Christina Research Seminar

15.12.2009, Metsätalo U40, Sali 8, 4pm –6pm.
Laura Werner, HY “Politics of Virility ”

Feminist political thinkers in the last three decades have paid ample attention to the dichotomy made between male reason and female matter/corporeality in modern political thought. The split between the spheres of ‘public’ and ‘private’ and the basis for men’s rule over female bodies and their powers of reproduction is seen by key modern political thinkers to lie in men’s ‘natural superiority’ in strength and ability, especially in the sphere of reason. As Carole Pateman puts it, “The separation of civil society from the familial sphere is also a division between men’s reason and women’s bodies.”

However, I believe conceptualizing the birth of the modern political subject strictly through the division between male reason and female bodies and/or female sentiment is – although a common enough strategy in feminist theory– inadequate. In this paper I want to provide a counterpoint to this classic feminist view by fleshing out the figure of the modern political subject. Instead of being disembodied, this political agent is very much in possession of a male body, and instead of being mainly a ‘man of reason’, he is a man of desire and of sexual virility.

I argue that active sexual desire becomes connected to political participation in a new way in European philosophy around 1800. My claim is that when we deconstruct the concept of ‘citizenship’ as it is developed in eighteenth century European thought, we find within not only gender in the abstract sense, but in very concrete terms, sexual activity.

http://www.helsinki.fi/kristiina-instituutti/english/christinaseminar.htm

Christina Institute
Faculty of Arts