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COUNTERING TEXTUAL VIOLENCE
On the Critique of Representation and the Importance of Teaching Its Methods

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Synopsis—I advocate the teaching and popularizing of a method of textual analysis which seems indispensable to a feminist and anti-racist critique of representation. Although this method originates in literary analysis and focuses on concepts such as the narrating instance, focalisation, intertextuality, and rhetorical figures—my aim is a political one. I consider sexual violence and racism, as acted-out realities, to be deeply embedded in longstanding, continuously inscribed cultural attitudes which are textually transmitted. Thus they are naturalised, made into the inevitable, the normal, the natural. I argue for a concept of discourse which contains the linguistic, the cultural, the socio-political and the material, as undivided, as being part and parcel of the same regime. Feminist critique of representation is not limited to certain privileged bodies of texts: It is the textual process itself which is analysed, be it pornography, newspapers, 'high literature' or film. I deal with two examples: the first one is a (newspaper) text on the Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken, including van der Elsken's own comments on his 'violent' photographs. The second text is Thea Beckman's influential children's book *Het wonder van Frieswijck*.

Germany, Autumn 1991: Stones and firebombs are thrown through the windows of immigrant-asylums. In the course of 1992 the stones are followed by a series of neo-nazi attacks on immigrant families. This is the country geographically adjacent to ours (the Netherlands). The other neighbour—Belgium—is experiencing the spread of violent xenophobia. In Autumn 1991, some parts of Antwerp voted 25% for the pro-fascist party. In our own country, an ugly public debate is going on about the 'large groups of illegal aliens' who should be identified and 'removed' as one left-wing politician put it. At the same time, on another front, the Dutch law that enabled victims of incest to claim financial redress from abusive fathers or uncles has been changed: This claim cannot now be made more than 5 years (formerly it was 30 years!) after the act was committed. This new law virtually protects child abusers.

Such events can produce a feeling of futility for an academic, sitting behind her desk, who has chosen literature as her field of research: literature, which seems so harmless, so beside the point, compared to the massive political problems which dominate our European societies. But might it not be worth considering, instead, the possibility that literature, or any form of representation, *can* actually do harm? Could it be true, as feminist critics since Kate Millett (1969) have been suggesting, that culture and representation are involved in the disasters of the real world? Could they be somehow coresponsible for those disasters? And if this were true, would academic feminists' work on culture then be capable of effectively addressing the political realities I have just mentioned?

In this essay I argue that feminist cultural critique can contribute to the racial and sexual socio-political struggles which surround us. I argue that feminist analyses of texts and images, broadly speaking, the feminist critique of representation, *does* make a real social and political difference. This claim depends on the way you theorize the connection between texts/images on the one hand, and the material and political world on the other. These realms are usually seen as divided, as

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different in principle, as being of different orders. Texts, in this view, are 'just texts.' Poverty, rape, laws, and fire-bombs are heavy hard-core 'reality.' They certainly are, but I argue that there is a very hard-core aspect to the textual as well. Laws, for example, are texts. They can be seen as especially powerful texts, applied over and over again, repeated by judges, referred to by lawyers, producing our sense of the just and the right, producing sentences which in turn produce very real facts like people being sent to jail. The law as text cannot be separated from the law as power-institution. Laws on paper are part and parcel of the juridical body that wields power. Language acknowledges this physical side of the text: It talks about 'the mighty arm of the law.'

It seems to me that this aspect of power, which the text of the law so clearly exhibits, is more or less inherent in each and every text. I'm not thinking then of the text as an idiosyncratic, isolated, finite piece of writing by a gifted individual. I'm thinking of the text as discourse, of 'text' as always part of a conglomerate of single texts which echo and repeat one another and in which certain cultural attitudes, gendered identities, fixed ways of seeing and of thinking are re-enacted and constantly constructed. In a single text very little is new. Cultural attitudes are already encoded in language, and these determine what belongs to the realm of the understandable, the utterable, the 'real.' Single texts—whether they are pornography, 'high literature,' the news, films, political debates, advertisements—mostly repeat and recirculate in the stylistic conventions of that particular medium, what is already there. The 'real' world is constantly being transmitted and created through textual and visual discourses. What we experience as reality is formed through the represented and the representable. Thus the question of how 'reality' relates to 'text' becomes the wrong question: They cannot be divided into two separate realms. This, essentially, is Michel Foucault's point (Foucault 1972, 1975). His concept of discourse contains the linguistic, the cultural, the socio-political, and the material as undivided, as being part and parcel of the same regime.

Susanne Kappeler's interesting book *The Pornography of Representation* (1986) can also be fruitfully drawn into this vexed question of the connection between text/image and 'reality.' Kappeler's example is pornography, which is widely assumed to be a special case of sexuality. Pornography is easily read realistically, and treated in terms of its content: 'real-life sex.' The pornography debate (very broadly) shows two positions concerning the question of the connection between pornography and 'reality.' Liberals tend to think that pornography is harmless: 'just fantasy,' without any effect on the real world of criminal sexual practice. The opposing (radical feminist) view is that pornographic texts and images are harmful, because they are 'acted out' as sexual violence in the real world. Both of these views ignore the view that pornography 'is not a special case of sexuality; it is a form of representation.' Pornography should be analysed, according to Kappeler, not in terms of the quality of the sexual exercises it portrays, but in terms of the way in which it represents:

> The fact of representation needs to be foregrounded: we are not just dealing with 'contents.' Sex or sexual practices do not just exist out there, waiting to be represented; rather, there is a dialectical relationship between representational practices which construct sexuality, and actual sexual practices, each informing the other. (Kappeler 1986, p. 2)

By proposing that the relationship between representation and reality is a dialectical one, Kappeler denies what is so vehemently maintained by many parties in the pornography debate: that reality is primary. Reality is supposed to be real, representation is supposed to be only 'real' in a secondary way, namely in its possible effects on the primary level. I want to go beyond the binary terms of this discussion, first by pointing out that pornography is a very real world in itself: It is a huge industry, a workplace. Thousands of people earn their living with it, huge profits are made from it, millions of customers spend lots of their time reading and viewing porn. Second, I agree with Kappeler that in both positions the pornographic representation itself is not taken into account, or at least not enough. The structure of pornographic representation is largely ignored through the exclusive focus on 'effect'—narrowed down to a literal 'acting out'—on the primary level. In

fact, both parties agree that as long as we cannot prove the effects of cultural texts, we can safely assume that representation is an ephemeral, unessential world. What I emphasize, however, is that representation works much more indirectly, in a more mediated way, but at the same time at a fundamentally formative level. Representation constructs identities and subject-positions for its users. Pictures of exhibited, available women not only construct women, they also work to construct *men*. *Masculinity* is made through the constant display—not only in pornography, but also in 'high art'—of women as available, virginal territories. Masculinity is constantly being created and acted out, in ways that cannot be bluntly traced back to the fact that a violent man has been looking at a violent movie as some critics of pornography suggest (see Intons-Peterson and Roskos-Ewoldson, 1989, for an extensive overview of empirical research on the effects of porn-viewing). Seeking proof of direct acting out of pornographic scenarios by men is very useful, but at the same time it obscures the fact that incessant representation itself has already produced men as 'naturally aggressive,' that is, that there is a culturally accepted definition of masculinity as seemingly prior to all construction. In her first chapter (Problem 1 'Fact and Fiction') Kappeler (1986, pp. 5–10) comes close to arguing that representation is in fact the primary level, and that reality is secondarily produced through acts of representation: Consider the hunter, who has himself photographed, posing triumphantly with his dead prey. Representation completes, consummates in a way the act of killing the animal. It secures the hunter's position as winning subject: The dead object is eternally displayed to prove that he is. The representation stamps the act as 'real.' In this way representation is the construction of identity and self-image, which serve to guide us through the 'real world.' Representation means nothing less that the production of 'self' and 'other.' The question is: What self? Which other? Looking back at the instances of violence I mentioned in the beginning, I would argue that all of these have been accompanied by intense offensives of representation, which prepare for, naturalise, even produce the 'facts.' The Dutch campaign against foreigners has already been going on for years and has itself created the very categories of 'legals' who 'belong here' and illegal aliens who don't. The Dutch debate on the 'illegal aliens' goes hand in hand with stricter policies at the borders. The discussion on incest has shifted, from what survivors have to say about the ordeals of their childhood, to the complaints of accused fathers and to the 'safe' ground of the delusions or fantasies of misled therapists.[1] The changing of the law (a text as well) becomes a logical and 'natural' part of that shifting discourse. Politics is endless talk, producing powerful documents, producing very real policies, all textually encoded, which affect people in every aspect of their lives.

I consider sexual violence and racism, as acted-out realities, to be deeply embedded in longstanding, continuously inscribed cultural attitudes which are textually transmitted and thus naturalised, made into the inevitable, the normal, the natural. Textual and visual structures can be viewed as being in a continuum with the stones and the votes and the laws. But if the cultural text can be situated on the same level as the socio-political 'text' (social, material reality), we should look more closely at *how* a text works. How then does it produce estrangement from and fear of the 'Other,' thereby promoting violence against those who have been made into 'others'? How can these 'othering' mechanisms be exposed and countered?

I propose these questions can be answered through close textual analysis, in which we use the methods of literary analysis (narratology, rhetoric, stylistics), for a different, nonliterary aim. These methods are not applied in order to demonstrate literary value or complexity or 'meaning.' They are used to show how textual power is wielded. They follow the ways in which texts produce subject- and object-positions, and how these positions are distributed along the lines of gender and race. They are used to demonstrate how the text rhetorically convinces, seduces its readers, produces 'naturalness.' Such analyses could create greater sensitivity to the common violence that is going on in texts. They could induce people to read differently, more critically, more 'resistantly,' more sensitively, and to be less manipulated by the narratives surrounding them.

I think the essential instruments for such a critique of representation are in our—academic feminist—hands. We should use them

to address current political realities. I also think we have to bridge the gap between useful academic knowledge and common knowledge: Critique of representation is relatively simple. It can be learned, taught, popularized. To illustrate this I have chosen two texts, to my mind 'violent' ones: a short commentary on a photograph and children's book. In my critical analysis of them I shall exemplify the analytic tools which I would like to see becoming common knowledge.

'AND HE SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD'

My first example is a piece by Wim Ellenbroek on Ed van der Elsken, which appeared in *De Volkskrant*, one of the so-called 'quality' national newspapers in the Netherlands (Ellenbroek, 1991). Ed van der Elsken is a very well known Dutch photographer, who died a short time ago. The *Stedelijk Museum* in Amsterdam recently devoted an exhibition to his collected works.[2] Because van der Elsken photographed 'the wild side'—he recorded street life, prostitutes, poor people, alcoholics, tramps—and because he himself had a working-class background and was largely self-educated, it took some time for him to become accepted as an artist. He is currently becoming canonized as one of the great Dutch photographers. Ellenbroek's piece is in itself an act of canonization: van der Elsken's 'folksiness,' his rough Amsterdam slang, his attraction to the margin, and his working-class 'masculinity' are romanticized here, appreciated, acknowledged as the photographer's trademark. He is pictured as the rough-on-the-outside, soft-on-the-inside kind of guy, as quick with his tears as with his swear-words, a wild man with a heart of gold.

Van der Elsken used to write short commentaries on his own photographs. His book of photographs *Amsterdam! Oude Foto's 1947–1970* (1979) contains a commentary which I would like to analyse in depth. It is also quoted in Ellenbroek's *Volkskrant* article. In order to analyse it better I am reprinting two (of a series of seven) photographs to which the commentary belongs (Figs. 1a and 1b). Here we see two boys grabbing a girl and throwing her almost to the ground. Another boy is looking on (Fig. 1b), sceptical, appalled, half-scared. Van der Elsken *calls* these photographs 'Having fun at the fair.' He comments upon them as follows:

Fig. 1. (a) Two boys grabbing a girl and throwing her almost to the ground.

Fig. 1. (b) Another boy looks on, skeptical, appalled, half scared.

> On the previous pages the photographer saw two girl-friends. He saw how one of these girls was grabbed roughly, by someone of the male sex. He saw how this brave guy forced the defenceless child to surrender, without any respect for her personality and without any say on her part—after which the girl had no choice but to settle down meekly in his arms. And he saw that it was good. (van der Elsken, 1979, unpaged. Also in Ellenbroek, *De Volkskrant* Oct. 11, 1991)

This commentary presents an interpretation, by the photographer, of the images. It invites us to look at the photographs in a very specific way: These kids are just having fun. The commentary 'naturalises' a scene of potential sexual harrassment into a scene of 'normal' heterosexual social behaviour amongst youngsters. The scene is even made to seem endearing. The title of the photographs and the commentary attached to them both seek to *prevent* us from interpreting the images in any other way. They preclude a 'resisting reading'—as Fetterley (1978) has called the feminist reading against the grain—of the pictures. They do not leave the spectator any choice.

What we are confronted with here is the power of interpretation, and its naturalizing force. Interpretation seizes the image, annexes it, throws a blinding light onto it. In reading this commentary to the very end we are subjected to the final moment when 'he saw that it was good.'

The problem with reading is that one enters into a text. One is encapsulated by it in the same way that one sits on a moving train: One has to stay on till the end; the narrative pull forces one to ride along. I want to point out that we have here several *levels* of framing interpretations: On the first level, the photographs themselves are quite literally a framing, and as such, already an interpretation, a wilful excerpt from this piece of life at the funfair. But as photographs, the images are in themselves still totally open: They can be interpreted in many ways. Van der Elsken's title and commentary form the second and third frames of interpretation, both forcing the meaning of the images in the direction of a naturalisation of heterosexual (men vs. women) harrassment. Image and commen-

tary together produce boys as subjects of the action, girls as its objects. On a fourth level, Ellenbroek's newspaper article in its turn frames van der Elsken's commentary, by not questioning it, but taking it as an instance of his way of looking at the world. After the quote Ellenbroek continues:

> His photographs reveal the secret of his way of looking—brash, direct, *engaged*.

Thus Van der Elsken's sexism is labelled as *vital*, even as progressive ('engaged'). His rough, folksy masculinity, which accommodates his ever-present interest in the theme of boys-chasing-girls is presented by Ellenbroek as a new, culturally acceptable, even refreshing attitude. His sensitivity and tenderness are supposed to be illustrated by his love for animals: his pity for a little she-cat he photographed, raped on the flat roof next to the kitchen by all the local tom-cats.[3] Such compassion or empathy is, however, not extended to the girl at the funfair. It is a telling displacement, performed by van der Elsken in his book and by Ellenbroek in his wake, from girls to female animals.

The fifth level—the last frame placed over the photograph—is of course the fact that it is currently hanging in the Stedelijk Museum: It is consecrated as High Art and therewith rendered immune to a critique of its ideology. It is this five-fold stack of ever-widening frames, placed over the photographs, which steers the image towards the suggestion that this is the natural, the human and even the beautiful way in which boy-meets-girl.

To see how such an ideological effect is produced, I would like to take a closer look at the rhetorical structure of van der Elsken's commentary. For this textual analysis, I shall need to refer to rhetoric, to narratology, and to the notion of intertextuality.[4] By treating the text as if it were a poem, we can see just how powerfully the text produces masculinity and feminity: how strongly van der Elsken convinces the reader of his view and with what textual means. I will give the commentary once again:

> [On previous pages the photographer saw two girl-friends.] He saw how one of these girls was grabbed roughly, by someone of the male sex. He saw how this brave guy forced the defenceless child to surrender, without any respect for her personality and without any say on her part—after which the girl had no choice but to settle down meekly in his arms. And he saw that it was good.

The remarkable thing about this description is that it *seems* to lead up to the concluding sentence: a girl is being harrassed here. The text establishes this expectation through the use of two classical rhetorical tropes: parallelism and enumeratio. (When a number of consecutive sentences start in the same way, as in Psalms for example, one speaks of parallelism. A summing up is called enumeratio.) Both tropes lend a stately, incantatory effect to the text. Both suggest we are reaching a climax. There is *parallelism* in: the photographer saw—he saw—he saw. We see *enumeratio* in the summing up of the consecutive series of violent deeds—(he grabbed her roughly/he forced her to surrender) which *suggests* a lead up to a violent climax. The climax however is not an ultimate act of violence, suggested once more by the phrase *the girl had no choice*. At the point where one would expect the climax, the girl becomes just enough of a subject to affirm the violence with her *yes*: she *settles down meekly in his arms*. Thus the actual climax of the violence is the girl assenting to it.[5] Furthermore, the formulation "this brave guy" appears to create an ironic distance from the boy who seizes the girl. It interrupts our identification with him. But neither does the subject of the enunciation identify with the other character: the girl. In calling her a "defenseless *child*" her personality is partly taken away from her. In this process of nonidentification with both of the characters the narrator takes a god-like position. This view-from-above is confirmed in the reference to the Biblical book of Genesis: "and h/He saw that it was good." Thus the artist/photographer/creator takes God's place in order to re-create 'healthy' heterosexuality. Significantly, the photographer does not introduce himself as 'I.' He speaks of himself in the third person, hiding behind his professional identity: "the photographer saw." Thus the photographer's gaze is textually transformed—through "saw that it was good"—into the indisputable gaze of God.

We see in this passage how intertextuality

(the reference to another text which the reader already knows) functions. The weight and authority of the ancient text is invoked to bestow the same authority on the new text. The meanings of the old text are exploited to make the new one more convincing. Through this Genesis-intertext, the boys and girls are metaphorically made into newly created Adams and Eves, rendered in their 'natural' state.

Another intertextual reference is, I think, the defenseless girl, ironically invoking the traditional 'Damsel In Distress' from fairy-tales and romances. Here, however, the 'Damsel In Distress' does not provoke masculine actions of rescue, but masculine exploitation of the situation. This is van der Elsken's revisionist re-writing of the 'Damsel In Distress' motif.

A final and more significant act of rewriting in this text is the rewriting of feminist discourse, which I think we also see. The reader might initially think that the description of the events at the funfair is being voiced by an indignant feminist. Follow me along this very feminist train of thought: 'One of these girls was grabbed roughly, by someone of the male sex'—'forced [. . .] to surrender'—'without any respect for her personality and without any say on her part'—'the girl had no choice.' Van der Elsken incorporates these feminist clauses into his text, but only in order to respond to them, by overruling them, by disarming them. His commentary, written in 1979, when feminism was firmly established in Dutch society, clearly picks up echoes from the circulating feminist discourse. Thus the text can be seen as a battlefield of at least two discourses: One can recognize feminist and neo-masculine discourse being pitted against each other in such a way that feminist language loses the battle and is reappropriated, contained, and thus rendered ineffectual.

Van der Elsken's sexist commentaries run like a leitmotif through his book *Amsterdam! Oude foto's 1947–1970*. Focussing on this aspect is all the more difficult, because the book is in many ways beautiful, even fascinating. Van der Elsken documents post-war Amsterdam, warm and desolate at the same time; he records life in the streets and parts of the old city which no longer exist, in often unique and moving images. Yet his sexism is disturbing. To give a further example: One series of seven photographs pictures boys harrassing girls (Figs. 2a and 2b). The girls obviously hate it, and the series has the following commentary: "Vulgar young tear-aways. Who bump into you, pinch, grab, tease, tussle, tickle, and make improper remarks. Any girl who doesn't take karate lessons can never be happy." The advice to take karate lessons seems quite ironical here. Another series shows boys violently chasing away girls from their seats on Dam Square. The commentary reads: "It's a real drag, girls, that eternal aggressive male trip, you can't even sit peacefully on the Dam Monument—but you must try and understand that we're driven too, tickled in the crutch by the hand of the great Reproducer." Thus God again justifies whatever men choose to do to women.

If one tries to discuss van der Elsken's sexism, people tend to respond indignantly: But van der Elsken loved women. If you point out that a great Dutch writer like Edgar du Perron, writing in the 1930s, could at times be quite racist (Bal, 1991; pp. 122–142), people respond very similarly: But du Perron was an anti-colonialist; he had a great many Indonesian friends and supported the struggle for liberation (Peeters, 1991). The only viable answer here is: We are not talking about an individual author, or about his personal moral virtues. We are talking about cultural conventions, about collective structures of representation, which go beyond this one author and which are deeply embedded in our language and our culture as such. We are talking about the text 'after Barthes',[6] about the text not owned by an individual author: the text as a process, as a supra-personal series of forces. The author can, so to speak, hold the pen for a moment, but the pen is already moving by itself.

EXPELLED FROM THE COMMUNITY OF SUBJECTS

Let me now turn to my second example: a children's book by Thea Beckman (1991) called *Het wonder van Frieswijck* (The Miracle of Frieswijck), which has led to a heated discussion in Holland. The book, widely distributed as the free gift for the national children's book week, is an historical novel. It is situated in the fourteenth-century Dutch city

Fig. 2. (a) Boys harrassing girls.

Fig. 2. (b) Boys harrassing girls.

of Kampen, which is confronted for the first time by a black child, named Danga. Danga is a slave owned by a visiting Portuguese merchant. The book portrays—with historical accuracy, or so its author claims—the incredibly racist reactions to this black child: He must be the devil, will he bite? He must be "black from sinning", he is a dangerous animal, and so on. Some commentators considered this book racist, others—a majority—felt instead that the book fights racism by explicitly rejecting it. The latter view is based on the fact that the book's protagonist, the white girl Alijt, sympathizes with Danga and even succeeds in freeing him from slavery. She steals the key of Danga's chain from the merchant's purse, frees Danga, and, through ruse and cunning, makes the whole thing look like a miracle worked by the Holy Virgin herself. Through her heroic action, and because of the fact that she is often given the central position, she quickly becomes the object of identification for the youthful reader. Young readers, asked for their opinion, gave ample proof of their identification with the hero Alijt: They generally thought there was nothing wrong with the book.

I do find something seriously wrong, but in order to point this out I need the concepts of narrator and focalisation/focalizer, which I explain first. Every story has a narrator. This can be an instance external to the characters, but the narrator role can also be taken by one of the characters. The narrator is the one who tells the story, the one who sees, whose vision is transmitted to the reader. This means the reader is all the time *dependent* on the narrator: Readers have no direct access to the related events—although we have the illusion that the events are displayed to us in an unmediated way. We can only see, know, and understand as far as the narrating instance permits it. The level on which the narrator speaks can be called the primary level of the story. But the narrating instance isn't talking all the time. It can lend speech and vision to one of the characters, or to several characters, one after the other: This constitutes an embedded, secondary level. The perspective from which the story is told used to be called *point of view*. The problem is that stories often exhibit different and quickly changing points of view, and that the narrator's 'dominant' point of view embeds secondary perspectives, those of the characters for example. The term *focalisation*, introduced by Bal (1985) is more apt to describe the way events are transmitted to readers in this always mediated way. Focalisation is defined as the connection between the subject of vision, and that which is seen. There can be no recounting outside of focalisation, because 'objective' description is impossible. There is always a subject of focali-

sation—be it the narrator, or one of the characters—as well as an object of focalisation: that which the focalizer perceives, and thus transmits in an always partial light. The distribution of focalisation determines the distribution of power in the story: who sees, who speaks—and who is seen and spoken of?—and thus it determines the sides which the reader takes.

Going back to *Het wonder van Frieswijck* we notice a dominant external narrator, the main focalizer. The main embedded focalizer is Alijt. The fact that she thinks, sees, speaks, and acts so often, combined with the fact that she performs the heroic deed of freeing Danga, stimulates positive identification of the reader with her. But Alijt is not only brave. At the end of the book she becomes quite patronizing as well, looking down slightly on Danga while protecting him. She exhibits the clammy 'do-good-ism' with which white people so often tend to buy off their guilt feelings. Because readers by then strongly identify with her, it has become quite difficult to reject Alijt's attitude: We are seduced into accepting it, sharing it, not questioning it.

What is more important, however, is that the story's ethnocentrism is not to be located on the level of narrative events, the level of 'what happens' (the so-called *fabula*). Events are always embedded in the way in which they are narrated and focalized. Within the context of the *Frieswijck* discussion, nobody has put forward this simple fact, which feminist literary theorists should have made common knowledge, namely that the racism of the book depends on the position and view of the narrator, and the network of focalisations.

A closer look on the level of the *story* (instead of the 'events themselves') shows how the external narrator is completely infected by the allegedly fourteenth-century views. Thus not only the 'ignorant' people of Kampen call Danga 'the devil' and 'the Moriaan.' The narrator *herself* calls the black boy 'Moriaan,' 'the little nigger,' 'the slave,' and so on. If the narrator had systematically referred to Danga as 'Danga,' then *Het wonder van Frieswijck* would have been a different story. The narrator would have created an effective distance between the present-day, liberal, anti-racist view from which the story might then have been written, and the obnoxious fourteenth-century views, which could then have been *exposed*, indeed *exhibited*. Now the narrator's descriptions of the boy are deeply intertextually related, not so much to fourteenth-century discourse, as to the threadbare colonialist twentieth-century views on black people. For example, the narrator repeatedly emphasizes an exaggerated contrast between the 'pitch-black skin' and the 'shining white' eyes and teeth, the 'rolling eyes,' the 'thick lips,' the 'pink palms of the hands,' and the like. Thus the narrator herself turns Danga into an exotic object and imprisons him in his physical features. Whilst Alijt 'frees' Danga on the level of narrative events, on the level of the story, Danga stays locked into his exoticized body. As this imprisonment is obscured by the 'heroic' events, its ideological effect is all the more far-reaching.

When we look at the network of focalisations we can see how all the 'agents' in the story (Alijt, her sister Agnes, her father, the merchant) are at some moment or other, focalizing subjects. Thus we often experience their thoughts, views, and feelings on events and fellow-characters from the inside. Danga, however, is *never set up in the position of focalizer*. This implies that he always remains an *object* of other (white) people's views of him. Thus Danga is, on the narrative level, expelled from the community of subjects, a position he shares with—guess who—the dog.

The similarity between Danga and the dog is uncannily highlighted in this passage:

> Danga, in his corner under the stairs, looked at Alijt and she at him. His thick lips split apart in a gleaming white smile. Tieske [the dog] was sitting next to him and the little slave ruffled her coarse, brown coat with the pale palm of his hand. Tieske rumbled with pleasure. They're alike, thought Alijt.

Apart from the emphasis on Danga's looks, this passage also shows how the narrator operates. The first sentence is focalized by the external narrator. In the next three sentences the focalisation is ambiguous: One can read them as a continuation of the focalisation by the external narrator, but also as already expressing the embedded focalisation by Alijt. The sloppy distribution of focalizing posi-

tions is characteristic of the story. In the last sentence it is clearly Alijt who focalizes Danga and the dog. Strangely enough, the grounds for the similarity which Alijt notices between the dog and Danga are not made explicit. Because the motif of the comparison is lacking, readers complete this awkward suggestion in any way they like.

These two narrative strategies—the narrator's obsessive focus on Danga's looks, which are described so as to exoticize him, combined with the consistent denial of a subject-position to Danga—make this children's book into a racist, and racism-inducing story.

I find stories such as these violent. One can imagine the vast field of research, affiliated with mass-communication and cognitive psychology, which tries to prove or disprove the 'social effects' of such texts. Such an undertaking has, however, not been my aim here. My aim has been to show how texts do not so much *lead to* violent acts, but *are rather, in themselves* violent acts. Some years ago my colleagues in the Utrecht feminist studies department formulated this idea as a series of questions: "Can certain forms of representation, such as the exclusion of women from a story, the metaphorisation of women into the embodiment of evil and the negation of women's subjectivity, be seen as a form of violence against women? Is the metaphorisation of women as 'other' in texts comparable to the objectivisation of women as victims of violence in society? Is the difference between the textual and the actual ultimately less great than people think?" (*Metaforen van geweld*, 1989). I would by now put 'white women, black women and black men' in all those questions, and then delete the question marks. Still sitting behind my university desk, working on literature, I see this as my task: to further develop and popularize the tools by means of which such 'othering' mechanisms of written texts can be dismantled.

ENDNOTES

1. My colleague, José Rijnaarts, author of *Dochters van lot. Over vader-dochter-incest* (1987) is currently writing a book on these shifts in media-discourse on incest during the past 10 years.

2. *Once upon a time.* Ed van der Elsken, photo's 1948–1988. Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Autumn 1991.

3. The commentary reads: "Four or five enormous, rough tomcats impregnate, repeatedly rape this one poor miserable pussy-cat. Yet she's asking for it, the little darling." (Van der Elsken, 1979). Note the emphasis on the female cat's supposed willingness.

4. *Rhetoric*: theory of the way in which speakers (and writers) should address their audience in order to persuade or please it, drawing from a vast repertoire of figures of speech and style, and a variety of modes of argumentation. Knowledge of the way in which spoken or written texts should be constructed and delivered in order to increase their effect was extremely popular in Antiquity. The teachings of rhetoric were part of a writer's education until Romanticism. With the advent of political (marxist, feminist) criticism, rhetoric has again become an object of study in cultural texts. (See Tompkins, 1980)

Narratology: the theory of narration in general. Narratology not only deals with literary, fictional stories/novels, but also with all (written or oral) texts which are non-dialogical and which contain a series of events. (See Bal, 1985)

Intertextuality: the phenomenon that texts explicitly or implicitly borrow elements (literal quote, metaphors, ways of expression, conventions of representation, motifs, themes) from other, already existing texts. Also the theory of the way in which every text absorbs and transforms other texts. (See Kristeva, 1969)

5. Kappeler (1986, p.137) calls this scenario 2. While the primary pornographic scenario (1) follows the master (oppressor)-slave (oppressed) scheme, scenario 2 pictures the willing assent of the victim to the master's wishes. Here the exploited subject is granted just enough subjectivity to agree to what is done to her. Kappeler finds these 'pornographic' patterns in all kinds of cultural texts, including literary ones.

6. See Roland Barthes (1989).

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