

Tuesday
11 June 2013
7:30 pm
In English

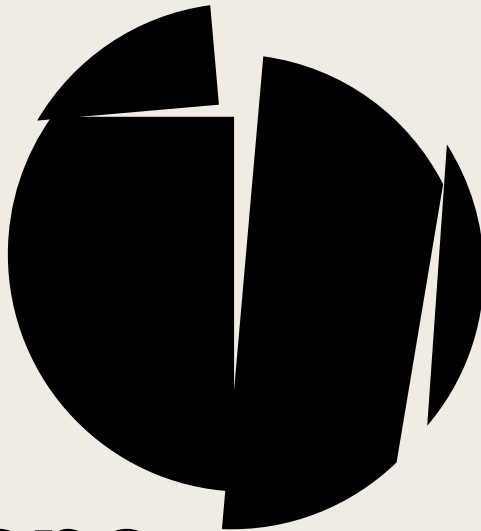
What is the future of sexual difference — long considered to constitute a perfect whole, then deemed a limited, even a masculine conception? Insofar as “two sexes” ever stood for oppositionality and complementarity, the alternatives appeared to be sexual sameness, identity, or equality. If these options once seemed to saturate the field of conceptual possibilities, new challenges to the imagination of sex have more recently emerged in the languages of *différance*, queer, trans, assemblage and plasticity. Among these, this paper reflects on a curiously persistent interest in sexual difference in the emergent field of new materialisms. In fact, these become contexts in which the qualities of a maximal plasticity are attributed to sexual difference. Even Luce Irigaray finds herself reconfigured, and to surprising ends — now seen as offering the resources for going beyond sexual difference. The paper asks to what extent this form of looking back can be seen as a transformative strategy available for a broader deployment.

Penelope Deutscher is Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Northwestern University. Her publications include *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance* (Cambridge, UP, 2008), *How to Read Derrida* (Granta/Norton, 2005), *A Politics of Impossible Difference: The Later Work of Luce Irigaray* (Cornell, UP, 2002) and *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction and the History of Philosophy* (Routledge, 1997). She co-edited (with Françoise Collin) *Repen- ser le politique: l'apport du féminisme* (Campagne première/Les Cahiers du Griffon, 2004) and (with Kelly Oliver) *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman* (Cornell, UP, 1999). She is currently working on two projects: *From Analogy*, on the historical grounding of women's rights claims in analogical proximities with animals, slaves and sovereigns; and *Foucault's Children: Thanatopolitics and Reproductive Futurism* — elements of which currently appear in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, *Theory, Culture and Society*, and *Telos*.

Constituting Wholes

Wholes are said to be more than the sum of their parts. This ‘more’ contains both a promise and a threat. When different elements — disciplines, methods, cultures, individuals — form a whole, they not only join forces, but also generate effects of synergy and a surplus from which also the parts can benefit. Being part of a whole is a way to acquire meaning and to extend oneself beyond one's limited existence; and having a part in the whole is to have an enlarged agency. But wholes are also more powerful than the sum of their parts. Wholes constitute their parts, determining what is a part and what is apart, what has a part and what is deprived of agency. Becoming a part requires submission and although parts may not pre-exist the whole, there may still be something in the elements that exceeds being a part — even if only the possibility of being part of a different whole. While a desire for being whole or part of a whole seems all-too-natural, organic metaphors, which are often used to think part-whole relationships, have been criticized precisely for naturalizing relations of hierarchy and power. Yet, entirely abandoning the whole in favour of the part(icular) is also problematic. After the disenchantments of the postmodern post-cold-war period and in the face of global crises — be they financial, economic, political, or ecological — the critical need to include a holistic perspective is felt with renewed urgency, as is the concern that the situatedness of any such perspective and the multiple, incommensurable ways of constituting wholes may be forgotten.

The lecture is part of the **ICI Lecture Series Constituting Wholes**, which explores the double, both active and passive, aspect of “Constituting Wholes” within the framework of the multi-disciplinary ICI Research Focus **Complementarity and Wholes Which Are Not One**.



Penelope Deutscher

**Complementarity and Futurity:
Looking Back at this
Sex which is “Not One”**