

INTERSECTIONALITY

Tags:

#intersectionality

#identity

#subjectivity

#transindividuality

The term intersectionality in the context of critical theory was initially coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw more than thirty years ago. More recent ongoing debates regarding intersectionality were recently picked up again by Crenshaw who felt a responsibility to address the “conflicts over the narrative” on “what the story is” and “who gets to tell it.” Crenshaw objects to the debates that instead of focusing on the problems intersectionality had pointed out, focused on criticizing the concept itself: “It was intersectionality itself that was being interrogated and intercepted, asked to justify itself as an interloper in the gated community of established ideas.” The concept of intersectionality is inevitably related to identity and one’s ability to define and understand the points of intersection between different identities and their relation within collectivity. However, the concepts of identity, subjectivity and intersectionality are stumbling blocks among philosophers, and social and political scientists due to their different understanding of the status of the human subject and the conscious experience. Feminist contribution to philosophy is thus substantial exactly because of the important introduction of intersectionality and other terms that deconstructed the misunderstanding of identity as homogenous and hegemonic entity. When using the concept of intersectionality the mainstream feminist discourse has often been accused of “misreadings, misuse and trespass.” However, when Jennifer C. Nash was asked why she entitled her book *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* she insisted that the “after” in the title had nothing to do with any calls for abandoning intersectionality and its promise. She claims that the use of the word “after” rather stemmed from the need to reimagine the relationship between intersectionality and Black feminist discourse. She furthermore argues against the usual criticism that addresses the misappropriation of the concept because there was not anything wrong with the concept itself in the first place. Given the harsh criticism of the “appropriation” of intersectionality from the position of privilege by “white feminists” without the acknowledgment of its provenience in Black feminism and also the newly emerging issues when intersectionality is deliberated in the frame of the neoliberal academic world, it is not surprising that such debates were dubbed “intersectionality wars.” Regardless of the ongoing criticism of the wide-spread use of the term intersectionality in mainstream feminist texts, Nash voiced her criticism against the “territorial” defensive guard of intersectionality in terms of protection of the historic legacy of Black feminist discourse. She objects to the treatment of “white feminism” as the villain for its alleged misappropriation because in her view this prevents both “Black” and “White” feminism from having rich discussions about the troubled intersections between race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, class and other pre-fixed categories of identity and subjectivity.

Crenshaw’s definition of intersectionality is a concept often used in critical theories and in art contexts to describe “the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another” (Ajalón and Porten). Hierarchized intersections can be addressed critically through culture and art that cherish transindividuality rather than fixed identities that intersect through inevitably controlled and politicized agendas, which is what the far-right, right-wing, ultranationalists, and neoliberals have in common. Therefore, intersectionality is problematic only in terms of who has the control over the back-and-forth traffic at the points of intersections.

Further readings:

Jamika Ajalon and Marion Porten, Ready to Rumble?! 2014, Copie Non Conforme, Kunstraum Niederösterreich, Vienna, Austrian Association of Women Artists in Vienna (VBKÖ). <http://jamikaajalon.tumblr.com>; <http://www.marionporten.com/en/works/ready-to-rumble-collaboration-with-jamika-ajalon.html>.

Jennifer C. Nash, Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

Claudia Garcia-Rojas, interview with Jennifer C. Nash, Intersectionality is a Hot Topic – and so is the Term’s Misuse, <https://truthout.org/articles/intersectionality-is-a-hot-topic-and-so-is-the-terms-misuse/>

Suzana Milevska, “Transindividuality and Difference: On Aporias of Intersectionality” springerin, Issue 1/2020 <https://www.springerin.at/en/2020/1/transindividualitat-und-differenz/>

Sara Salem, “Intersectionality and its discontents: Intersectionality as traveling theory”, in: European Journal of Women’s Studies, vol. 25, 4, 2016.

Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”, in: Stanford Law Review 43(6), 1991, 1241–99.

Kimberlé Crenshaw’s speech given at the Center for Intersectional Justice, April 28, 2019, <https://www.intersectionaljustice.org/publication/2019-05-07-speech-given-by-kimberl%C3%A9-crenshaw-at-the-gala-in-her-honor-on-april-28th-2019/>

Suzana Milevska