in tension with her analysis of the 'money, sex and power' novel) that a mobile and denaturalized femininity and 'feminization' of the public sphere is not straightforwardly detraditionalizing of gender; that the take-up of an aesthetic stance should not be read as undoing gender (even though it appears to unsettle or subvert gender norms); that reflexivity entails a mobile relation to gender styles; and that women are often excluded from such mobility and hence such reflexivity. Felski's analysis therefore appears to support the very broad argument made in the previous chapter, that to ignore the aesthetic dimension of reflexivity is not only to make invisible uneven distributions of reflexivity but also the significance of the aesthetic in regard to the making of differences.

Indeed, Felski extends her analysis further, and notes the similarities between the early modernist endeavour to overcome gender via the feminine, and more recent interests in the destabilizing power of feminine textuality, especially in the 'deployment of the motif of "Becoming woman" as a trope for the crisis of Western philosophical thought' (1995: 113). Felski argues that in such contemporary strategies the fantasy of becoming woman is often defined in opposition to the naivety of feminists' struggles for social change which are read as either essentialist or as concerning phallic identification. On such strategies she writes,

Without wishing to exaggerate the similarities between very different intellectual and political contexts, one might note that this strategy appears to enact an uncanny repetition of the dandy's affirmation of his own 'feminine' semiotic at the expense of women. (Felski 1995: 113)

A similar logic is also located by Ahmed (1998) in her analysis of the postmodern genre of meta-fiction – a genre of writing which is often understood to involve an extreme form of self-reflexivity and as overcoming the conventions of realism. Ahmed notes that while often fascinated with the sexual difference and sexuality, nevertheless this genre is often read as overcoming such differences.⁴ But she argues while postmodern fictions are frequently read as such, they 'may re-constitute those differences differently, through the very experimentations with literary form' (Ahmed 1998: 150). Via a detailed analysis of meta-fictional stories, Ahmed suggests that such a reconstitution may take place through the way in which the self-reflexivity of such narratives concerns a masculine mode of enunciation. For example, she draws attention to how the self-reflexivity of such narratives often entails a liberal and masculinist freedom to create woman, as well as fantasies of a 'over-coming gendered and generic limits as an aspect of a masculine mode of enunciation' (Ahmed 1998: 158).

reflexivity and the politics of mobility

With similar caveats as Felski's in mind with regard to issues of historical, intellectual and political specificity, what I want to draw attention to is the affinity between the kinds politics of reflexivity at issue in relation to the self-consciousness of the literary avant-garde and post-modern fictions located by Felski and Ahmed respectively, and the politics of reflexivity at issue in social research 'in the world'. And specifically I want to do so in regard to gender. Consider for example, the disembodied textual mobility enacted by Woolgar and Ashmore in their self-conscious dialogue above ('BUT THE BASIC POINT IS THAT WE COULD SWITCH ROLES WITHOUT ANYONE NOTICING? Yes. AND THAT WE COULD DROP THE UPPER CASE/lower case DISTINCTION IN ORDER TO DELIBERATELY CONFUSE OUR SUPPOSEDLY SEPARATE IDENTITIES? Right'). Thus, as Felski argues in relation to the literary avant-garde the apparent transgressiveness of such self-reflexivity – indeed the speaking position of such self-reflexive texts – is constituted through a vision of a self-conscious transcendence of corporeality and identity. But consider also the non-textual, non-endogenous, referential, '*in-the-world*' mobility accredited to Roper by Williams in terms of the relationship between knower and known. Specifically, Williams accredits Roper's social research with referential or infra-reflexivity (and his account is understood to be 'correct') on the grounds of an account of a recursive identification between

knower and known, that is, on the grounds of Roper's identification with the male organizational executive managers he interviewed, and an account of the latter's identification with Roper, evidenced in offers of career advice and business contacts. Thus what constitutes Roper's account as reflexive for Williams is a vision of mobility in regard to identity on the side of the knower in relation to the known, that is a mobility both in terms of identity and identification (in this case a mobility in terms of different forms of masculinity) as well as a self-consciousness regarding this mobility. For example, according to Williams, such mobility ensured that Roper's research involved the kind of challenge to subject/object relations in relation to the knower and the known which a more reflexive social research reaches towards. By contrast, in regard to my research Williams disallows such a reflexive dimension by attributing a *lack* of mobility in regard to identity and identification to the knower in relation to the known. In short, Williams suggests that the problems of my particular research project related to the inability to overcome identity – age and sex – and that this fixity in turn led to a lack of reflexivity (referential and endogenous) and to problematic research. Hence her claim that I 'had difficulty seeing the world from the vantage point' of those I interviewed and her assumption of hostility between those interviewed and myself.⁵ It seems therefore that the capacity for reflexive social research, and in particular the precondition of referential reflexivity (for example, claims of a recursive identification between knower and known) is an issue of overcoming fixity on the part of the knower through a vision of a mobile relation to identity in relation to the known.

While for the literary avant-garde and for the contemporary textual self-reflexivists reflexivity is constituted through a vision of a self-conscious transcendence of corporeality and identity, it seems that reflexivity '*in-the-world*' – that is, aesthetic or hermeneutic reflexivity – is constituted through a similar vision of mobility in regard to identity. As we have seen, Felski has shown how the reflexivity of the literary avant-garde was constituted through a mobility in relation to gender, yet this mobility was predicated on a 'radical disavowal and dissociation from the "natural" body of the woman' (Felski 1995: 11). Hence in avant-garde texts women are denied such mobility 'whose nature renders them incapable of this kind of free-floating semiotic mobility' (Felski 1995: 12). So too it seems that a similar politics of exclusion is at issue in reflexive social research. Thus according to Williams age and sex may render women incapable of mobility '*in the world*' and hence of referential and self-reflexivity in the social research process. Indeed, much like the '*in-the-world*' reflexivity in cultural economies discussed in the previous chapter, it seems that in terms of the research process women may be denied such reflexivity on the grounds of an immanent relation to gender identity.

In this context, and along the lines of Felski's and Ahmed's questioning of the subversiveness of literary avant-garde and of postmodern meta-fictions respectively, the progressiveness so often ascribed to reflexive social research (not only endogenous, but also referential) must surely be

questioned. Indeed, reflexivity as a critical practice may be far from neutral and in particular may have a hidden politics of gender. Specifically, if reflexivity between knower and known is constituted via a vision of a mobile relation to identity on the part of the knower in relation to the known, and women are excluded from such mobility on the grounds of their 'nature', then much like the self-reflexivity of the literary avant-garde, such strategies 'in the world' may also concern the inscription of new gender hierarchies. Here the issue is one of who can speak 'for whom, why, how and when' (Probyn 1993: 2) in the age of reflexive social science. For as I hope to have illustrated through the example of two research projects, reflexivity in terms of the knower and the known may inscribe a hierarchy of speaking positions in relation to gender. The inscription of this hierarchy is however hidden by claims that reflexivity is a 'good' and 'progressive' thing in regard to the gender politics of social research. Indeed what is ironic regarding this inscription is that reflexivity is often understood in part to be a response and antidote to feminist critiques of universalism in social research (see e.g. Gergen and Gergen 1991). Thus a more reflexive politics of location in regard to both the knower and the known in social research developed in part due to feminist critiques of universalism in social research. Yet while reflexivity ostensibly calls into question such universalism, and in particular appears to call into question assumptions of a masculine speaking position and the normalization of masculine experiences, at the same time reflexivity may be constitutive of new hierarchies in social research, particularly if reflexivity is attributed to certain selves and not to others (see also Cronin 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Skeggs 2002).

On this point, it is interesting to note that although, as was made clear in Chapter 3, McDowell has interpreted the apparent questioning of universalism associated with the take-up of an aesthetic towards gender (that is, in-the-world reflexivity) as potentially 'liberatory', somewhat ironically Barnes *et al.* (2000) have denied McDowell this very form of reflexivity in relation to the research process. Specifically, in a discussion of her research project on professional financial sector workers, Barnes *et al.* suggest that McDowell may not have treated the men and women she interviewed in her research project equally, and in particular suggest that she was 'often more sympathetic to women than she was to men' (Barnes *et al.* 2000: 276). For example, they argue that McDowell makes 'snide asides' when discussing the comments of high-up male directors in a way that she does not for the women she interviewed. Thus Barnes *et al.* question McDowell's research on the grounds of a lack of mobility in regard to identity on the side of the implied knower in relation to the known – that is, on the grounds of an implied inability to overcome identity in the context of the research evidenced in a lack of identification with (some of) the men she interviewed. Barnes *et al.* therefore imply that this lack of mobility vis-à-vis identity and identification did not allow for the development of referential or infra-reflexivity in this project, and question the research on these grounds. Thus the very politics (the

politics of in-the-world, hermeneutic, or aesthetic reflexivity) that McDowell sees as potentially 'liberatory' are here enacted to call into question her research, indeed to enact a hierarchy of social science speaking positions arranged in terms of mobility and fixidity.

situating reflexivity 'in the world'

In a critique of the reflexive ethnographic turn in anthropology, and in particular a turn to self-reflexivity (where 'the reflexive gaze stops at the author'; 1993: 80) Probyn has also discussed the politics involved in reflexive social science. In particular, she has drawn attention to the ways in which self-consciousness on the part of reflexive ethnographers often relies on making respondents as well as 'the field' stationary. What I am suggesting is that for referential reflexivity a similar logic is also at issue regarding speaking positions on the side of the knower. Thus while some social scientists are deemed mobile (and their research hence reflexive and sound), others are deemed fixed (their research unreflexive and hence questionable). Discussing self-reflexivity further, Probyn has argued that the problem is not that there should not be reflexivity regarding one's research practices, but rather that it 'is the conception of the self at work within this reflexivity that is at fault' (1993: 80), a conception which she characterizes as concerning an ontological egotism. Against this conception of the self, Probyn insists that it is vital to always ask 'what had to be held in place in order for this self to appear at all' (1993: 80). Thus, she posits an understanding of the self as a speaking position based on a questioning 'of how it is that I am speaking' (1993: 80; see also Skeggs 1995). It is precisely this kind of questioning which I am suggesting may be disallowed in reflexive social science through a *normalization* of a speaking position based on a vision of a mobile relation to identity, a normalization which makes invisible exclusions from this vision. Thus while Probyn, along with writers such as May and Latour, have questioned the version of the ego-centred self at issue in endogenous and self-reflexivity, I would suggest that this questioning also needs to be extended to referential or infra-reflexivity, particularly if, as I have suggested, the politics of reflexivity only allows some people to speak.

Felski denaturalized the speaking position of the avant-garde and called into question the apparent transgressiveness of their textual strategies by showing how a self-conscious speaking position relied on an appropriation of femininity, an appropriation made possible by the emergence of consumerism for the middle classes. Following this strategy, alongside Probyn's suggestions regarding the importance of historically situating speaking selves and questioning conceptions of selfhood at work in social research, we might ask how it is that the referentially orientated social researchers are speaking? What has to be held in place in order for a vision of the self with a mobile relation to identity to appear? Following my analysis of gender reflexivity in

the previous chapter I would suggest that such visions of mobility need to be situated in terms of general processes of denaturalization and desocialization, but where such processes are understood to be an important ground for the making of contemporary axes of difference. That is, such visions need to be situated in terms of broad processes which are undoing forms of socio-structural classification (such as the aestheticization of everyday life), but where this does not imply straightforward forms of declassification, but also new forms of classification. As with the previous chapter, this chapter suggests that positions of mobility and immanence in regard to aesthetic reflexivity – in this case, the take-up of a reflexive stance towards the relations between the knower and the known – are central to the latter, and in particular that differences of gender as well as class are currently being articulated in these terms. Situating such a vision in this way suggests that the version of the self at issue on the side of the knower in relation to reflexivity ‘in the world’ – that is, a vision of the self with a mobile relation to identity – may be the ideal and privileged self of late modernity. Reflexivity may then be far from the critical practice it is often understood to be for social research. Indeed, while reflexive social research practice ostensibly aims to redress the normalization of particular privileged speaking positions both in relation to the knower and the known it seems, as Haraway has argued, that ‘reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere’ (Haraway 1997b: 16).

five

reflexivity, risk and the (neo-liberal) politics of sexuality

Introduction

In the previous chapter through a consideration of reflexivity and the politics of knowledge particularly in regard to recent debates in social research I suggested that rather than offering a mode of knowing which breaks down self–other relations and produces subject–subject forms of knowledge, reflexivity involves a vision of a mobile relation to identity on the side of the knower in relation to the known. Moreover, I suggested that such reflexivity inscribes a hierarchy of speaking positions in relation to gender whereby women may be denied such ‘in-the-world’ mobility. Indeed, I argued that the mobile speaking position at issue in reflexive social research is a version of the ideal self of late modernity made possible by processes of denaturalization and desocialization in relation to gender. Thus much like the reflexivity at issue in cultural economies discussed in Chapter 3, while such processes enable mobility in regard to identities and identifications, and moreover, the cultivation of techniques which allow such flexibility, they should not be understood as ‘liberatory’ but rather should be read critically, and in particular should be understood as involving new articulations of difference and power.

In this chapter I explore the politics of ‘in-the-world’ reflexivity further, but here I am concerned with sexuality. In particular, in this chapter I am interested in the politics of reflexivity in regard to sexuality and HIV testing. I have chosen the latter as important for analysis since the discursive and administrative procedures associated with HIV testing have been located as inciting reflexivity. That is to say HIV testing has been located as an

- such moves signal a decline of identifications in terms of class and status since occupational distinctiveness was historically central to their constitution. So although here I am focusing on desegregation in relation to gender, such moves may be linked to a more wide-ranging set of shifts relating to the breakdown of a range of socio-structural forms of classification.
- 7 Indeed, Crompton notes that one of the most rapidly growing occupations for men is 'care assistant'.
- 8 Although Halford, Savage and Witz provide extensive documentation of this shift they also stress that it should not be read unproblematically. For instance, they discuss new divisions between full-time and part-time workers, a clustering of women in senior jobs which they argue are removed from centres of organizational power, and the emergence of new forms of organizational masculinity based on macho competitiveness.
- 9 The idea that contemporary culture is a feminized culture is of course not a new one, for as Modleski has reminded us 'ways of thinking and feeling about mass culture are... intricately bound up with notions of the feminine' (1991: 22) and historically mass culture has often been condemned on such grounds. However, on more recent readings rather than condemned, contemporary culture is now often affirmed precisely on the grounds of its associations with the feminine.
- 10 For example, it has been argued Baudrillard's notion of simulation is a synonym for the Hegelian notion of feminine seduction (Modleski 1991).
- 11 Masculinity has been represented as culturally feminizing in other historical periods, and has been denigrated on these grounds (see e.g. Kimmel 1994 for an historical account of the feminization of American masculinity). However, like contemporary culture more generally, rather than condemned, contemporary masculinity is now often validated because of such associations with the feminine (see Vitellone 2000b for a critique of this view).
- 12 Felski, of course, is not the first feminist theorist to highlight gender hybridity in late capitalism. Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto', for example, drew attention to a range of boundary and dichotomy breakdowns – between human and animal, nature and culture, organism and machine – which challenge the dualisms 'which have been systemic to the logics of and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals' (1991: 177). Such breakdowns, Haraway suggested, mean that in the late twentieth century 'we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras' (1991: 177). As is well known, Haraway's account of boundary breakdown, mobility and hybridity was concerned mostly with high-tech scientific culture. In this chapter while considering similar themes my concern is with these issues in relation to consumer culture and especially the 'culturalization' of the economic. Despite this significant difference however, while Haraway argues for a recognition of new forms of domination in a 'post-gender world' (1991: 150) I also suggest that at the same time as challenging and undoing traditional forms of domination, boundary and category breakdowns also concern new forms of power and new arrangements of gender.
- 13 See for example Bhabha (1990) and Hall (1990, 1997a) for discussions of hybridity, especially the ways in which hybridity involves the dual move of new positions and an effacement of the idea of 'origins'.
- 14 See Hall (1997a) on the distinction between hybridity and reversal.
- 15 In this study a number of theses are put forward, but here I focus on and pull out arguments made regarding feminization.
- 16 Illouz suggests that this new language of selfhood was articulated primarily via psychological expertise (see Rose 1990).
- 17 Although see Sedgwick's (1994) discussion of the phenomena of 'corporate drag'.
- 18 As Diawara notes his trantextuality/immanence scheme does not only accrue to 'race' but to a range of positions (1998: 66).

- 19 This adds weight to Mariam Fraser's (1999) view discussed in Chapter 1 that a privileging of the visible is problematic for the contemporary politics of gender and sexuality. Moreover it underlines the point also made in Chapter 1 that issues of socio-economics and issues of identity and subjectivity cannot be easily divided.
- 20 I refer here to the debate between Butler (1998a) and Fraser (1998) discussed in Chapter 1 concerning the relations between questions of identity and questions of 'socioeconomics' and distribution.
- 21 Indeed this replacement of the masculine trope seems to reproduce the very binarism which the feminization of masculinity is assumed to undo.
- 22 Rouse has argued that the emergence of flexible worker subjectivities, that is, of workers with self-transformative capacities for 'moving fluidly back and forth between markedly different modes of experience and arenas of activity' (1995: 389) and for combining 'disparate aspects of personhood' (1995: 390), is linked to transnationalism, or what he sees as processes of capital accumulation organized along transnational lines (1995: 357). Moreover, Rouse suggests that the shift to transnationalism concerns a new set of class relations and a significant reconfiguration of the class structure 'manifest in occupational distinctions and income levels, from a broadly pyramidal structure to something that is shaped more like a rocket' (1995: 397, emphasis in original). It seems therefore that flexible worker subjectivities may be linked not just to refashionings of gender, but to a major refashioning of a range of differences along a number of axes.

chapter four

- 1 May recognizes that a set of diverse thinkers are classified under this term.
- 2 See also Lash (1994) who, as noted in Chapter 2, makes a similar point in regard to cognitive understandings of reflexivity in contemporary social theory.
- 3 The case studies looked at governance in tourist organizations including the regulation of employee behaviour and appearance and interactions with customers. This involved non-participant observation of employee and customer interactions and training sessions, semi-structured interviews with managers, supervisors and employees, and documentary research on the changing formal organizational policies regarding governance in these areas. The study of the occupation of public house management involved interviews with public house managers (husband and wife teams), interviews with company (brewery) personnel managers and documentary research regarding the shifting organization of this occupation. The latter primarily comprised an analysis of company records and policy documents.
- 4 See e.g. Kaufmann (1998) for an example of such a reading.
- 5 In so doing Williams disputes my account of the significance of heterosexuality as an organizing principle of service labour. This raises interesting – if complicated – issues regarding the politics of reflexivity in regard to sexuality which I address in the following chapter.

chapter five

- 1 The researchers used the term AIDS as piloting 'revealed that many people were unfamiliar with the term HIV' (Bray and Chapman 1991: 107).
- 2 The high levels of testing in Australia have been compared to those found in Sweden (see Lupton *et al.* 1995b) which 'has one of the highest rates of HIV testing per capita in Europe. By 1996, 9.5 million tests had been carried out among Sweden's population of 8.5 million' (Danziger 1998: 567).