



Perspective

Feminism and Realization of Gender Subjectivation in the Theoretical Field of Metamodernity

Olga Vlasova  

Ukrainian State University of Science and Technologies, Ukraine.

Abstract

The article aims to conceptualize the architectonics of the feminist philosophy under the theoretical conditions of metamodernism. In this context, it emphasizes the importance of the multidisciplinary research methods. By adopting a gender-differentiated methodology we accentuate the stable relationship between women and the problem of subjectivity, which is still mainly based on the ideology narratives and discourses. As the concept of gender identity is becoming more and more multilateral, it is obvious that its problematizing is closely linked with the concept of identification, which is considered more valid under the conditions of metamodernity. Social identity is still one of the grand narratives in social, political, and philosophic sciences: in contrast to single-hypothesis theories, it is complex and dynamic – gender identification is by all means under the metamodern “umbrella,” too. In contrast to gender identification, feminist approaches are logically straight, being based on the dichotomy “male-female”. The metamodern “pendulum” has swung in the opposite direction to question the postmodern principles, yet the fundamentals of the postmodern philosophy and feminist studies stay remarkably stable. Concerning a certain misunderstanding of feminist philosophy in traditional academic circles, it should be emphasized that it seems an exaggeration to talk about completely different conceptions and meanings of feminist philosophy and gender studies: the main problem remains with the concept of the human nature of men and women.

Keywords: theoretical mutations, multidisciplinary research, gender identification, discursive practices.

Funding: No funding was received for this research and publication.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Article History: Received: 16 April 2024. Revised: 25 May 2024. Accepted: 26 December 2024. Published: 29 December 2024.

Copyright: © 2024 by the author/s.

License: Critical Gender Studies Network (CGSN), India. Distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Publisher: Critical Gender Studies Network (CGSN)

Citation: Vlasova, T. (2024). Interpretation in Post-Postmodern Theoretical Drift and Gender Mutations. *Critical Gender Studies Journal*. 1:2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21659/cgsj.v1n2.09>



Introduction

"The period known as postmodernism is over." This assertion is becoming popular nowadays when the line between narratives and reality seems to be increasingly uncertain. There are no more "pure" scientific definitions: scientists have been treating interpretation as a key to the postmodern mutations of the idea of Truth since the 70s of the last century. Scientists claim that to come to an understanding of our current historical moment, a new metalanguage should be exerted, and the key term in it is metamodernism. Researchers use the word "metamodernism" as a heuristic label to come to terms with aesthetic and cultural predictions. The topicality of the issues mentioned above is scientifically grounded in some valid articles and monographs (Garret, 2022). Generally speaking, we should emphasize here some main points – the metaphysics of time, the nature of identity, and the importance of human beings as persons. All this signals a rupture from a familiar past and the "advent" of a new and very different present (Severan & Dempsey, 2021). It is generally accepted as a fact that mainstream social sciences have always been highly fragmented with considerable isolation among disciplines and subjects. The latter means we cannot but use multidisciplinary research to add some concepts of social identity, gender identification, hermeneutic interpretation, etc. By adopting a gender-differentiated methodology, we accentuate that there is a stable relationship between women and subjectivity, which is based not only on biology but, most likely, on ideology. In this context, the meanings that M. Foucault attaches to the concept of discourse and discursive practices are of particular importance. According to M. Foucault, discourses are a set of certain social practices that systematically shape the objects in question, i.e. a set of rules that include characteristic statuses and roles, codes of perception of the human body, topics of utterance, and utterances themselves, which are subjected to the same system of formation. Discursive practice, according to M. Foucault (1982), is a set of anonymous, always time- and space-determined rules that, at a particular time and for a particular social, geographical, or linguistic sector, have determined the conditions for the function of expression. When analyzing political discourse, we try not to forget that any discursive practice is closely related to the broader social context and is always subjected to the strong influence of non-discursive social processes.

Presentation of basic material

In the conceptual framework, three defining characteristics of today's world are important in social, political and cultural branches of science: interdependence, velocity, and complexity. We argue that the analysis of the phenomenon of subjectivity is impossible outside these problematic fields with special stress on gender, masculinity, and femininity; it is impossible outside the discourses of identities and stereotypes - the constructions of an ideal from the perspective of

belonging to a certain gender, ethnic and social characteristics. Today, women, no matter how different they may be, are a collective "we", a collective subject of politics that creates its own public practice with undeniably positive content. And here it should be noted that despite the significant growth and recognition of the feminist trend in science, this problematic field of knowledge remains ambiguous in the academic environment. It is in the critique of value-hierarchical thinking and the logic of domination that gender researchers reveal how traditional philosophy destroys women's values, fundamental assumptions, and key concepts related to women. Returning to a certain position of feminist philosophy, it should be stressed that feminists have criticized modern foundationalist epistemologies and modern moral and political theories. They have confronted the "dominant philosophical project of seeking objectivity in the guise of a 'God's eye view' which transcends any situation or perspective" (Nicolson, 1990, p. 26). On the other hand, it should be emphasized that it looks like an exaggeration to talk about completely different gender meanings, but the dialogue in the male-female opposition often takes place in so different contexts that cultural communication usually fails to achieve its result. At the same time, it should be remembered that "the problem of society is not a problem of limitation, but of integration" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 3).

J. Deleuze argues that the moral world is not reducible to moral instinct. The moral world asserts its reality when contradiction actually expands, when dialogue is possible, and it replaces violence. The moral world, Deleuze continues, is an artificial tone in which private goals are integrated and added to each other. Moral consciousness is political consciousness; true morality is politics. The moral problem is the problem of the whole, as well as the problem of the means, according to J. Deleuze (1991, p. 32).

Here, it seems appropriate to return to gender identities and recollect the fact that scientists, as a rule, accept the definition of gender identity as the private experience of gender roles, while gender role is the public manifestation of gender identity (Son, 2021). However, we should recall that culture still identifies femininity with community, mutual assistance, the process of interconnections, and a vision of the world united by human relationships. In her well-known monograph, K. Gilligan argues that moral laws and principles are crucial for the masculine mentality in the moral sphere, and the concepts of care, mutual understanding, and trust are crucial for women (Gilligan, 1982). By adopting a gender-differentiated methodology, we are involved in recognizing that there is a stable homogeneous relationship between women and subjectivity and that this relationship is most likely ideological rather than biological.

Despite the complexity of the issues discussed in this regard, it should be noted that the main problem remains with the concept of the human nature of men and women: the superiority of

reason over emotion, "male" and "female" knowledge, and so on. In the subjectivist approach, we ask not only how gender determines women's behavior, the treatment of women, etc., but also how women comprehend the personal, political, and social notions of what it means to be a woman.

Scholars argue that the difficulties of gender thinking are largely because gender, both as an analytical category and as a social process, is relative and consists of internally interconnected components, intersecting fields of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and so on (Freedman, 2002). It is worth noting that in modern sociology, identity is understood as a characteristic of an individual in terms of his or her membership in a social community or group; on the other hand, a person's identification with a group can occur on different grounds: gender, age, nationality, membership in a particular class, profession, or confession. Accordingly, different types of identity are distinguished - gender, class, nationality, etc., but the problem is that gender is always present in the realization of any of these identities. As a result, it is not surprising that the representation of individuals' identities is a whole spectrum of different practices determined by various ideologies and theoretical constructions.

According to feminist researchers, all political actors exist as finite entities, although they are embedded in circles of broader systems of interaction. These "we" can be grouped according to such features as physical or economic ties, a common language, culture, values, beliefs, and the development of communication channels within the subject, which allow us to assert that "we" can recognize one another and communicate with each other through the use of common symbols and signaling techniques. Thus, "the explication and justification of beliefs, values, symbols inherent in this "we", which transforms them from the property of individuals into phenomena of public and political life, makes it possible to form the identity of a political subject" (Kukarenko, 2007, p. 102). In order to understand gender in the terms of social relationship, we need a deep deconstruction of the meanings we attach to biology (sex) and social relations (gender). For example, as it has been mentioned above, men demonstrate a greater interest in the manifestation of the abstract mind, in the desire to dominate nature (including the body), in aggression and militaristic tendencies; women's qualities are traditionally associated with the activities of care, education, and motherhood, - though at present we all are spectators of some definite mutations in this problematic field.

It should be emphasized that in this vein, a reassessment of socio-cultural and moral values is needed, a rethinking of what is humanly excellent, highly moral, and worthy of praise. Feminist scholars, challenging the patriarchal culture, constantly emphasize that in a society de facto built on gender dualism an individual cannot be just a "person". In contemporary culture, our behavior

is coded as masculine or feminine – despite the ever-growing number of genders - and it functions as such in the dominant system of gender power relations.

Since the early 1970s, feminist scholars have begun to re-analyze both well-known and less familiar philosophical texts. Their new feminist analysis and new interpretation have yielded significant results; as the scholars themselves insist, these have had revolutionary implications for understanding not only those texts themselves, but also such important philosophical categories as equality, freedom, justice, public/private, democracy, etc. Despite the significance of these new studies, since most were conducted outside traditional philosophical directions, they have received "strikingly little attention in the discussion of contemporary political and philosophical problems" (Pateman, 2005, p. 11). It is significant that according to R. Hof, the difference between "women's studies" and "studies about women" is the inclusion of women's life experiences in the framework of socio-cultural reality as the basis of scientific analysis, which radically changed the type of argumentation (Hough, 2009. p. 35).

Traditional studies of women were no longer seen as scientifically sound statements that could explain the inequality between men and women. Theories that asserted the irrationality of women and attributed them to an exclusively private sphere are now considered masculine strategies, aimed not so much at explaining as at affirming the existing patriarchal gender order. Feminist scholars questioned the notion of a "neutral" or "genderless" researcher who reflects on the identification of universal human values since such a researcher loses sight of the gender-dependent power relations within culture. Interestingly, it was women's literature that was at the center of attention of feminist theorists in the 1970s. As the researchers rightly noted, "literary discourse was one of the few in which women's issues constantly played a prominent and obvious role" (Hough, 2009. p. 37). Ukrainian scholars also note that gender studies, which began their active work in Ukraine at the turn of the 80s and 90s, were mostly represented by literary studies (Ageeva, 2004, p. 3). Gynocriticism, which developed alongside "women's aesthetics" in the 70s, established women's works as the central object of feminist critics. Gynocriticism dealt with numerous sign systems of women's literary traditions, interpretation, and intertextuality. At about the same time, researchers from the departments of French literature and comparative literature appeared in the feminist theoretical field, who saw poststructuralist linguistics, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and deconstruction as the most powerful means for understanding the origin of gender differences in language, reading, and writing (E. Sixou, L. Irigaray, Y. Kristeva, M. Wittig, and others).

Following Derrida and Lacan, French-American feminist scholars focused on what E. Jardin calls "gynesis", the study of textual thought (Showalter, 1985).

Sharing the views of some metamodern scholars, we emphasize that no experience can be felt and acquired outside of a certain socio-cultural context, just as there is no culture outside of human sensory experience. We do not just have a cultural tradition and the paradigmatic beliefs behind it; rather, we live within it, and it lives within us. Therefore, we can never be completely outside of our inherited beliefs, taking the purely "objective" stance assumed by the old model.

The latter fully applies to the image of women in feminist anthropology and postmodern philosophy. Differences in feminist approaches to the consideration of the "nature" of women are quite extensive and are related to many reasons, including the use of different research methods: Marxist, phenomenological, psychoanalytic, hermeneutical, etc. At the same time, the main goal of feminist studies of women's nature is to remove the notorious philosophical dichotomy of "woman - nature" and "man - culture." Without losing sight of how "woman" is pushed beyond "man" (peculiarities of female physiology, psychology, etc.), we emphasize that the correlation of the binary oppositions "woman/man" - "nature/culture" are inseparable links in the same chain, on the rethinking of which the philosophical anthropology of feminism is based. It is fair to point out that the assumption of the existence of a specific "feminine principle" today can no longer be considered to justify the subordinate position of women. In connection with the "male experience," it is worth recalling the advice given to men by Sigmund Freud: "If you want to learn as much as possible about femininity, turn to your own life experience, or to the poets, or wait until science is able to give you deeper and more interconnected information" (Hough, 2009. p. 34). Feminist philosophers argue that the gender factor is very important even in the most abstract theories, where its presence and influence seem unexpected. For example, as N. Fraser shows, Habermas's detailed and subtle analysis, with its distinction between material reproduction and symbolic reproduction, preserves the patriarchal division between public and private, i.e., Habermas's theory implicitly contains a certain gender connotation (Wilber, 2001, pp. 347-379). That is why gender researchers focus on what values underlie and permeate various theories. That is why feminist philosophers strive to connect theory with everyday practice and highly value the diversity of experiences of many women who differ in their class position, ethnicity, race, age, or the capabilities of their bodies. It is this interest in the diversity of women that has sparked the debate about the possibility of speaking in a "women's" (or "feminist") voice.

Returning to the more general discourse of the "postmodernization" of sex and gender, it should be noted that the changes that erode what until recently seemed indisputable in an individual's sexuality are not just changes in human thinking but reflect changes in the qualities and

distributions of sexual experience in the present moment. As some kind of prediction, R. Barth wrote: "The opposition of the sexes should not be a law of nature. Consequently, confrontations and paradigms should gradually disappear... meanings will tend to increase to disperse... and gender will not be subject to typology. There will be, for example, only "homosexualities," the plurality of which will lead to a dead end for any constituted, centered discourse" (Butler, 1993, p. 69).

Conclusions

Recent research in the humanities shows that attempts to introduce the "fact" of a specific time and place into a structural framework in terms of the premature and the universal cannot serve either science or society. The requirements of theory in the metamodern context are not to devalue empirical methods, as suggested by critics of the first "wave" of postmodernism, but to reassess theory, at least to refuse to search for some "set" of generalizations. Methodologies of all kinds, being critical, still remain the essence of our ways of seeing the world and the conditions for discussing what we think about the world. Scholars have argued that there are good reasons to reassess the self-perceived relationship between theory (understanding) and research (description). Recognizing that theory and research inevitably contextualize each other does not mean that they are completely mutually exclusive but that they retain the potential to inspire each other in descriptions and conceptualizations of our own practice: a diverse yet hierarchical relationship that describes a larger social order.

There are many possibilities for interpreting any experience, and narratives, such as the "specific stories" of a particular individual, are one of them. This approach significantly increases the need for further research into human experience in the metamodern context, where every "history" as an interpretation has an equal right to be true. However, it never becomes absolute and universal in this sense.

"Unheard" is a tragedy of the ages and the peoples, which in our "metamodern" period is played out especially often on the stage of history. The latter takes place against the backdrop of the constant repetition in both academic publications and the media of the thesis about the special role of the dialogue of cultures in the processes of globalization. These processes are, of course, a given of modern historical development. The problem is that if 5-10 years ago it was an axiom that those processes naturally lead to international and interpersonal rapprochement and interaction, today this statement is becoming increasingly problematic.

References

- Ageeva, V. (2004). Gender Perspective. Kyiv: "Fakt".
- Butler, J. (1993). Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of «Sex». New York: Routledge.
- Deleuze, G. (1991). Empiricism and Subjectivity. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Foucault, Michel (1982). The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language. Vintage; First Edition.
- Freedman, E. B. (2002). No Turning Back. The History of Feminism and the Future of Women. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Garret, B. (2022). Time, Identity and the Self. Essays on Metaphysics. Springer.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Hough, R. (2009). The emergence and development of gender studies. Sex. Gender. Culture. Moscow: University of Freiburg, RGGU.
- Kukarenko, N.I. (2007). Gender inequality and the subject of feminist policies. Moscow: GAPN; GOSSPEN. C. 100 – 10 c.
- Nicolson, L., ed. (1990). Feminism/ postmodernism. New York and London: Routledge.
- Pateman, K. Introduction (2005). Feminist Critique and Revision of the History of Political Philosophy / K. Pateman, M. L. Shanley. Moscow: ROSSPEN. 11-24.
- Severan, A. & Dempsey, B.G. (2021). Metamodernism and the Return of Transcendence. Independently published.
- Showalter, E., ed. (1985). The New feminist criticism: essays on women, literature, and theory. New York: Pantheon.
- Son, D. (2021). The End of Gender: Debunking the Myths about Sex and Identity in Our Societies. Threshold Editions.
- Van den Akker, R. & Gibbons, A. (2017). Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Wilber, K. (2001). A Brief History of Everything. Shambhala.